

## Beyond Quality Control: Writing Assessment and Adjunct Accountability at a Small Public University

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As with many institutions of higher education in the United States, Shawnee State University (SSU), a small undergraduate public institution of 3,000 in Portsmouth, Ohio, relies heavily on part-time or adjunct faculty for implementing its composition program. While SSU is not the first institution to be interested in qualified, affordable instructors, it is unique in expecting these few good people to be highly accountable *and* willing to stay in the region. Established in 1986, the relatively new state-supported institution is located at the southern tip of Ohio bordering northern Kentucky, a historic area stressed by a struggling economy, semi-abandoned mining and oil-refining industries, and conservative politics. Nearby Appalachia, according to many locals, has also contributed to a historical and cultural distrust in higher education. By any measure of ethics, adjunct instructors seem to be shouldering a missionary responsibility consisting of many callings to teach in this geographically, economically, and educationally challenging area. Nonetheless, adjuncts continue to staff an average of eighty composition sections each year, along with their few tenure-line, mostly literature-trained colleagues.

Besides staffing, one major challenge I had in 1996 as a new coordinator of composition was to establish accountability for the faculty's teaching performance and the students' writing abilities; such an initiative, interestingly, came as an exigency, since we were bracing ourselves for the ten-year North Central Association (NCA) accreditation review. Somewhere along these lines of conversation, SSU's acting English chairperson, who is a founding faculty member, and the former composition coordinator, who is a Yale-trained Shakespearean scholar, suggested that I focus on the grading pattern, if one existed, of adjunct English faculty members. Two crucial concerns in the eight-member English department were (1) that students'

learning outcomes, such as writing and research skills, should match the course grades they received, and (2) based on the then 40%–60% staffing split, that the assessment approaches and grading patterns used by tenure-line and adjunct faculty should agree reasonably well in terms of their assessment approaches and grading patterns.

Traditionally, issues such as these would be confronted by publishing term-grade distributions each quarter. A particular instructor's grade distribution, for instance, might be compared to the departmental norm or average. If an instructor gave mostly As (or Ds and Fs), he or she might need to meet with the composition coordinator or the English chairperson for a discussion of grading philosophy and practices. Often, I was told, the discussion would lead to a good-spirited conversation about grading that involved the faculty and the administrator; very rarely did it bring about an investigation, let alone any discrediting of the instructor's professional judgment and sincerity. (The implicit underpinning of this process was that the department and SSU knew that this university was attractive as an adjunct employer to those living in the area.)

This practice of holding people responsible for in-class assessment seemed commonplace and democratic enough; however, it made no solid argument for any improvement of the grading process especially at a time of (hyper-) accountability. While the validity of reported grades was the point of interest, instructors did not normally share observations about students' writing skills or publish them. Grading rubrics certainly did not exist in every section, much less any enforcement of standards across the board. Instructors thus were the sole evaluators (and thus standard-setters) of submitted essays within their individual classes. A common departmental concern, then, was that the assigned grades, although resulting from a variety of instructional measures, should significantly reflect major composition goals, such as acquiring desired writing skills in contexts of structure, content, mechanics, and research. This concern had never been dealt with directly, either in the composition program or in the department.

As it happened, I was able to approach a few internal assessment issues by participating in a pilot portfolio project within a campus-wide assessment effort. Through a quantitative descriptive study that compared the results from analytic scoring by a cross-disciplinary reading team with the original grades assigned by instructors, I was able to approach the questions regarding the relationship between assigned grades and writing skills, and examine grading differences, when they existed, between tenure-line and adjunct faculty, at least for the limited sample size. While the imminent NCA visit ultimately provided an exigency for campus writing assessment,

SSU has benefited from its smaller size as a close-knit teaching community enabling frequent and direct contacts among the new WPA, the adjunct composition faculty, and SSU's central administration.

This essay, then, presents writing assessment logistics in the context of a newly established small public college, illustrating a unique opportunity for adjunct faculty development through the use of a valuable rubric, relevant data from the pilot descriptive study, and follow-up meetings and workshops.

#### **A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF CAMPUS-WIDE WRITING ASSESSMENT AT SSU, 1993–1997**

- 1993 Charged by the board of Regents, SSU's central administration established an assessment office with Dr. David Todt, an appointed director from the department of education on campus.
- 1995 In preparation for the NCA visit, the director of assessment approached different departments, explaining assessment time-windows, essential respective needs regarding individual program assessment and campus-wide writing assessment; during the same year, collection of writing samples began within identified majors and courses.
- 1996 The director of assessment invited the newly hired composition coordinator to join the assessment committee, which monitored assessment progress and developed two writing rubrics (see Appendix 1) and one critical-thinking rubric. Later in 1996, the assessment committee applied a pilot reading to selected writing samples (for an essay excerpt, see Appendix 2), reported the data, and publicized its intradepartmental discussion to the campus community. The committee also did a descriptive study comparing the sample scores based on the rubrics to the original paper grades (see Figure 1).
- 1997 The composition coordinator met with composition faculty to discuss results from the descriptive study, based on a draft of the annual composition program report.
- 1997 Using data from a second reading (see Appendix 3), several members of the assessment committee, including the composition coordinator, led a half-day assessment workshop at the annual convention of the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) in Miami, Florida.

