

Bergen Community College

ASSESSMENT REPORT FORM FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Assessment Period: Fall 2016 to Spring 2018

Department/Program: English Basic Skills

Department Chair: Dr. Leigh Jonaitis

Department Assessment Liaison: Prof. Don Reilly

Date Submitted: June 11, 2018

❖ **Program Description or mission/outcome statement of the Department/Program:**

The mission of the Department of English Basic Skills is to prepare our students, with their diverse academic backgrounds, for the demands of college reading and writing, and to provide them with a challenging educational experience that enhances the critical thinking skills necessary for life-long learning.

Based on the results of the English portion of the basic skills assessment and placement test, a student may be placed in one of four entry-level English courses:

- Developmental Skills I and Developmental Skills II (EBS-011/EBS-012)
- English Skills (EBS-021)
- Directed Studies in Writing II and Composition I (EBS-033 and WRT-101)
- Directed Studies in Writing I and Composition I (EBS-041 and WRT-101)
- Composition I alone (WRT-101)

Students placed in Developmental Skills I and II or English Skills must enroll in their required courses in their first semester at the College.

❖ **Program Learning Outcomes:**

- Use critical reading and thinking skills to analyze college texts.
- Use a variety of computer programs to support and develop language skills.
- Find and use outside sources in written assignments.
- Write multi-paragraph essays with unity, support, coherence and sentence skills.
- Apply writing process to writing assignments.
- Demonstrate academic survival skills.

SEMESTER 1: CREATING PROGRAM-LEVEL ASSESSMENT PLAN

1. Program Learning Outcome(s) to be assessed (from the above section):

For the 2016-2018 assessment cycle, the Department of English Basic Skills will assess reading instruction in EBS-011 by assessing the Program Learning Outcome below. Assessment will be limited to vocabulary comprehension, identifying the central point and main ideas, identifying topic sentences, transitional words and phrases, and supporting ideas.

Program Learning Outcome to be assessed: “Use critical reading and thinking skills to analyze college texts.”

2. Means of Assessment:

The goal of this assessment project is to assess the effectiveness of reading instruction in EBS-011 classes. The committee charged with this assessment project will design a pre-test that will be administered at the beginning of the semester and a post-test that will be administered after the mid-term point in the semester. These tests will ask students to read an appropriate EBS-011 text and answer questions related to the following critical reading strategies: vocabulary comprehension, identifying the central point and main ideas, identifying topic sentences, transitional words and phrases, and supporting ideas. The committee is expecting to see scores improve from the pre-test to the post-test. The degree of this improvement will help us measure the efficacy of current instruction on critical reading.

▪ Feedback from Dean:

SEMESTER 2: DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT TOOL (s) and TIMELINE

3A. Describe or attach assessment tool (s), including sources of data, timeline for data collection and how data will be analyzed.

Assessment Tools:

There will be two assessment tools for this project: a pre- and post-test, both of which evaluate the students' ability in the following critical reading categories: vocabulary comprehension, identifying the central point and main ideas, identifying topic sentences, transitional words and phrases, and

supporting ideas. Each test will consist of a short article on the theme of communication followed by nine multiple-choice questions which will assess the critical reading categories above. The first article is entitled “Non-verbal Communication” and the second is “Compliance Techniques: Getting People to Say Yes.” Both of these articles are attached at the end of this report. Please note that, the articles were taken from an instructor’s edition of an EBS-011 text. As a result, the answers to the questions appear in the attached copies. The articles and questions will be re-typed so the answers do not appear next to the questions.

The pre- and post-tests will be administered to a cohort of about 250 EBS-011 students during two seventy-five minute classes. Students will use Scantron answer sheets to record their answers to nine multiple-choice questions. While the names of students will appear on the answers sheets, the names of their professors will not be identified. Before the tests are graded, the EBS assessment liaison will verify that there is a pre- and post-test for each student. When either is missing, that student’s answer sheet will be removed.

Timeline:

May 2017: Distribute email informing EBS faculty about assessment project.

June-July 2017: Re-type tests; identify classes for cohort; write directions for instructors; prepare packets for instructors.

Week of August 28: Distribute e-mail reminding EBS faculty of assessment project.

Week 1 of Fall 2017 Semester: Distribute pre-test assessment packets to cohort classes.

