INDIANA UNIVERSITY SOUTHEAST

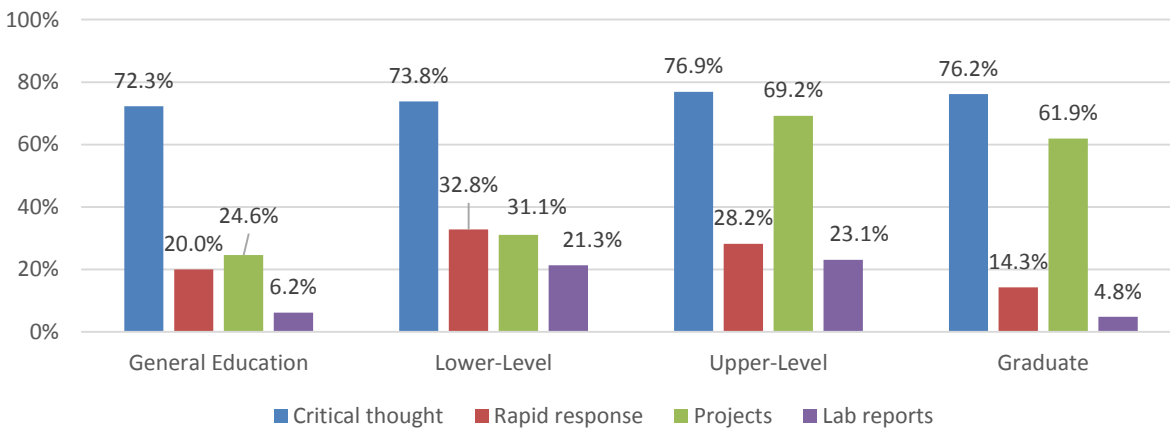# 2014 Improvement of Writing across the Curriculum Report

The Faculty Senate Improvement of Writing Committee developed a faculty survey to analyze writing across the curriculum at IU Southeast. The assessment tool asked faculty to report areas of student writing concern, types of writing assigned, writing as a percentage of final grade, writing assignments requiring draft submissions, assessing student writing, use of the Writing Center and the Library, and ownership for improving student writing. Results were broken down by class level and school.

The anonymous survey link was sent to the IU Southeast faculty listserv in February and March 2014. There were about 117 usable responses, with response rate varying by question (partial responses were recorded). Overall, approximately 578 faculty are subscribed to the listserv, resulting in an estimated 20.2% response rate.
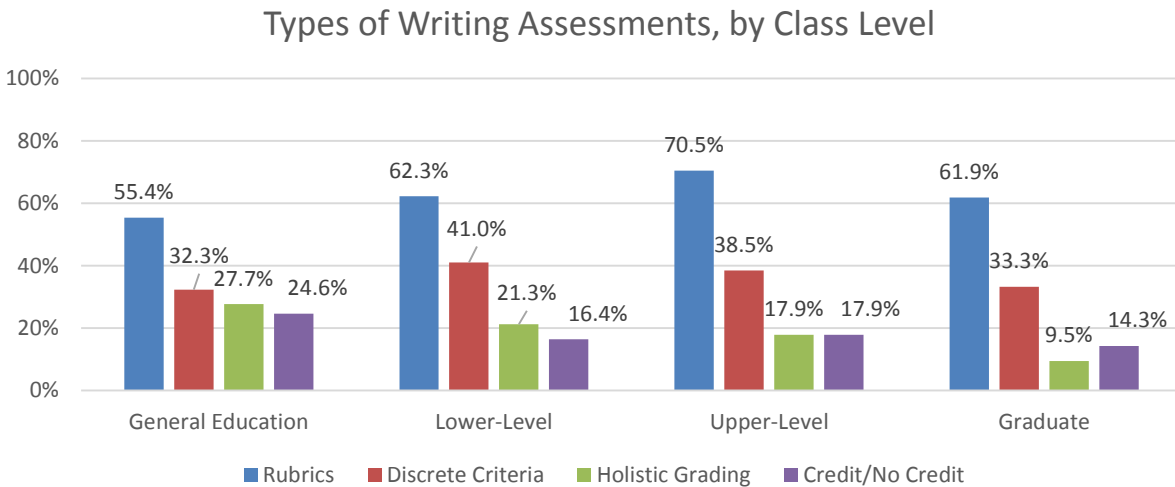
WHERE WE ARE AND WHAT WE LEARNED

TYPES OF WRITING ASSIGNED: About three out of every four respondents teaching at each class level assign critical thought writing assignments. About one-third of lower-level course instructors assign rapid response assignments, while lab reports are assigned in about one-fifth or one-quarter of lower-level and upper-level courses. Culminating research projects are assigned most heavily in upper-level major and graduate courses.

