

## Introduction

In Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 the CSU, Chico Curriculum Advisory Board (CAB, the campus GE committee) undertook a comprehensive independent assessment of written communication skills of students in its GE program.

## Methods

A total of 505 papers written by students in 17 different classes were uploaded to the STEPS system and were each read by at least two reviewers. The reviewers were not made aware of which class a paper was from nor any biographical or demographic information on the student who had written the paper. Each reviewer gave a score to the paper in each of 4 categories:

- Content
- Grammar and other Surface Features
- Organization and Argumentation
- Sources and Evidence

Each reviewer scored each category on a scale from 1-3

- 1 = Beginning level
- 2 = Competent
- 3 = Accomplished

For a complete definition of what the different scores mean in each category, please see the attached rubric (Appendix A).

## Participants

A total of 505 pieces of student work from a number of different WI courses were analyzed. The papers were divided into three categories (see Table 1): those from Area A-2 Courses (**311** total papers), those from other lower-division Writing Intensive courses (**141** total papers), and those from upper-division Writing Intensive courses (**53** total papers).

Area A-2 Courses		Lower-Division WI Courses		Upper-Division WI Courses	
Course	Number of Papers	Course	Number of Papers	Course	Number of Papers
ENGL 130I	227	GEOG 101I	50	POLS 365I	31
ENGL 130PI	44	UNIV 105I	32	POLS 401I	15
JOUR 130I	23	HUMN 281I	14	MCGS 401I	4
ENGL 130EI	17	NFSC 200I	13	POLS 324I	3
		WMST 275I	10		
		RELS 275I	9		
		RELS 204I	6		
		RELS 264I	4		
		ENVL 105I	3		
TOTAL A-2	311	TOTAL LD	141	TOTAL UD	53

Table 1: Source of papers used in Written Communication Assessment

These categories represent the different stages of a student in the CSUC GE Program. Table 2 shows the breakdown of student classification in the three categories. Those in Area A-2 were nearly all freshmen; the majority of students in lower-division WI courses were still freshman but with some more advanced students; and the majority of students in upper-division WI courses were juniors and seniors.

Area A-2 Courses		Lower-Division WI Courses		Upper-Division WI Courses	
Class Level	% of Students	Class Level	% of Students	Class Level	% of Students
Freshman	89%	Freshman	65%	Freshman	2%
Sophomore	9%	Sophomore	20%	Sophomore	10%
Junior	1%	Junior	7%	Junior	36%
Senior	0%	Senior	7%	Senior	52%
Post-Bac	0%	Post-Bac	1%	Post-Bac	0%

Table 2: Class Level distribution of students

## Results

Table 3 below shows the summary of the analysis of the 505 papers, broken up into the various rubric areas, with percentages of scores (1, 2, 3) awarded in each of the course categories (A-2, Lower-Division, and Upper-Division).

	Beginning (1)	Competent (2)	Accomplished (3)		
▼ Content	22.56%	60.50%	16.94%	Mean	Standard Deviation
A-2	25.67%	60.47%	13.86%	1.882	0.618
LD	19.26%	63.85%	16.89%	1.976	0.602
UD	12.75%	50.98%	36.27%	2.235	0.663
▼ Grammar and Other Surface Features	19.55%	68.39%	12.06%		
A-2	20.66%	70.03%	9.31%	1.886	0.536
LD	20.82%	66.89%	12.29%	1.915	0.570
UD	8.91%	62.38%	28.71%	2.198	0.583
▼ Organization and Argumentation	32.15%	54.09%	13.76%		
A-2	36.21%	52.51%	11.29%	1.751	0.643
LD	27.42%	58.53%	14.05%	1.866	0.631
UD	20.59%	50.98%	28.43%	2.078	0.699
▼ Sources and Evidence	31.88%	54.42%	13.70%		
A-2	36.39%	51.90%	11.71%	1.753	0.649
LD	29.83%	55.25%	14.92%	1.851	0.653
UD	9.80%	67.65%	22.55%	2.127	0.557

The data from Table 3 is shown again in graphical form on the following page (Figure 1).