Week 2 of Fall 2017 Semester: Administer pre-test.

Week 9 of Fall 2017 Semester: Distribute packets for post-test.

Week 11 of Fall 2017 Semester: Administer post-tests.

Weeks 13-14 of Fall 2017 Semester: Tabulate results. Analyze and discuss.

3B. Desired results faculty would like to see.

The EBS assessment committee expects to see a 20% improvement on the post-test scores when compared to the baseline scores of the pre-test.

- **Feedback from CIE:**

SEMESTER 3: COLLECTING AND ANALYZING DATA

4. Summary of Results (attach aggregated data table, survey tool, etc., to support the summary)

During the week of 9/25/17, students in eleven EBS-011 classes took the pre-test. In order to ensure that a diverse cross section of the EBS-011 population took this test and to ensure that these students experienced a variety of teaching styles, these eleven classes were taught by full-time and part-time faculty and met in the morning, afternoon, and evening. The pre-test required students to read an article entitled “Non-verbal Communication,” a 1500-word essay. This article is attached at the end of this report. Based on research performed by the EBS Assessment Project Committee, the reading level of this essay was determined to be at the 10th grade. Students read this essay and answered nine multiple-choice comprehension questions on Scantron answer sheets in one class period. Questions were limited to the following areas: vocabulary, main idea, supporting details, and transitions. A total of 169 students took this test. The results are below. The raw data is attached at the end of this report.

Results of the Pre-test:

Score Point	0-44	56	67	78	89+
Number	45	28	44	32	20
Percentage	26.6	16.6	26	19	11.8

Comments:

It should be noted again that the pre-test article was rated at a tenth-grade reading level. The reading level of many EBS-011 students can be much lower than this, at the 6th or 8th grade level at least. The EBS Assessment Committee did not want students to read an article at their current level, but set out to challenge them to read at the level the committee hopes students will achieve. The results of the pre-test confirm the challenges EBS-011 students face when asked to demonstrate basic reading comprehension skills at the 10th grade level. Only 30.8% earned a score of 78% or above while 43.2% failed this test (scored below 67%); 26% earned a borderline score of 67. This suggests that at the beginning of the semester, 69.2% of students have difficulty with the most basic of reading comprehension skills. This confirms what EBS faculty have consistently observed in EBS-011 classes: reading is a significant hurdle for students.

The pre-test establishes a baseline for this project. It was the assessment committee’s goal to establish this baseline at the beginning of the semester before significant reading instruction was delivered. The post-test was administered during the week of 12/11/17. This test asked students to read “Compliance Techniques: Getting People to Say Yes,” an article of similar length and reading difficulty to the pre-test. This article is also attached at the end of this report. Results were still being submitted by instructors as this report was being prepared. Since the EBS assessment project design required a post-test at the end of the fall semester and since this report is being submitted at the semester’s end, the results of the post-test will be tabulated and analyzed by the assessment committee in the spring. Based on this

analysis, the committee will make recommendations for improvement and will close the loop in semester 4 of this project.

The results of the post-test were tabulated during the Spring 2018 semester and the results are below.

Results of the Post-test

Score Point	0-44	56	67	78	89+
Number	50	22	22	17	7
Percentage	42.37	18.64	18.64	14.41	5.93

Comments:

While 169 students took the pre-test, only 118 took the post-test. Even though this difference may skew the results, it is clear that many students found the post-test reading to be more challenging than the pre-test reading. Even though the post-test was rated at a reading level similar to the pre-test and was of a comparable length, the EBS Assessment Committee recognized that the post-test article was slightly more challenging than the pre-test. This is why the committee chose the more challenging article as the post-test. The committee's expectation was that instruction between the two tests would help students improve their scores. In retrospect, this may have been a flaw in the design of the test. The committee should have found two reading passages that were at the same reading level. The number of students who scored in the failing range of 0-57 on the post-test rose to 61.1% from 43.2% on the pre-test. The overall passing percentage (67+ range) fell from 56.8% on the pre-test to 38.68 on the post-test. The percentage of students who scored in the 78+ range also fell from 30.8 on the pre-test to 20.34 on the post-test. In short, students did not improve their scores by 20% as the Committee had hoped. While these results are disappointing, they are not entirely unexpected.