From 1998 to the present, the assessment committee enlisted new members from different disciplines while continuing its efforts in assessing writing samples collected from identified courses and majors. Results of assessment are now published in the committee's annual reports.

### THE INSTITUTION AND ITS MISSION

Shawnee State University is a dedicated teaching institution. At a quick glance, its state university title and designation as a public institution of higher education suggest it is a regional campus of the well established Ohio state university system (such as Ohio State, Kent State, or Cleveland State), with a sizable state-funded enrollment, a few professional schools or research centers, several graduate programs, and, in some cases, a university press. However, SSU can be positioned somewhere between a community college and a comprehensive university that is challenged simultaneously by a nearly rural (but changing) population and by a state budget, said locals, dominated by the larger institutions in the northern, more populated part of the state. Regarding the institution's specific nature and mission, the then-president of the university, Clive Veri, sought to appeal to the local student population: "When I was searching for a college to attend in the mid-1950s with no money in my family to support me—a college did not exist that told me it would help me be a successful student. Every college I looked at had competitive admissions policies [ . . . ]. Shawnee State is a very special place that prides itself in helping students to be successful" (*SSU 1996–97 Catalog* 5). In addition to declaring the school's accessibility and student-centeredness identical to the spirit of two-year colleges the President empathized further by saying that "At Shawnee State, faculty and staff take special pride in having had the opportunity to earn college degrees, and thereby enjoy satisfying and productive careers. *All of us are eager to offer students the same chance we had* [ . . . ] . We call it 'Sharing the Spirit of Opportunity'" (*SSU 1997–99 Catalog* 3). Apparently, Veri undertook the demography well, for Shawnee State consequently strove to reach a balance between standards that created academic gatekeeping and admission of every student courageous enough to knock on its gate. As a small public college with traditional liberal arts and professional programs, its position and existence presented something of a paradox.

Compared to other institutions in the state or nation, Shawnee State recognizes its specific responsibility for meeting the educational needs of the region including south-central Ohio, northern Kentucky, and the entire Appalachian area because of its historic development from a technical school, a branch campus of Ohio University, and a community college. For the first ten years since its inception in 1986 as a four-year school, SSU grew

from a junior college to a four-year college that offered associate degrees in twenty majors, baccalaureate degrees in eighteen majors, certificates in elementary and secondary education, with a handful of new majors being developed each academic year. (In 2002, the school started in partnership with other universities offering graduate classes in occupational therapy and education, but the Board of Regents confirmed once again that SSU committed all resources to quality undergraduate programs.)

Especially related to composition instruction during the period our pilot study was pursued, SSU's mission statement highlighted a commitment to fostering "competence in oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, and critical analysis/logical thinking" (*1997–99 Catalog* 6). It further included the following emphases: Dedication to *undergraduate education*; Focus on excellence in *teaching*; Dedication to *motivating college attendance and graduation*; Commitment to increasing *quality*; [and] Conducting multiple assessments of *student learning outcomes* (6–7; italics, mine). Such objectives, it seems, had directed efforts of the design and adoption of outcome-based rubrics and arrested the attention of the entire campus from the very beginning. In other words, we knew we were to conduct writing and outcome-based assessments on all fronts to further essential student and faculty needs. As the newly hired WPA, I also sensed that the composition program was being held accountable for the entire university by accident beyond the original departmental grading context or even the accreditation context (!).

### ASSESSMENT EFFORTS: THE PORTFOLIO PROJECT AND AN INADVERTENT STUDY

At the university level, the process of randomly identifying students and collecting writing samples began in early 1995, which primarily included writing samples (copies of actual class papers) gathered by faculty teaching in the general education program (GEP). In 1996, the university assessment program formally inaugurated the portfolio project, which aimed at assessing the writing and critical thinking skills students acquired by completing the GEP courses. Later that year, the assessment committee drafted three rubrics two writing-skills rubrics (research-based and nonresearch-based) and one critical-thinking rubric for evaluating these varied skills as learning outcomes exhibited in student writing. This paper focuses on only one, the research-based writing-skills rubric (Appendix 1).

*Applying the Rubrics: First Readings.* On December 11, 1996, a group of faculty including the director of assessment, the GEP coordinator, faculty from history, math, and education departments, the English chairperson, and me, applied the rubric (designed for research-based writing) to reading

the samples requiring formal documentation. As mentioned, we were also interested in comparing rubric-based scores and the samples' original grades as a pilot descriptive study within the English composition program, with the primary intent of observing any existing grading patterns between tenure-line and adjunct faculty members.

