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Course-level assessment: ENG 122 College Composition

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Project Purpose and Goals

In the fall 2019 semester, under the direction of Tara Wood, a new, standardized curriculum was implemented for all sections of ENG 122 College Composition. This new curricular approach is grounded in the transfer and cross-context writing studies research that have emerged in the past decade (e.g. Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2015; Downs and Wardle 2017; Yancey, Robertson, Taczak 2015). Historically, the curricular approach to ENG 122 has floundered with a lack of clear vision and a lack of consistency of delivery. Moreover, to our knowledge, no previous assessment of the curriculum has been implemented. Ultimately, this grant proposal aimed to evaluate student achievement of course outcomes using this new piloted curriculum. ENG 122 meets 3 credit hours of LAC area 1 (Written Communication) and is also approved by the state as a Guaranteed Transfer course in Written Communication (GtP CO-1). In light of the latter, ENG 122 must adhere to the course outcomes and content criteria as constructed by state standards. The focus of the mini-grant would be to measure how successfully the student artifacts created in our piloted ENG 122 curriculum reflect the expectations articulated in the Colorado Department of Higher Education's (CDHE) gtPathways. Below are the student learning outcomes for Written Communication:

1. Employ Rhetorical Knowledge
 - a. Exhibit a thorough understanding of audience, purpose, genre, and context that is responsive to the situation.
2. Develop Content
 - a. Create and develop ideas within the context of the situation and the assigned task(s).
3. Apply Genre and Disciplinary Content
 - a. Apply formal and informal conventions of writing, including organization, content, presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices, in particular forms and/or fields.
4. Use Sources and Evidence
 - a. Critically read, evaluate, apply and synthesize evidence and/or sources in support of a claim.
 - b. Follow an appropriate documentation system.
5. Control Syntax and Mechanics
 - a. Demonstrate proficiency with conventions, including spelling, grammar, mechanics, and word choice appropriate to the writing task.

Description of Project

In order to achieve the project purpose and goals above, we adhered to the following timeline of assessment collection, analysis, and enculturation.

- Summer 2019: Curriculum Re-Design & Assessment Preparation
- Fall 2019: Data/Artifact Collection
- Winter Break 2019: Artifact Norming/Scoring
- Early Spring 2020: Analysis of Assessment Results

- Late Spring 2020: Sharing Results
- Summer 2020: Formative Application of Assessment Results / Curriculum Re-Design

Methodology

We collected a random sample of 5 essays from 20 separate sections of ENG 122. We randomly selected student 1, 3, 7, 9, and 13 from each roster (in cases where a student did not submit, the subsequent student on the roster was selected). The third essay from the common syllabus was selected as the artifact. The third assignment is a Discourse Community Analysis project. All instructors from the 20 sections were asked to email the artifact to Dr. Santos and/or Dr. Wood. All collected artifacts were stored and organized in a google drive folder and subsequently coded for the following:

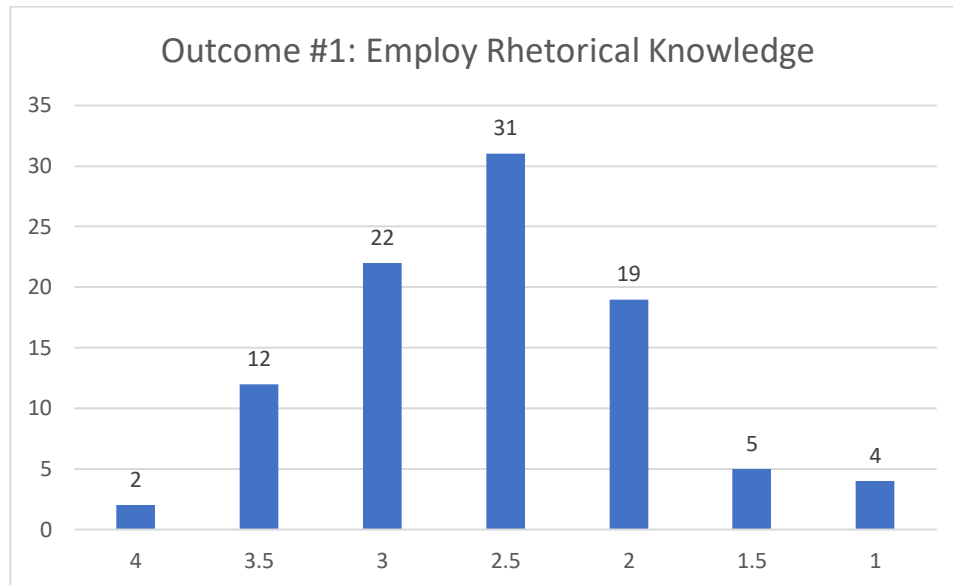
- Name
- First-Generation Status
- Gender
- Race / Ethnicity
- Canvas / Early Performance Feedback pilot
- Major / College
- MWF or TR section