The Department of Developmental English has long been concerned the emphasis its curriculum, SLOs, and Mastery Test place on writing. The Mastery Test alone places a great deal of pressure on instructors (many of whom are adjuncts) to prioritize writing over reading since the EBS Mastery Test is an essay exam that students must pass in order to leave the EBS sequence. Even though admirable changes have been made to this test, it remains a test that assesses writing more than reading. EBS-011 students who earn an A or a B in EBS-011 must earn at least a borderline passing grade on the Mastery Test to be eligible to skip EBS-012 and accelerate into WRT-101. Those EBS-011 students who earn less than a B are still required to take the Mastery Test as practice. When the students who earn less than a B in EBS-011 move on to EBS-012, they must pass the Mastery Test to pass EBS-012. In some way, shape, or form, the Mastery Test hovers over EBS-011 students as a requirement, and instructors respond to this pressure by emphasizing writing instruction over reading. In recent years, the Mastery Test has been revised so it requires students to write about an article they have read. In order to earn a clear passing grade on this new test, students must incorporate ideas from the article in some way (direct quotes, paraphrases, or summary). While this approach does not test reading comprehension as the pre- and post-tests did, it does place a heavier emphasis on reading. But more needs to be done.

While the results above are disappointing, this assessment project provided the EBS Assessment Committee with some valuable data. While the Committee hoped to see a 20% improvement in scores, it really wanted to generate some evidence about the effectiveness of reading instruction in EBS-011 now. Since reading comprehension is not assessed in a direct, systematic way in EBS-011 (or in any other EBS or WRT class for that matter), this was an important first step. Developmental English professors have long used anecdotal evidence to support the claim that reading instruction in EBS-011 must change. This project has generated data the Department can use as a starting point for discussions about possible curriculum and pedagogical changes that may help EBS students read at higher levels. This will be discussed in the next section: Semester 4, Closing the Loop.

5. Recommendations for Improvement:

The EBS Assessment Committee reviewed the post-test results and made the following recommendations:

- If reading is assessed in the next testing cycle and if a pre- and post-test structure is used, both reading passages should be at the same reading level so to avoid the kind of challenge students faced this cycle, that is being required to read a more challenging article for the post-test. Furthermore, future assessment committees should consider using an assessment method that does not rely on the multiple-choice format. Multiple choice questions do not test real-world reading skills and do not acknowledge that reading and writing are inextricably linked. Future assessment projects could analyze the annotations and summaries that students complete in preparation for the Mastery Test.
- The Department of Developmental English could consider adopting new text books for all EBS classes, that is, texts that use the Integrated Reading and Writing approach in deep and meaningful ways.
- Although the Mastery Test was recently revised, perhaps deeper changes can be made so that writing assessment is no longer prioritized over reading assessment.
- Perhaps the Department can re-visit the whole book approach and select books based on reading levels.

▪ Feedback from Dean:

SEMESTER 4: CLOSING THE LOOP AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE

6. Use of Results:

The following list represents some methods the Department of Developmental English can use to share the results of this assessment project:

- Discuss the results of this assessment project at the Fall 2018 meetings of the Department of Developmental English and/or the English Department.
- Convene a summit to revise SLOs in order to place greater emphasis on reading.
- Invite an Integrated Reading and Writing specialist to a summit, share these assessment results with him or her, and discuss strategies that could be used to enhance reading instruction in the department.
- Results of the projects could be discussed at future WRAP sessions. Furthermore, reading specialists from the department could attend Wrap sessions and discuss reading strategies that can be used to enhance classroom instruction.

▪ **Feedback from CIE:**

6/15/2018

The 2016-2018 EBS assessment project is thorough and insightful. This project exemplifies the value of program learning assessment for both student learning and program improvement. The qualitative and quantitative data collected during this assessment project is a springboard to a program-wide collaborative endeavor to improve pedagogical strategies within EBS courses and a revamping of the pre and post tests used in the future. The agreement amongst faculty, on the clearly higher level post-test, regardless of the level originally believed, was the first indication of a universal willingness of faculty to be open-minded towards the possibility of curricular or instructional changes. Whole book readings, increased attention to advancing students' reading skills and integrating more reading support for advancing students' writing skills; these are varied instructional techniques which may inevitably lead to the improved post-test results that you and your colleagues expect.