Types of Writing Assignments, by Class Level

WRITING ASSESSMENT: Rubrics are the most utilized form of writing assessment across class levels, with its highest use in upper-level courses. Credit/no credit and holistic grading techniques are less commonly used across all course levels.

Types of Writing Assessments, by Class Level

WRITING RESOURCES:

The Writing Center: All writers, experienced and inexperienced, need educated readers and can benefit from someone else reading their work and providing feedback. Our goal is to create stronger writers at IU Southeast.

We invite all students, staff, and faculty to visit our Center to have a conversation about any class or personal writing project at any stage of development. Our professional staff will review your assignment, discuss your needs, and provide feedback and guidance for your writing. Podcasts and videos on our website can give you more information on how to prepare for a consultation.

Since our number one objective is to create stronger writers, proofreading doesn't support this goal. We encourage students to participate in the revision process through guidance, learning, and application. We assist students in learning how to proofread for themselves.
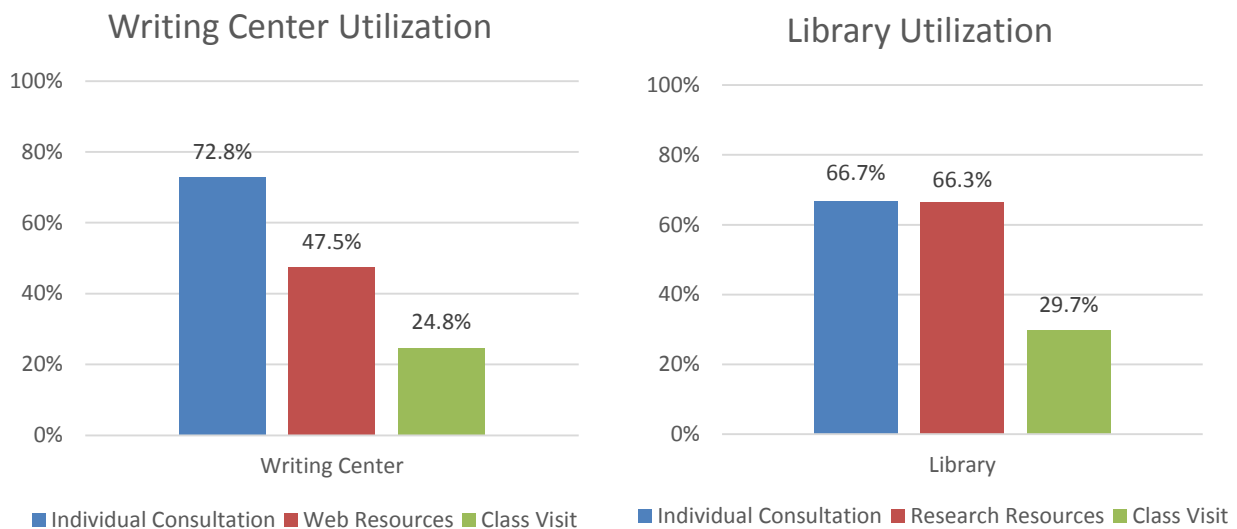
Our services are free. We are open in two locations, KV 208 and the Library, and we have many available hours for consultations, either online or face-to-face. In addition, students are encouraged to use the many resources available to them on our website. Also, various workshops are presented each semester for students to attend free of charge.

We can be contacted a number of ways: In person, synchronous online chat option, online video consultation, e mail consultation, e mail questions, telephone (812 941-2498), and through social media. Check our website for our specific semester schedule, workshop schedules, and any other additional information needed: http://www.ius.edu/writingcenter/
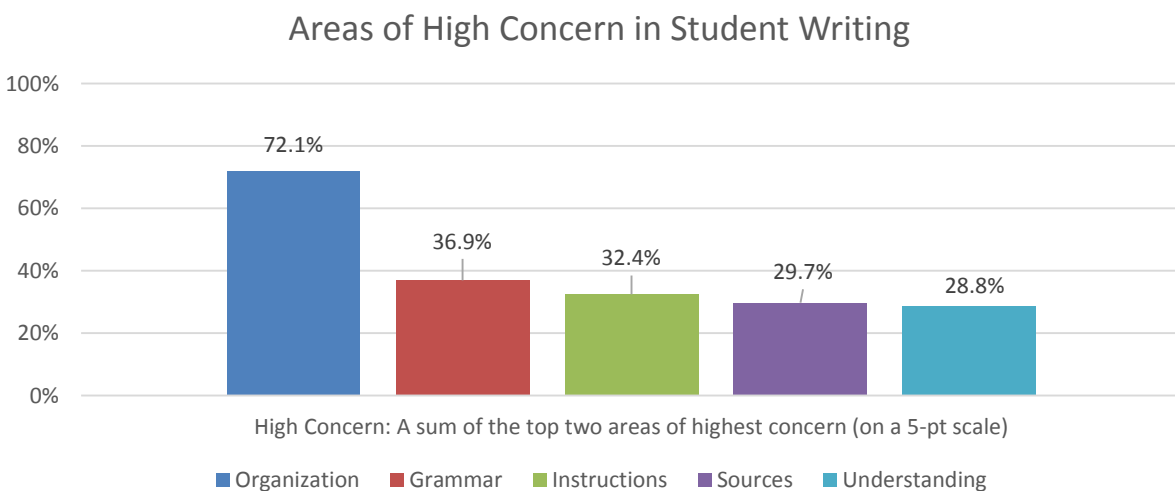
Library: The library offers a student-centered instruction program that introduces students to the resources they need to be successful at library research and supports them as they achieve mastery in this area. Our goal is to empower students to be self-sufficient, confident researchers who know how to locate, use, and evaluate information ethically and responsibly. The library is primarily responsible for integrating information literacy—one of the General Education Student Learning Outcomes—throughout the curriculum. The faculty librarians who teach in the program will work