We scheduled two scoring days with four contract-renewable instructors and spent the opening hour and the lunch hour of both days norming/re-calibrating readers. We used the state Gt Pathways recommended rubric and created a google form for scorers to use throughout the reading days. Each essay was read by at least two readers. In the case of a-contiguous scores, Dr. Santos and I read, discussed, and served a the third read. Following the completion of scoring days, analysis was conducted of the data. Results below.

Results

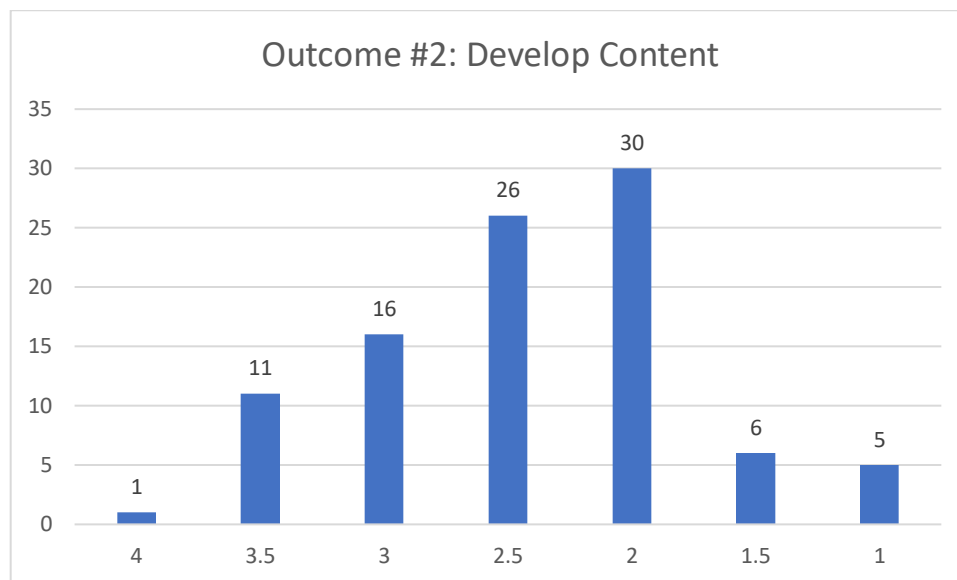
The charts below report results for each of our 5 outcomes and the general impression score.

Outcome 1: Employ Rhetorical Knowledge



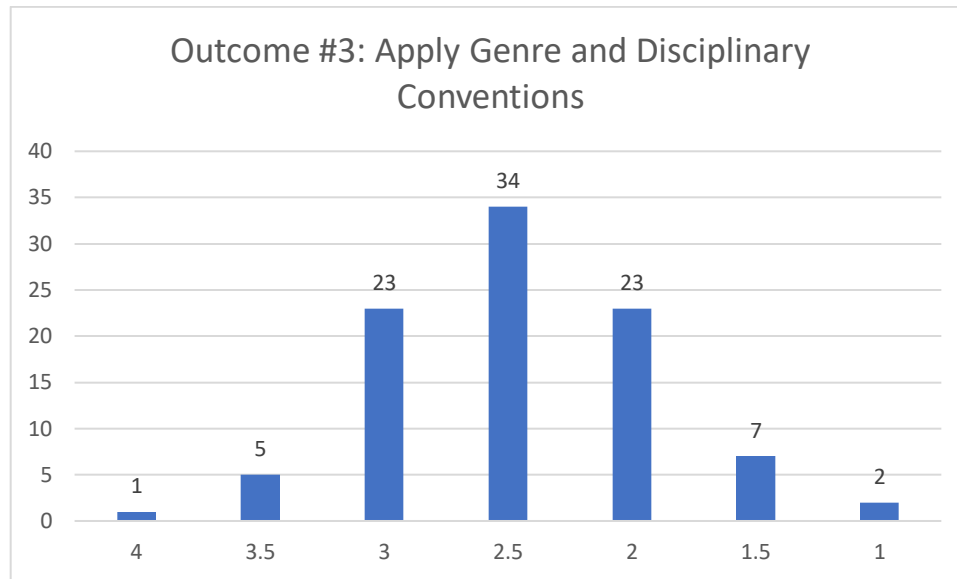
The mean score for Outcome 1 was a 2.56. The mode was a 2.5. 38% of papers earned a competent (3) or higher. 29% of papers earned a developing (2) or lower.