The day began with an introduction to the portfolio project, an explanation of the scoring process, and an overview of the rubrics offered by the director of assessment. Norming samples of individual student essays were used to generate a discussion about validity and reliability. (In this case, readers approached individual student essays instead of portfolios, although essays had been collected as required items in the portfolio project. The scoring practice is analytic, not holistic see Appendix 1.)

After four or five applications and discussions, the scores for this initial use of the rubric were within two points (of a possible twenty) of one another. We agreed that norming had occurred and that the rubric seemed to be applicable for evaluating writing skills on the essay samples we had all read and rated. Then each committee member read up to ten essays, collected from English 112, a source-based composition class. Arbitrarily, we had a total of sixteen papers from sections taught by four tenure-line faculty members and eighteen papers from five adjuncts. Each paper was read by two participants; their scores were tabulated and compared. Discrepancies of more than two points were discussed and resolved by the two readers. Of the thirty-four papers read, seven required discussion and score adjustment. Scores for each paper were averaged for data analysis. For the pilot descriptive study, the original grades students received in English 112 courses were later added to the data for further analysis.

*Results.* The average rubric score for the thirty-four papers was 12.78, translating into a description of writing skills as slightly above "adequate" for research papers. The average grade for the thirty-four students was a 2.88, a little above a B-. A slight difference, then, was noted between the overall scores on samples taken from sections respectively taught by tenure-line and adjunct faculties ( $t = 1.39$ ,  $df = 32$ ,  $0.05 < p < 0.1$ ); a second difference existed between overall grades based on a 4-point scale assigned by tenure-line and part-time faculty (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

**Table 1.**

Comparison of English 112 students' grades and writing-skills rubric scores based on writing samples collected from sections taught by tenure-line and adjunct faculty, winter quarter, 1996, at Shawnee State University.

FACULTY	NO. OF SAMPLES	AVERAGE RUBRIC SCORE/ BASED ON A POSSIBLE 20	AVERAGE GRADE/ BASED ON A POSSIBLE 4.0
Tenure-line	16	13.76	2.52
Adjunct	18	11.90	3.20
TOTALS	34	12.78	2.88

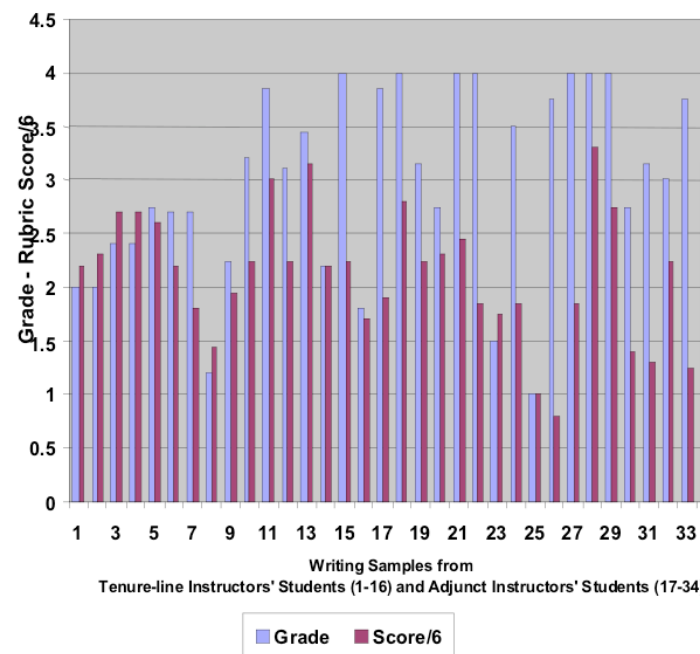
Note:

Variance based on the original rubric scores from tenure-line faculty V1 = 11.94  
 Variance based on the original rubric scores from adjunct faculty V2 = 16.35  
 Independent t-test result based on the original rubric scores t = 1.39  
 Degree of Freedom (df) is (16-1)+(18-1) = 32

Percentage Spreads:

- between the average rubric scores of tenure-line and adjunct faculty: 69%, 60%
- between the grades of tenure-line and adjunct faculty: 63%, 80%

**Figure 1.**  
 Comparison of Grades and Rubric Scores (Adjusted)



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Note: "Score/6" means raw rubric scores have been adjusted by dividing each by a common value of 6 in order to fit the comparison table. Tenure-line faculty: Students 1-16; Adjunct faculty: Students 17-34.

Two more workshops were conducted, and results were analyzed and tabulated (see Appendices II and III). Encouraged by the participation and discussion, the assessment team presented its findings at an interactive session titled "Assessing Writing and Critical-Thinking Skills Using a Rubric Applied to Portfolio Entries" at the American Association of Higher Education Annual Convention in Miami Beach, Florida, in June, 1997. Workshop participants were given a hands-on experience reading two essays and applying two rubrics, one for writing skills and another for critical thinking. (The conference session was also well received; of fifty-two attendees, forty returned their optional end-of-workshop surveys with mostly positive comments. The response rate, which is over 76 %, indicates a high degree of interest.)

#### FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS RELATED TO ENGLISH COMPOSITION

*Validity and Reliability of the Rubric Applied.* The writing skills (research-based) rubric appears to be consistent with assessment literature (by, most recently, Hamp-Lyons and Condon, Haswell and Wyche-Smith, Huot, White, and Yancey) in terms of the concrete language used in common judging categories: structure, content, mechanics, and research. With our assessment committee's approval, I added language about audience to the content category. In terms of its purpose and design, the rubric shares most of the reasons inherent in writing evaluation processes, including grade relevance, diagnosis of particular writing problems, and tracking correlations regarding aspects of writing performance (Cooper and Odell), such as administrative, instructional, and evaluation and research functions; its five-point gradation is also similar to most rubrics presented in professional literature, such as those stated in "Dimensions and Standards in Writing" by Alan C. Purves, et al., which ranges from "basic," to "proficient," to "advanced" (although "inadequate" is not specified in this source, but it is present in our rubric as "Not Adequate") (52).

Instead of looking at the portfolio holistically as a collection of various, multiple entries, the Shawnee State rubric targets *the individual essay*. In the "superior" or "strong" categories, one also notices the rubric's emphasis on appropriateness and correctness (instead of "risk-taking," "engaging voice," or "sophistication/style" as might be expected in such categories); such a criterion description perhaps issues from the rubric's cross-disciplinary nature or, arguably, from SSU's mission of inclusion, focusing as the mission does

on sufficiency and acceptability rather than on uniqueness and distinction. "Competence," not necessarily excellence, is indeed the key term at this small school that services a population in cultural transition.

The rubric targeting skills of formal documentation were apparently exercised reliably between scorers. Faculty from various academic disciplines applied the rubric to writing samples with fairly consistent results. Discussion by raters occurred (as mentioned) and centered on the nature of the original assignment, document styles, and the student writer; adjustments of scores by some faculty resulted, and the raters differed no more than two points on the six-point scale per sample. It took an average of ten to fifteen minutes to score a sample of around six hundred words, although there was considerable variation in the speed with which faculty worked. Experienced essay readers such as the English chair and I (who also frequently read writing samples holistically) tended to read and score faster.

*Discrepancy between Tenure-line and Adjunct English Faculty.* During earlier visits, NCA expressed a concern about the proportionately large number of adjunct faculty teaching the composition sequence at Shawnee State. In most quarters the number of adjunct faculty teaching English 112 courses was greater than 50 percent. (For example, in the fall semester 1996-97, with eleven sections of E112 total, six were taught by adjuncts; in winter, twenty-one sections, ten were adjuncts' courses; and in spring 1997, of twelve sections, five were taught by adjuncts.) According to this pilot study (see Table 1), no statistically significant difference existed between *the writing-skills scores* of students in sections of English 112 taught by tenure-line and those taught by adjunct faculty (i.e., given the sample size, the independent *t* score is 1.39). Nonetheless, data indicate that the adjunct faculty gave higher *grades* than may be warranted by the writing samples of their students (Figure 1).

If it is comforting to know that the writing skills reflected by these rubric scores are about equally recognized by the tenure-line and adjunct faculties, the higher grades the adjunct instructors tend to award is indeed an issue worth pursuing. In Figure 1, students taught by tenure-track faculty (numbered 1 through 16) received grades that seem to match their skills, except for students 7, 10, 11, and 15, whereas students taught by adjuncts, 17 through 34, received grades that don't seem to match their skills (except for 20, 23, 25, and 34). These two findings are, of course, preliminary because of the small sample size.

Despite creating an expected level of controversy, the chart did *not* seem to offend the twelve adjunct members who came to a follow-up meeting. Most, in fact, wondered if they could use the rubric in their instruction and agreed as a group to look into the grading issues. I was never more

thankful for the positive feedback and almost immediately saw an opportunity for good adjunct support in reaching standardization of grading. (More discussion appears later in this article.)

*The Research Paper in the First-Year Sequence.* English 112 was described in the university catalog as “an introduction to the relationship between research and composition.” The course’s final paper, which was the source of the essays we collected as samples, was argumentative by design. The writing task required that each student take a position on an issue and then defend that position with documentation and references. It was clear to the assessment team that this goal had not been met. The great majority of papers were summaries of information about topics, much like encyclopedia entries. Presenting straight expositions, some students did not take a position and argue a stance on the topic they had selected.