with instructors to customize the instruction session to the specific needs of the students and their assignment. While most students get their first exposure to library resources and services at the FYS level, it is important to continue reinforcing and expanding on those skills, so we strongly encourage instructors to make use of our instruction services whenever they assign something that requires students to engage with library resources. More information about the library instruction program is available here: http://libguides.ius.edu/instruction.

Respondents were asked how often and what type of services they recommend to students from The Writing Center and Library.

CONCERN IN STUDENT WRITING: The area of highest concern is student problems with organization or flow of ideas, particularly in upper-level major courses and in classes with intensive amounts of writing.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

In response to, "How can the campus community improve the writing of students?" four main themes emerged from faculty open-ended responses (representative comments are included below; a complete list of comments can be found on pgs. 18-22 of the full report):

1. INCREASED WRITING: A large number of instructors believed that student writing quality can be improved by assigning more of it throughout the curriculum:

 ➢ "Require more writing in ALL classes and give nuanced feedback, and have individual conferences with students."

 ➢ "All (or nearly all) classes need to emphasize using writing to help students learn material and to help them join in the conversations in their fields."

2. HIGHER STANDARDS: A number of instructors believed the campus should set higher standards for writing by raising the requirements for admission, encouraging no or low tolerance grading, offering more intensive writing requirements, continually and thoughtfully assessing students' work, demanding more of students, having higher expectations and generally caring about their writing:

 ➢ "I think we need to demand quality from our students, but we also have to help them develop these skills. We need to accept the fact that not all students will come to campus with the ability to write. But, if we are truly committed to educating students and preparing them for their futures, we need to commit to helping them develop stronger writing skills."

3. PROPER ASSESSMENTS AND TRAINING: Many instructors voiced the need for proper assessment of students' writing ability and the importance of training early in their college education and recommending early testing, higher standards and ongoing assessment:

 ➢ "Perhaps assess writing through each year so that strenghs/weaknesses show up."

4. CLASSES/WORKSHOPS/TRAINING: Some instructors recommended formal and informal methods for improving student writing:

 ➢ "Would like to learn more about developing and using rubrics for assessing writing assignments."

1. Establish a faculty-driven Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) program. A WAC program, with a full-time faculty director, would provide faculty members across the disciplines with professional development for integrating and evaluating writing instruction in their courses. A WAC program would complement support offered by the Writing Center and the Writing Program.

2. Offer faculty workshops on drafting, evaluating, responding to writing and low stakes/high stakes writing. Faculty members with expertise and experience in writing instruction are a valuable and underutilized resource for our campus. These faculty members should be encouraged to offer brief workshops on different aspects of integrating writing in the curriculum.

3. Design and institute formative assessment of writing in program-level courses. Ongoing assessments of writing across campus can provide the University with crucial information to develop methods for improving student writing and offering professional development opportunities for faculty to include writing in their courses. We encourage formative assessment because such efforts should not be used to evaluate programs; it should be used to improve faculty instruction and student learning.

4. Create a sustainable feedback loop, such as a regular campus assessment of writing and the cross-program sharing of data. Constructing a sustainable culture of writing instruction across the curriculum means engaging in regular conversations across disciplinary lines about the kinds of writing students need to be doing as well as the kinds of challenges faculty and students face.

A full report of results was presented to the Faculty Senate Improvement of Writing Committee in Summer 2014 and is available at www.ius.edu/oie. For further details or school-specific report creation, please contact Ron Severtis at rseverti@ius.edu or (812) 941-2148.

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