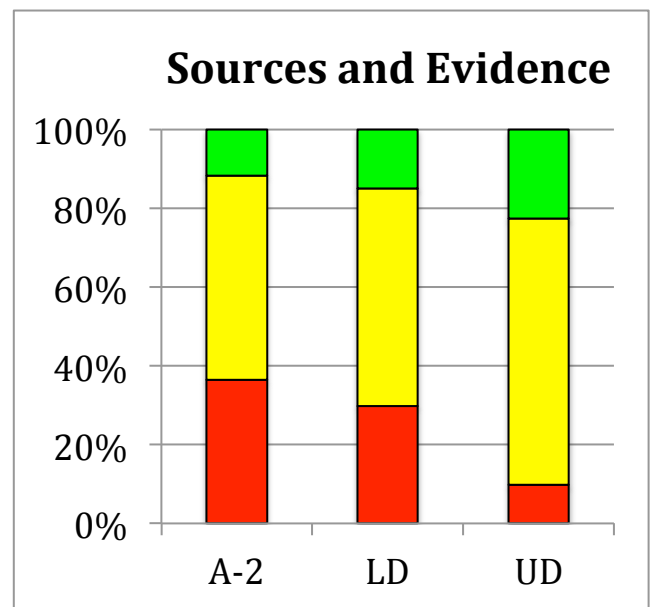
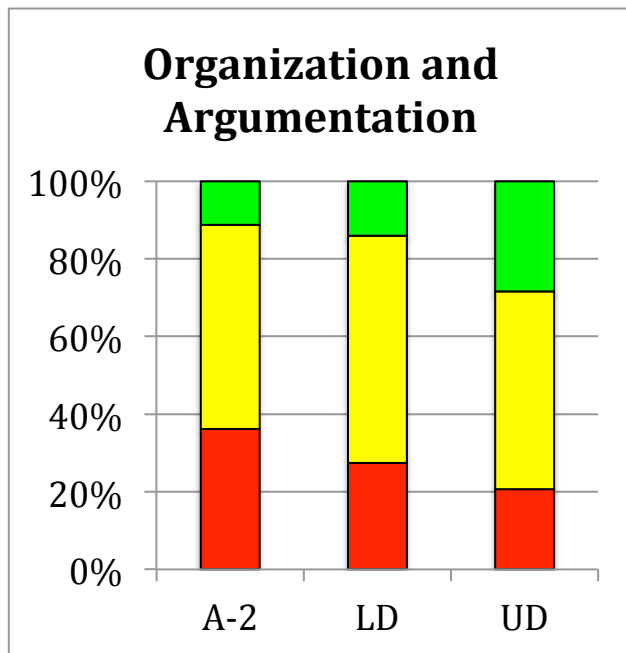
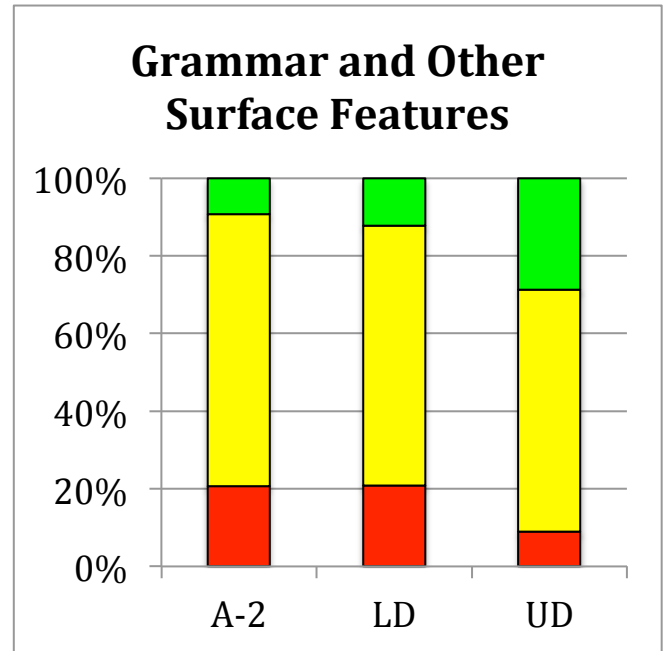
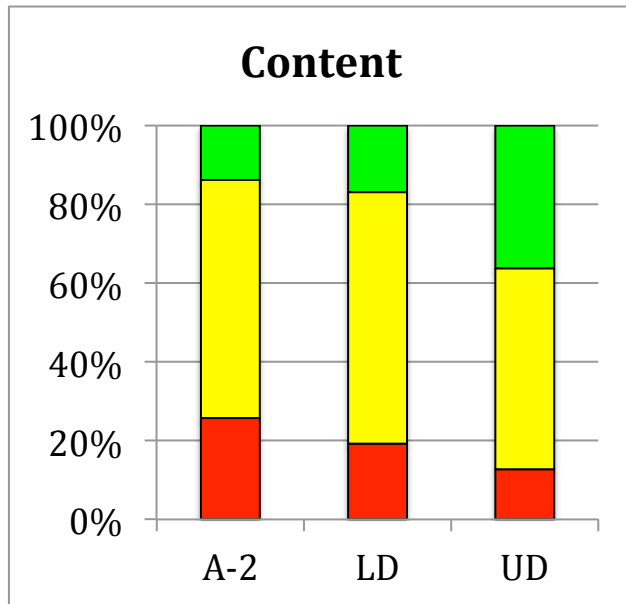
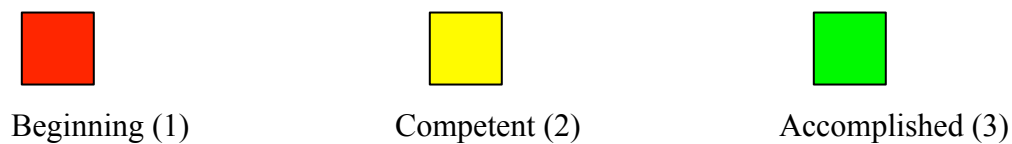