As a pilot study, the results of this quantitative descriptive analysis, however, did point to accomplishment of the portion of the SSU mission related to written and oral communication. In addition, the committee encouraged the English department to use the information from the study to begin discussion of outcomes expected in English 112. An effort to standardize the writing prompt for the final paper in English 112, along with a faculty workshop on the expectations for the course, was consequently planned for the following quarter. Faculty’s patterned grading habits (including some adjunct faculty’s interest in adapting the rubric to instruction) would also be explored.

*Plan for the Entire Campus.* Beyond our pilot study applying the research-writing skills rubric on English composition papers, great value was created through the use of the general portfolio project and applications of our three rubrics for scoring a variety of writing samples. After the pilot readings, project participants applied the rubrics and their recent adjustments to a larger number of papers from writing-intensive courses in a variety of subjects. As noted by Wolcott and Legg, a confirmed value exists in using writing assessment in content-based disciplines and programs. (As faculty-initiated efforts, some departments at SSU have adapted the rubrics for writing projects within the context of program assessment purposes.) Depending on different programs’ purposes and interests, we also discussed the possibilities of reading portfolios holistically. As the collection of portfolio entries of individual students expands, the assessment team plans to take a longitudinal look at writing in the GEP at Shawnee State.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMPOSITION FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

The existence of *cross-disciplinary* writing assessment rubrics (including Writing Skills Rubric, the non-research based version) and their implementation have no doubt created a positive environment for faculty dialogue at SSU, in fact parallel to the general Writing-Across-the-Curriculum or Writing-In-the-Curriculum movements across the country. The acts of designing the rubrics and applying them have drawn together academics who would have otherwise been compartmentalized departmentally and who, despite their overall interest in and concern for student writing, would have functioned only within their individual classrooms and disciplines, well into the interior of the institution’s small setting. For English composition at SSU, the use of rubrics as a part of a larger assessment effort suggests valuable opportunities for instruction and learning involving faculty and students.

Based on their original cross-disciplinary nature, the rubrics have been easily adapted to freshman composition courses that emphasize general rhetorical knowledge or public nonacademic discourse, as compared to the local discipline-based knowledge in upper-level academic discourse, which were not examined in the rubric. A related assessment interest exists between using the rubric as an analytic instead of a holistic instrument. For learning’s sake inside the process classroom, the rubric seems to function better as an analytic tool serving a formative purpose. For instance, instead of receiving averages from categories, as gleaned in the pilots, or perceiving their single scores from holistic readings, students may find clearer instructions in the analytic scores that point to specific areas of strengths and weakness (Wolcott and Legg 183). By not adding up the scores from each category, students may develop better understandings of their specific needs. For such discussions, faculty have participated in writing assessment workshops. (The State of Ohio’s early assessment grant had funded such workshops during summer; when not funded, participants received free lunch as their only compensation). Several tenure-line faculty members, in fact, have voluntarily adopted or adapted the rubric for specific use in instruction; some even traded selected essay samples for norming each quarter. (Such an interest in evaluation and pedagogy also led to a discussion about designing a potential exit exam.)

Administrators concerned with standardizing a given program seem to find the rubrics a necessary unifying force with which student writing (a reasonable reflection of instructor effort and/or success) can be quantified and therefore made available for reporting and discussion. What matters more, obviously, is not just what the assessment numbers are, but how they are interpreted, by whom they are read, and in what ways they are applied

to instruction. At Shawnee State, perhaps because of its size and mission, assessment efforts evidently have led to a good-natured, campus-wide discussion and to specific program implementations.

*Promises and Challenges.* The first and foremost note of caution concerns teaching to the rubrics. While assessment rubrics may become statements of standardized grading criteria, even in the good name of formative evaluation, they have limits in actual classroom applications as tools of instruction. In such a perspective, while students began to attend to the rubric requirements, our instructors continued to underscore the meaning of criteria within *specific* assignments and sought to offer examples. Some instructors, when emphasizing the drafting process, brought samples to class and had students practice scoring, intending, perhaps, for them to internalize the rubrics as target criteria.

Other challenges of program or campus-wide portfolio assessment focus less on applying the rubrics than on the procedures of collecting appropriate writing samples, maintaining funding sources, and following up with faculty and even with student interests. We had asked our students to maintain portfolios of “major research papers” from each class until graduation; we did not suspect that keeping papers could be a major ordeal for most of them. Absent-mindedness is more common than we know. In addition to student responsibilities, our funding sources needed to be consistent in order to cover costs of copying, hiring and maintaining reader subcommittees and secretarial assistance. The administration must be convinced that this is an ongoing, competitive project worthy of every bit of our scarce resource.

Likewise, faculty who have shown their interest through workshop participation and by having their students’ papers scored must be encouraged for follow-up activities. As assessment representatives, these faculty participants take the rubrics back to their departments and further involve their colleagues, who in turn will serve as future contacts across campus. Program implementation also needs to involve them. In such a buy-in process, assessment teams disseminate findings regularly to the university community through sensible schedules and clear presentations that accommodate all.

