

## Abbreviated Initial Findings from FTS/ WRITI Assessment 2017-18

*SLO 3: Students use writing to evaluate texts critically and to create arguments that communicate effectively with varied audiences, while acknowledging the limits of their own judgments.*

**Goal:** Assess how students use “other voices” (resources/ evidence) as they make arguments.

**Assessment Team Members:** Six faculty (FTS and WAC Advisory Board/ Committee, plus the Multilingual and Intercultural Programs Coordinator and FTS, WAC and WC directors).

**Methodology:** Collect, read and assess random sampling of student writing from a wide swath of FTS, and code prompts descriptively.

Criterion-based assessment (rubric) developed on site to address categories below:

- Presence of discernible argument/ thesis (defined as “topic plus comment,” per Lunsford);
- Integration of evidence/ support (defined as examples, data, texts, interviews, anecdotes);
- Use of quotations (whether used at all and, if so, the role played);
- Types of evidence/ support (to analyze types of support used across the program);
- Overall impression of the ways in which sources/ evidence was used to support arguments.

### Assessment Details at a Glance

Number of FTS sections represented: 14	Number of randomly selected and anonymized papers per section: 3	Number of papers assessed: 42
Departments represented by readers: ENG, COM, HES, BIO, POL, CICE	Number of faculty readers: 6	Readers per paper: 3
Rubric focus: Thesis/ Argument and Evidence/ Support	Number of assignment prompts submitted: 13	Number of departments: 11

### Initial Findings

The first three criteria were assessed on a 1 (low) to 4 (high) rubric.

	Average Score <1.5	Average Score 1.51-1.9	Average Score 2.0-2.5	Average Score 2.51-2.9	Average Score 3.0-3.5	Average Score 3.51-4.0
Thesis/ Argument	2 4.8%	1 2.4%	9 21.4%	5 11.9%	15 35.7%	10 23.8%
Evidence	0 0%	0 0%	5 11.9%	9 21.4%	19 45.2%	9 21.4%
Quotations	7 16.7%	0 0%	4 9.5%	4 9.5%	16 38.1%	11 26.1%

The reader’s overall impression of the paper was assessed on a 1 (low) to 3 (high) rubric.

	Average Score <1.5	Average Score 1.51-2	Average Score 2.1-2.5	Average Score 2.51-3
Overall Impression	9 21.4%	6 14.3%	21 50%	6 14.3%

## Observations and Implications

### Student Work: Overall Impression (the use of evidence/ support in developing an argument / thesis)

The “glass-half empty” reading is that 50% of the papers were “okay.” The glass half full is that more than 50% of the papers were better. Readers agreed: papers were competently written at the sentence level but “uninspiring.” While there were excellent papers among the batch, we noticed lack of individual voice, enthusiasm, and passion. At the same time, the readers noted strong organization at the global level (clear paragraphing strategies) and sentence level clarity.

### Student Work: Thesis/ Argument

69% of papers averaged between 2.0 and 3.5, meaning that “if a thesis/ argument was present it was quite broad or general, or if a specific thesis was present, it wasn’t well supported.” Many had an overly broad thesis that was not well-supported, or a broad thesis with some support or a specific thesis with insufficient support. Only 24% sustained an argument throughout. Lack of clear, explicit thesis or argument can lead to somewhat directionless expository prose.

### Student Work: Evidence/ Support

Nearly 67% of the papers had an average score of 3.0 or above. About half the students “could provide evidence/support that was explained well or could use commentary to provide purpose and context for the evidence.” There were no papers-0%- that averaged below 1.5. Students can bring other voices into a piece of writing in a variety of ways (quotation, paraphrases, summaries, footnotes, etc.). For the 80% that did use quotations, about 20% integrated quotations without explanation or context, while almost 40% did so in a “rudimentary way.” The other 26% did so “skillfully.”

### Instructors' Prompts

We encountered a wide range of prompts. But lack of coherence among them resulted in papers ranging from lengthy expository research reports to 450-word editorials. Some required 10 sources; some did not specify the number. Most required some scaffolding and at least two drafts. We saw few, if any, patterns of correlation among student paper scores and types of assignments. *No two sections of FTS seemed to offer comparable writing experiences in this regard.*

## **Writing in FTS: Some Implications**

- No two FTS sections are alike in terms of what students are asked to write or how they’re asked to support that writing. Disparities point to a lack of coherence for the FTS and WAC programs overall.
- Not all students are being asked explicitly to make arguments, and even when they are asked to do so, they may not know what an arguable thesis is. If all instructors worked through a common assignment or set of tasks, all students could be taught explicitly what an argument is and how to make one.
- Facility with the “mechanics” of bringing evidence to the table, rather than making sustainable arguments, may suggest too much attention to sentence level instruction and support and not enough work on reading and analyzing arguments.

## **Recommendations**

- 1. Make the collection and analysis of student work and assignment prompts a regular part of FTS and the Writing Program.** Create a culture where FTS instructors share assignment prompts and discuss student writing across sections. These opportunities will aid assessment and curriculum reform.
- 2. Develop an FTS curriculum that includes shared assignment types based on a concise, manageable list of SLOs, and support via faculty development efforts;** create sample assignments and lesson plans that help instructors meet those outcomes.
- 3. Revise SLO #3, which is too complex, and decide what to focus on:**
  - Students summarize, analyze and evaluate written texts (a reading and thinking goal).
  - Students use writing to summarize, analyze and evaluate written texts (a WTL goal).
  - Students analyze arguments and identify the ways in which an argument reflect their values and beliefs.
  - Students produce an argument that develops a single claim and supports it throughout the piece; the argument should be intended for a specific audience. (A WTC and WTL goal)
  - Students use writing to reflect on their own assumptions and values about argument. (A Gen. Ed. goal!)