First-Semester Results, Pilot Portfolio Assessment Project
Department of English Program Evaluation

Summary Report Prepared by Joy Marsella, Fall 2002 Project Coordinator, January 2003

<u>Background.</u> Assessment specialists agree that the reading and writing carried out in Department of English courses is best assessed by portfolios with their multiple and related samples of work. Following that prevailing wisdom, faculty undertook a two-semester pilot project in program assessment to learn how well students are meeting learning goals. Guided by faculty, students enrolled in 11 sections of English 100/101 Composition I, 2 sections of English Language Institute 100 Expository Writing, and 4 sections of English 320 Introduction to English Studies prepared learning portfolios. In addition, a student portfolio-keeping workshop was held focusing on student accountability for their learning; this workshop involved eight students and will continue Spring Semester 2003. Additionally, eleven more faculty members will participate in a second iteration of the pilot project during Spring Semester, drawing on results from the Fall Semester.

<u>Method.</u> At the beginning of Fall Semester, faculty met in a day-and-a-half workshop to learn about the assessment project, to develop syllabi and assignments based on established goals, and to decide on the contents of the portfolios. Throughout the semester, faculty met every three or four weeks to discuss issues that arose during instruction, to develop criteria for assignments, to develop the rating scales (called rubrics) that guide portfolio scoring, and to practice scoring. To accommodate schedules, English and ELI 100 faculty divided themselves into two groups.

The portfolio process in the 100-level classes assessed seven learning goals: rhetorical performance, grammar/mechanics/format (called grammar/mechanics/conventions by the second group), information source usage (called documented inquiry by the second group), information source documentation, analysis, argument/reasoning (interpreted more broadly as form/genre by the second group), and self-reflection. Portfolios included 15 - 20 pages of writing, with 3 or 4 entries, including a paper involving research and documentation, and a self-reflection.

The portfolio process in English 320 assessed four learning goals: quality of analysis, ability to use critical approaches, writing skill, and documentation of sources. Portfolios included no more than 10 pages, with 2 or 3 pieces of writing.

In all three groups, portfolios were scored on a four-point scale according to the following general criteria (defined more precisely in each of the rubrics): 1 = very little or no knowledge, ability, and proficiency, 2 = minimal, 3 = satisfactory, and 4 = excellent. Each portfolio was scored twice; ongoing review during scoring sessions suggested few discrepancies, a fact that was confirmed by statistical analyses. Faculty did not score their own students' portfolios, and they read a random and equal assortment of portfolios from other sections.

<u>Results.</u> In all three groups, students performed on average at or near the satisfactory ("3") level, with consistent performance across goals. Appropriate statistical analyses showed that raters applied scores consistently, with 90% of ratings in agreement or with only a one-point difference. Rating scales were found to be reliable and valid for the particular scoring task using

appropriate statistical analyses. Figures given below on standard deviation suggest a relatively homogenous range of scores.

For the first 100-level group (114 students), descriptive statistics showed that the mean score for the seven course goals was 3.03, with a mean standard deviation of .58. For the second 100 group (77 students), the mean score for seven goals was 3.08, with a mean standard deviation of .63. For the 320 group (71 students), descriptive statistics showed that the mean score for four goals was 2.77, with a mean standard deviation of .65.

Implications and Discussion. The few differences in interpretation of 100-level guidelines suggest that the goals and the guidelines on which they are based need fine-tuning. This focus on learning goals is already beginning to address curriculum diversity across sections of 100. The fall process allowed for clarification of the 320 goals, and a revised set will be integrated into the Spring Semester iteration of the project. Participating faculty welcomed the opportunity to examine and discuss their teaching. At issue, however, is the time involved in portfolio scoring, coming as it does at the already-busy end of semester. Also at issue is the stake students have in assessment: although grades are not tied to portfolio scores, students put time and energy into preparing the portfolios and want to know their scores. Their desire for a timely response and their right to research integrity make it problematic to reduce scoring time by reading only random portfolios or by reading portfolios only once. Full statistical documentation and further project information is available from Joy Marsella or Steve Canham, Spring Semester 2003 Coordinator.