*Adjunct Faculty as Stakeholders.* If chairing an academic department or program is “leadership among peers/equals” (Tucker 4), the small-school WPA must strive to balance between recruiting and maintaining a quality staff. At SSU this balancing act necessitates a long-term commitment. Assessment efforts and positive teaching evaluations certainly support adjunct contract renewals; beyond that, some extra empathy and care would help ensure quality payback.

Reading the SSU scenario, one notices that these adjunct instructors are expected to do *more* at Shawnee than other schools—in terms of their loads, uniformity, and quality as well as expected teaching accountability—since, unlike big research institutions, SSU has teaching as its primary mission. We must produce quality instruction or we have no reason for existence, in addition to consistent recruitment and keeping academically inclined students. That these adjuncts, almost twenty of them, were generally cooperative in pursuing their daily responsibilities and those added for this particular study should be most encouraging to WPA’s and provide them with goals for their own adjuncts’ participation.

As the institution’s survival depends on enrollment, so the composition program’s survival in this small, geographically-challenged university depends on the program’s retention of committed adjunct faculty. There was (and is) no question about our reliance on their service; at the same time, we knew that these professionals, M.A. and Ph.D. degree holders, who for the most part grew up in the area, had employment challenges in the region. As a new hire, I was told the first week that I should not evaluate adjuncts with typical measures such as class observations, course evaluations, and mandated workshops; despite that, I was concurrently told that I should start tracking their class practices and grading patterns. I remember holding meetings and workshops with very few attendees and handling the same instructors’ complaints about students. I sincerely believe that, given the situations and adjuncts’ challenges, we, as peers wearing many professional hats and who came and stayed for different reasons, had done our best teaching writing and then assessing our teaching performance. Once, an adjunct, who is also a county librarian, came to my office at 8:00 p.m. to share her mixed responses to working with our students, all the while saying emphatically that she remained interested in teaching them. At 7:00 a.m. the following day, a faculty spouse explained that she needed an additional section because her husband’s program had just been canceled. The following night, a high-school teacher volunteered for staffing an odd-hour class and offered to assist in organizing a forthcoming teaching colloquium.

Just as I was their understanding, supportive, and reliable “boss” compositionist, these adjunct colleagues were my fellow teachers and could be expected to perform at a high level. I have my national WPA knowledge base, and they have their local professional experience; together, we share our teaching priorities of working with many of SSU’s special type of first-generation college students.

## WPA AND CAMPUS-WIDE WRITING ASSESSMENT

Opportunities arose when I was invited to talk about WAC theories and practices. Faculty from different disciplines were genuinely interested in students' writing performance—including some faculty who argued that, among SSU's students, understanding the assignment and ability to think critically seemed more important than "getting everything right" grammatically for the first time. A few, in fact, knew about process pedagogies. Further, we had many faculty, both tenure-line and adjunct, accessible as readers and many retrievable essays as samples. Without a doubt, small is flexible. In this case, faculty members were not unlike family, clarifying things quickly, somehow working together, and moving on.

As a whole, my experience began with a series of meetings in the dean's office, moved through a pilot reading at a local resort club, a presentation to English department faculty, a series of more formal readings, a conference presentation, and a follow-up meeting, and my first-year experience finally culminated with the year of implementation. Collectively, the activities brought people from different fields or levels together, discussing and practicing shared criteria for good writing, curriculum policies, graduation standards, faculty development, and a short list of other unplanned but student-centered topics. Occasions permitting, we invited deans, vice-presidents, and the provost to our meetings, and *they all came*. We copied these administrators and the president directly with our memos and proceedings. (And I copied our adjuncts theirs to create an inclusive experience for them.) Probably not all of these events would happen in large institutions, at least according to my personal experience in a school of more than eighteen thousand students. Yet at Shawnee State, we could interact during a single assessment experience, putting aside our academic and philosophical differences, prompting interesting questions such as "How might this sense of collegiality spill over to other things on campus?" and "Would campus-wide assessment aid faculty morale, even indirectly?"

We had much to gain and very little to lose. We learned from one another, certainly. In the process of fine-tuning the rubrics, I discovered the reception and receptibility of writing and the teaching of writing, including how and what writing was done in other disciplines, and what discipline-specific interests or concerns might already exist in the departments. Faculty outside English, for instance, while emphatic about assignment formatting and styles, generally supported the use of writing as a learning aid; they were all quite curious about student-engagement. Progressively, faculty from math, history, education, accounting, and biology further discussed the rela-

tionship between the first-year sequence and capstone seminars, and they explored the potential relationship between on-line instruction and assessment. Much communication developed during that year.