Outcome 2: Develop Content



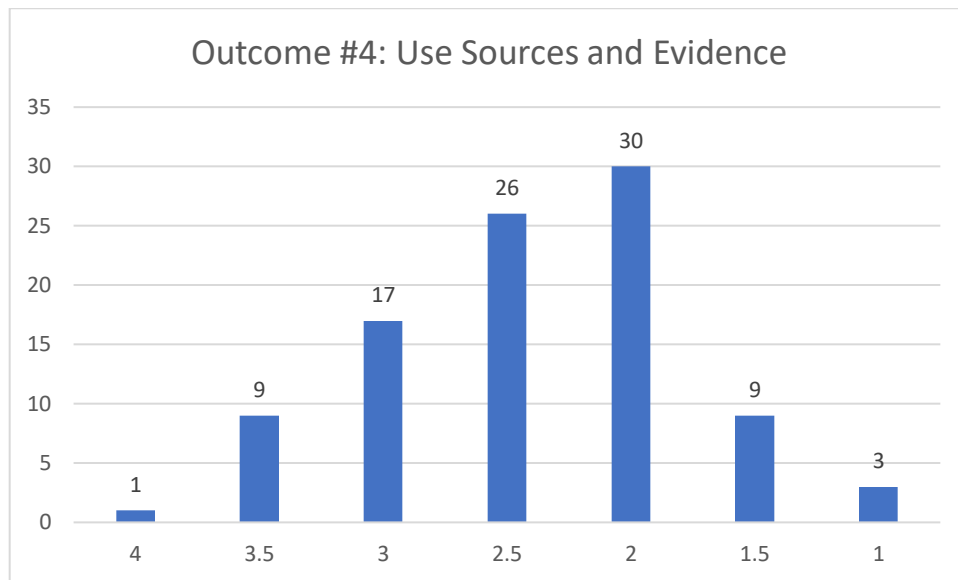
The mean score for Outcome 2 was a 2.42. The mode was a 2. 29% of papers earned a competent (3) or higher. 43% of papers earned a developing (2) or lower; the majority of these (30 out of 41) were developing (2).

Outcome 3: Apply Genre and Disciplinary Conventions



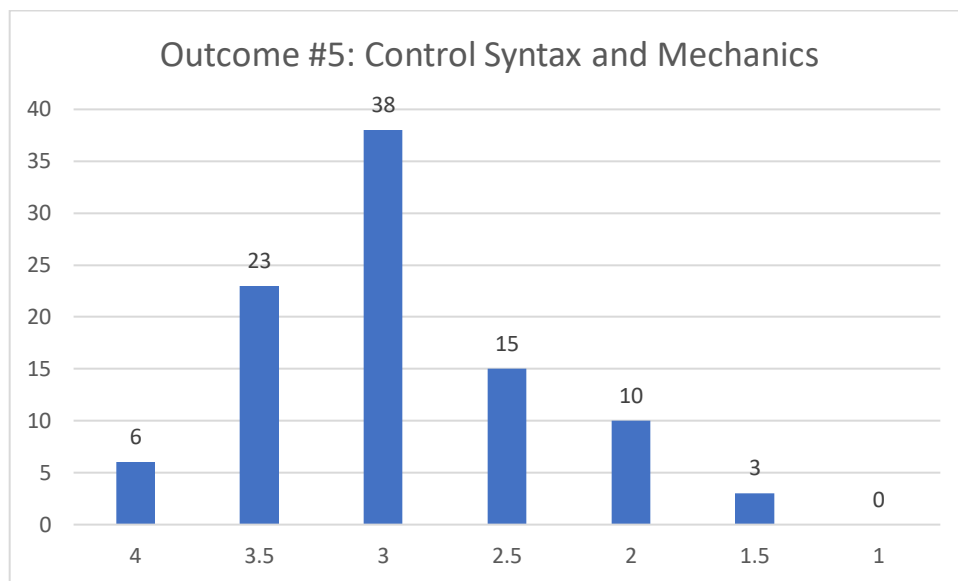
The mean score for Outcome 3 was a 2.46. The mode was a 2.5. 31% of papers earned a competent (3) or higher. 34% of papers earned a developing (2) or lower.

Outcome 4: Use Sources and Evidence



The mean score for Outcome 4 was a 2.5. The mode was a 2. 29% of papers earned a competent (3) or higher. 44% of papers earned a developing (2) or lower, the majority of these (30 out of 42) were developing (2).