Figure 1: Graphical representation of the data from Table 3



From both Table 3 and Figure 1 it is clear in each category that as students progress from Area A-2 course to lower-division WI courses and then to upper-division WI courses, there become fewer scores of “1” (beginning) and more scores of “3” (accomplished). To determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the scores of the papers in each category, independent t-tests were carried out on the results, comparing those in area A-2 with those in lower-division WI courses, and those in lower-division WI course with those in upper-division WI courses. The summary of those test results is in Table 4 (means and standard deviations in the various categories are part of Table 3)

Content	t-score	Significance
A-2 vs. LD	2.19	0.0288
LD vs. UD	3.65	0.0003
Grammar	t-score	Significance
A-2 vs. LD	0.73	0.4650
LD vs. UD	4.28	<0.0001
Organization	t-score	Significance
A-2 vs. LD	2.58	0.0101
LD vs. UD	2.85	0.0046
Sources	t-score	Significance
A-2 vs. LD	2.13	0.0334
LD vs. UD	3.82	0.0002

Table 4: Comparisons of scores: A-2 vs. LD and LD vs. UD

The data from Table 4 shows that there is a statistically significant improvement (at the 95% confidence level,  $s < 0.05$ ) in the scores in each of the four categories as a student moves from A-2 to LD course and from LD courses to UD courses, except for the “Grammar and Other Surface Features” score between A-2 and LD courses, where there is an improvement but only a minor one.

Finally, in Table 5 below, the average total scores (the sum of the four category scores) are shown. The minimum score would be 4 (all 4 categories marked “beginning”) and the maximum score would be 12 (all 4 categories marked “accomplished”)

Classification	Overall score (4-12)
A-2	7.27
LD	7.61
UD	8.64

Table 5: Average total score of papers in each category

### Acknowledgements

Thanks go out to all those involved in completing this assessment, including

- Kate McCarthy, past-chair of CAB
- Lorraine Gardiner, administrator of the STEPS system

- Bill Loker, Dean of Undergraduate Education, whose office oversees the GE program
- CAB Pathway coordinators and others (14 reviewers total) who each reviewed between 24 and 123 papers)
- Faculty teaching the 17 courses involved in this assessment for allowing their student work to be sampled and reviewed

Respectfully submitted

Christopher Nichols  
Chair of CAB

**California State University, Chico**  
**General Education Scoring Guide for Writing**

<b>Scoring Level</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Organization &amp; Argumentation</b>	<b>Sources &amp; Evidence</b>	<b>Grammar &amp; Other Surface Features</b>
<b>3 - Accomplished</b>	In addition to meeting the requirements for a “2,” the writing shows evidence of deep engagement with intellectual material of course/discipline, imagination, and creativity. Few or no errors of fact or interpretation. Writing could be used as a model of how to fulfill the assignment.	In addition to meeting the requirements for a “2,” writing flows smoothly from one idea to another. The reader can easily follow the claims and examples used to support the ideas expressed. The writer’s decisions about <b>focus</b> and <b>organization</b> facilitate reading.	Sources used to support argument are valid, appropriate to the topic being explored, and support major points according to assignment and disciplinary conventions. Citation style clear and consistently applied.	In addition to meeting the requirements for a “2,” the writing is essentially error-free in terms of mechanics and shows considerable evidence of proofreading and editing. Models the <b>style</b> and <b>formatting</b> appropriate to the assignment.
<b>2 - Competent</b>	Content of text fulfills the assignment. Writing demonstrates engagement with intellectual and/or creative material of the course/discipline. Few errors of fact or interpretation.	Sequencing of ideas and transitions makes the writer’s points accessible. Examples are adequately developed and claims supported in most cases. The organization and tone communicate ideas effectively.	Most sources used to support argument are appropriate to the topic being explored, the assignment and disciplinary conventions. Demonstrates competence in documenting sources; the reader would have little difficulty referring back to cited sources.	While there are minor errors, the paper follows normal conventions of spelling and grammar throughout. Errors don’t interfere with reading. Appropriate conventions for style and format are used consistently throughout the writing sample.
<b>1 – Beginning</b>	Requirements of the assignment have not been fulfilled. Little/no evidence of engagement with material of the course/discipline. The paper reveals numerous errors of fact or interpretation.	Writing lacks transitions and/or sequencing of ideas, making reading and understanding difficult. Examples and/or claims are weak or missing in many cases. The writer’s decisions about focus and organization interfere with communication.	Sources are unclear or inappropriate to topic being investigated, assignment or disciplinary conventions. Source documentation is incomplete. It may be unclear which references are direct quotes and which are paraphrased.	Writing contains numerous errors in spelling, grammar (such as subject/verb agreements and tense), sentence structure and/or other writing conventions that interfere with comprehension.

**SOME BRIEF DEFINITIONS**

**Focus:** the purpose, theme, or overall argument in a text—and the way that other features in a text point toward this focus.

**Organization:** the arrangement of ideas or points in a text according to the writer’s purpose and knowledge of disciplinary conventions.

**Style:** an author’s choices about vocabulary, tone, clarity, and connotation that project her sense of purpose and audience.

**Formatting:** conventional visual and layout elements (such as bulleted lists, graphs, and pictures) that writers use to organize a document.