Among the several issues concerning assessment and accountability, at center stage seems to be the close relationship between institution-wide assessment and adjunct faculty development within the small university setting. My maxim now is that nothing about SSU's and our department's enterprise is really small. The interesting paradox is that, before a small school decides to do institution-wide assessment, especially of writing, the entire human team while numerically small must simultaneously function as large and powerful. That is, while the physical components such as the student population, the number of buildings, departments, and personnel involved might seem "small," "fewer," or "little," no matter how we qualify and quantify them, the actual opportunity, results, and implementation are necessarily influential and far-reaching. In the SSU case, the opportunity was educational for all its community members because our efforts foregrounded the composition program and its adjunct faculty as stake-holders. If I should take on the assessment task again, here are the lessons learned:

1. More pre-design conversation and collaboration between the assessment officer and the WPA can help to ensure a good theoretical and praxis footing.
2. An ad hoc advisory committee can be involved to chart progress.
3. A larger assessment team (of more than seven members) involving participants from the administration, tenure-line, *and* adjunct faculty is advisable as a team of stakeholders.
4. Beyond the immediate campus, such an assessment team could also involve area high-school instructors in a summer institute or articulation projects in order to reinforce institutional aims.
5. Follow-up work is necessary:
  - a. The rubrics need to be imaginatively used in teacher-training and campus-wide workshops, connecting, for instance, to the WAC or WID initiatives; and
  - b. the assessment conversation can be enlarged to establish a teaching and learning center is a highly desirable effect of the program.

While my experience may have been positive because of the close interaction among faculty members, my arguments are these:

1. In a small institution such as Shawnee State, the WPA occupies a distinct vantage point from which—based on the relatively modest size of composition staff of eighteen and central administration of four—a large body of student texts and their assessment scores as raw data is readily available upon call, which then becomes an invaluable source for varied research methodologies and projects.
2. Being considered a small institution does present an illusion in terms of the education, training, time, and politics involved. In other words, an institution-wide writing assessment is necessarily a large process in scope and practice. Its benefit for us, unlike larger institutions that are our counterparts, is that as a small university faculty we learned to take on big issues. While teaching, not research, is usually the mission and consequently the focus of SSU faculty, institution-wide writing assessment has been educational for all SSU's writing faculty—including our adjunct colleagues because of the necessary exposure to the professional literature and practices *and* to our conversation about learning, teaching, and assessing writing.

**ENVOI**

After the AAHE workshop the assessment team received several invitations for program consultation on various campuses. While opportunities like these are relatively rare, they also suggest that our college clientele have changed so much in recent decades that assessment, an issue of interest primarily for lower-division colleges not long ago, is now a common concern for many more open or selective four-year institutions. The assessment need has risen because access to higher education has continued to widen while society concurrently searches for even more curricular and instructional accountabilities.

At SSU, we strive to show the NCA our assessemnt efforts not only in emphasizing specific goals of performance consistency as shared criteria but in teaching essential writing skills in our courses, which holds that SSU's composition program including its adjunct faculty highly accountable for the entire institution. Based on its fundamentally cross-disciplinary character, campus-wide writing assessment is a worthy act especially in a small school. Through expanding dialogues and, more importantly, professional development opportunities, I hope to retain our accountable adjunct colleagues as a dedicated and stable teaching force.

**APPENDIX 1:**

RESEARCH-BASED WRITING SKILLS RUBRIC, AND SCORES OF “NO APPLAUSE” (SAMPLE TOTAL)

Rating (13)	Structure (3)	Content (3)	Mechanics (4)	Research (3)
5 <b>Superior</b>	Clear beginning, development, and conclusion; appropriate paragraphing; clear and appropriate transitions	Appropriate length to cover topic; clearly, coherently focused; a good sense of audience; thoughts clearly organized/ presented; logical and clear progression; assertions clearly supported/ illustrated	Correct sentence structure;correct spelling;correct punctuation; correct capitalization; correct usage; appropriate word choice	Reference page included and in correct format; appropriately cited sources; appropriate number of resources; appropriate resources to support thesis
4 <b>Strong</b>	Generally clear beginning, development, and conclusion; generally appropriate paragraphing; generally clear and appropriate transitions	Appropriate length to cover topic; clearly, coherently focused; a general sense of audience; thoughts generally organized/ presented; generally logical and clear progression; assertions generally supported/ illustrated	Generally free of errors in sentence structure spelling punctuation capitalization usage word choice	Reference page included and mostly in correct format; sources generally cited correctly; appropriate number of resources; mostly appropriate resources to support thesis