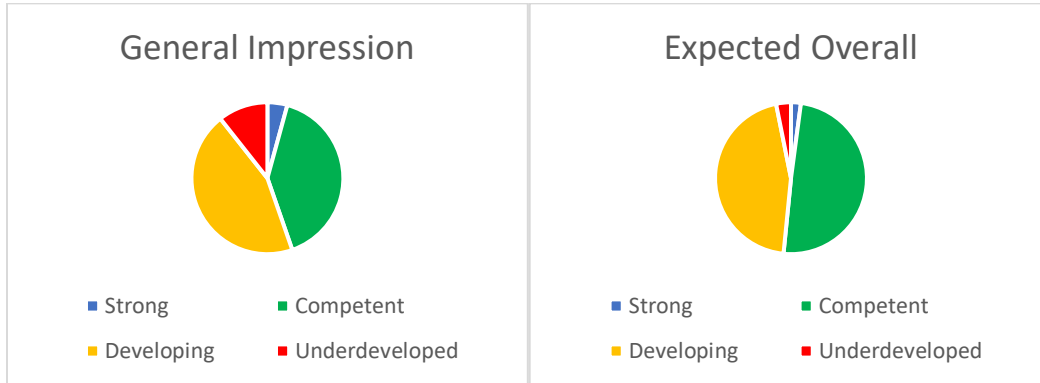
Outcome 5: Control Syntax and Mechanics



The mean score for Outcome 5 was a 3. The mode was a 3. 71% of papers earned a competent (3) or higher. 14% of papers earned a developing (2) or lower.

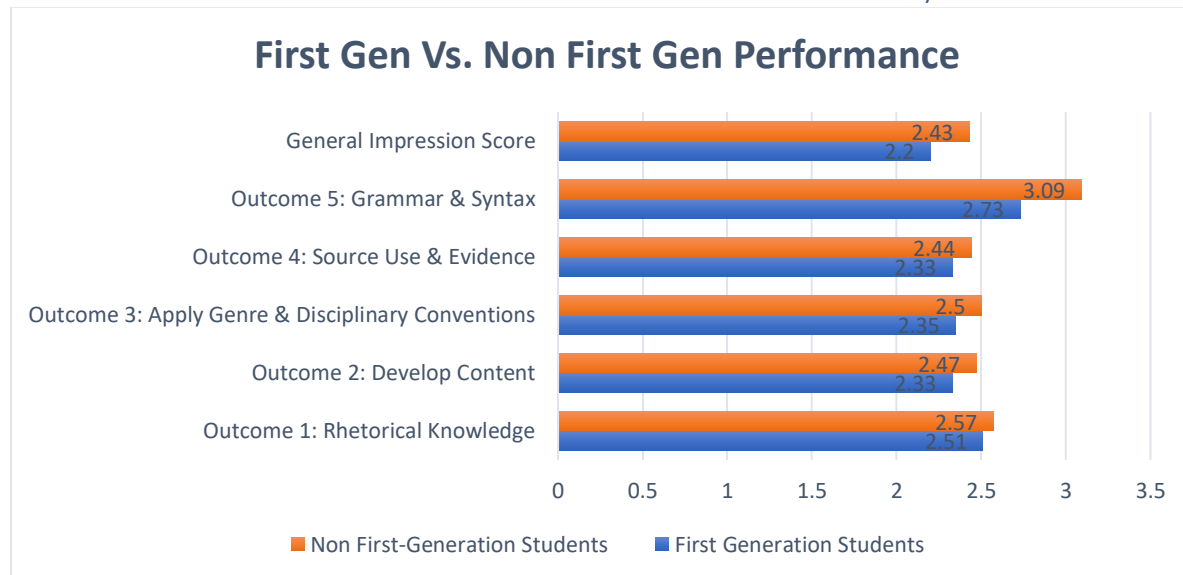
General Impression vs. Expectation

The chart below reveals the general impression score compared to the expected total score. The expected total score was calculated by averaging outcomes 1-5 for a given paper.