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>3</b>  <b>Adequate</b></p>	<p>Adequate beginning, development, and conclusion; adequate paragraphing; adequate transitions</p>	<p>Adequate length to cover topic; adequately focused; some sense of audience; thoughts adequately organized and presented; adequate progression; assertions adequately supported/illustrated</p>	<p>Relatively few errors in sentence structure/spelling punctuation capitalization usage word choice</p>	<p>Adequate reference page; some errors in citations; sources generally cited correctly; adequate but limited resources; adequate but limited choice of resources to support thesis</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2</b>  <b>Weak</b></p>	<p>Weak beginning, development, and conclusion; weak paragraphing; weak transitions</p>	<p>Not adequate length to cover topic; weakly focused; little sense of audience; thoughts not clearly organized; unclear progression; assertions weakly supported/illustrated</p>	<p>Frequent errors in sentence structure spelling punctuation capitalization usage word choice</p>	<p>Significant errors on reference page; citations; choice of resources; not adequate resources</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>1</b>  <b>Not Adequate</b></p>	<p>Serious and persistent errors in organizational structure; paragraphing</p>	<p>Does not cover topic; not focused; little to no sense of</p>	<p>Serious and persistent errors in sentence structure spelling punctuation capitalization usage word choice</p>	<p>No reference page numerous format errors, or both faults; sources uncited or incorrectly cited; few and inappropriate resources</p>

**APPENDIX 2:**

AN EXCERPT FROM AN E112 ESSAY

Title: No Applause for Television Violence

I belong to a generation that cannot remember life before television. We grew up with televisions in our homes and in our lives. It's easy to recall what day of the week it is by what is showing on television this evening.[. . .] All this visual and audible violence seeps into our minds and into our lives. It is time that we take notice of the negative influences television violence has on our society. It is time to take a stand against violent programming on television.

The negative effects that TV violence has on our children are too serious to be ignored. "A study by the Center for Media and Public Affairs disclosed that an average child--regardless of family income or educational status--views 8,000 murders and 10,000 other acts of violence on TV before finishing elementary school" (Weir 14). Television, whether we like it or not, acts as a teacher in many ways. Children learn from educational shows like Sesame Street, but they learn from shows like The Power Rangers, too. A recent study by Boyatzis, Matillo, & Nesbitt finds "an important and alarming discovery [. . .] that children's aggression was immediately and markedly greater following exposure to but a single episode of The Power Rangers (53). Children imitate the violent behaviors they see on TV. I can see it in the young children who I babysit. When they are watching a show like The Power Rangers they begin to imitate the jumps, kicks, and punches they see. [. . .]

Children are not alone in being misled by television violence. "Viewing violence will make people insensitive to the issue of personal violence as well as violence in society" (Signorielli 96). When we see a particular violent act for the first time, it shocks us. This is a good and fitting response. We ought to be stunned by violence. The Commission on Violence and Youth of the American Psychological Association found that "evidence clearly reveals that viewing and hearing high levels of violence on television, day after day, were correlated with increased acceptance of aggression and more aggressive behavior" (qtd. in Hepburn 310). [. . .]

TV violence encourages real life violence. [. . .]

Supporters of violent programming have argued that TV has little or no affect on our society. If this were true, I doubt advertisers would dump millions of dollars into trying to get people to buy their products. It would be terribly unwise to use a medium for advertising which has so little effect on peoples' attitudes and decisions. [. . .]

Clearly people are affected by what is seen on TV. Ex-president of Columbia Pictures, David Puttnam, said shortly after he resigned, “Someone has to say ‘Enough’—because this is disaster, we are destroying ourselves. [ . . . ]

The days of remembering life before there was TV are long gone. Television is sure to be a part of American life for many generations to come. We must take notice of the negative influences which TV violence has on our society. Something must be done. The time is now.

Note: A nearly error-free Works Cited page was attached to the original student paper.

### APPENDIX 3:

SCORE RESULTS FROM SENIOR RUBRIC, MAY 21, 1997

No./Title	CrThk1	CrThk2	Wrt1	Wrt 2	Reader 1	Reader 2	Senior Seminar	GPA	Major	Total
1. Inequality in Ohio's Schools	15	11	14	13	Hamilton	Todt	A	3.91	Computer Science	53
2. Tropical Rain Forests of the Sea	23	17	18.5	17	Eng	Todt	A	3.18	Biology	75.5
3. Negative Effects of Privatization	11	10	14	12	Huang	Todt	B-	3.13	Occupational Therapy	47
4. Reintroduction of Industrial Hemp in Kenya	14	12	9	10	Lorentz	Todt	C	2.66	Natural Science	45
5. Vaccination: The Key to Malarial Eradication	17	22	14.5	18	Hamilton	Eng	A	3.67	Biology	71.5
6. China Population Control	14	5	9.5	6	Hamilton	Huang	D	2.17	Biology	34.5
7. Birth-Control Use	15	20	14	18	Hamilton	Eng	A	2.91	Chemistry	67
8. Medical Freedoms & Alternative Therapy	19	17	17	12	Huang	Eng	B	2.72	Biology	65
9. Effects of Ancestral Traditions in Africa	21	22.5	20	15.5	Lorentz	Eng	B+	2.75	Biology	79
10. Human Forced Changes on The Amazon	15	22	13	19	Lorentz	Huang	D	2.3	Natural Science	69

### NOTES

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