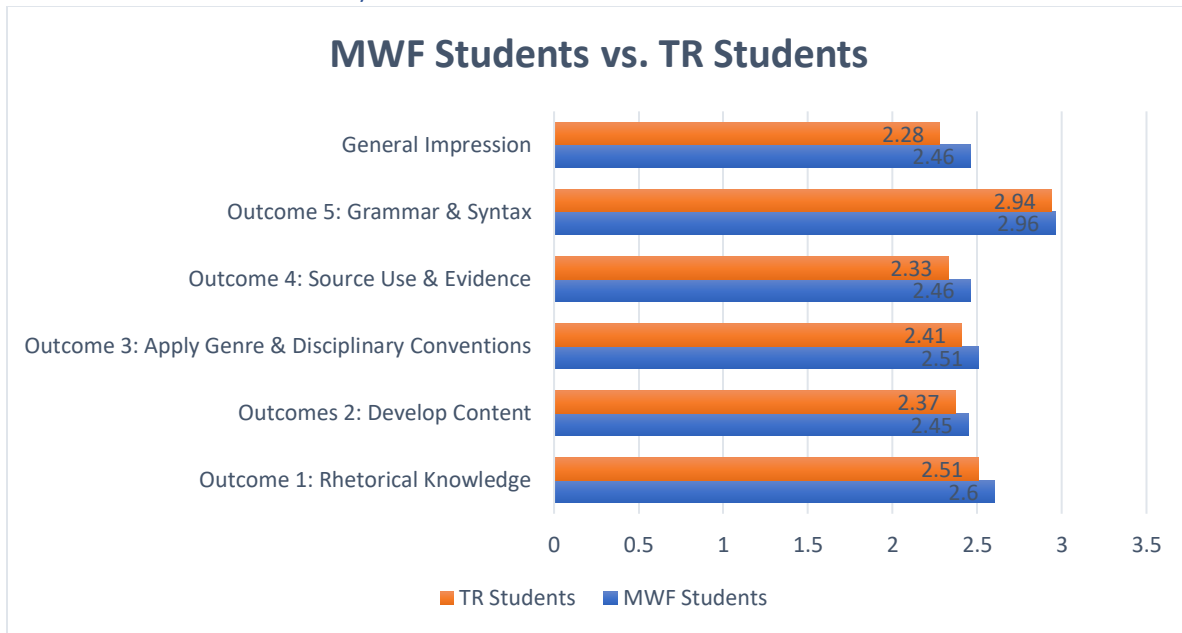
By general impression, 45% of essays were scored competent or better and 55% of essays were scored developing or worse. The mode was developing (42 of 95 scores). However, by the expected average, 52% of essays were competent or better and 48% of essays were developing or worse. The mode was competent (47). This reveals a noteworthy difference between how instructors view the discrete outcomes and judge a paper's overall value. As we note below, our orientation and grade norming sessions for future assessments should address this tendency.

First-Generation Students vs. Non-First-Generation Students Analysis



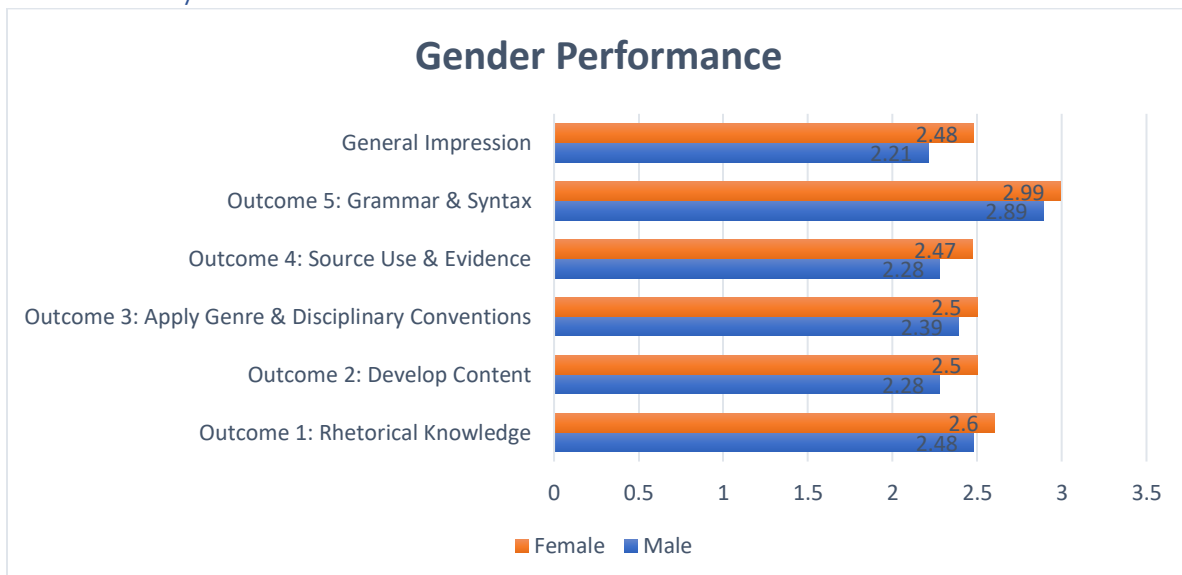
Non-first-generation students outperformed first-generation students on all outcomes.

MWF vs TR Sections Analysis



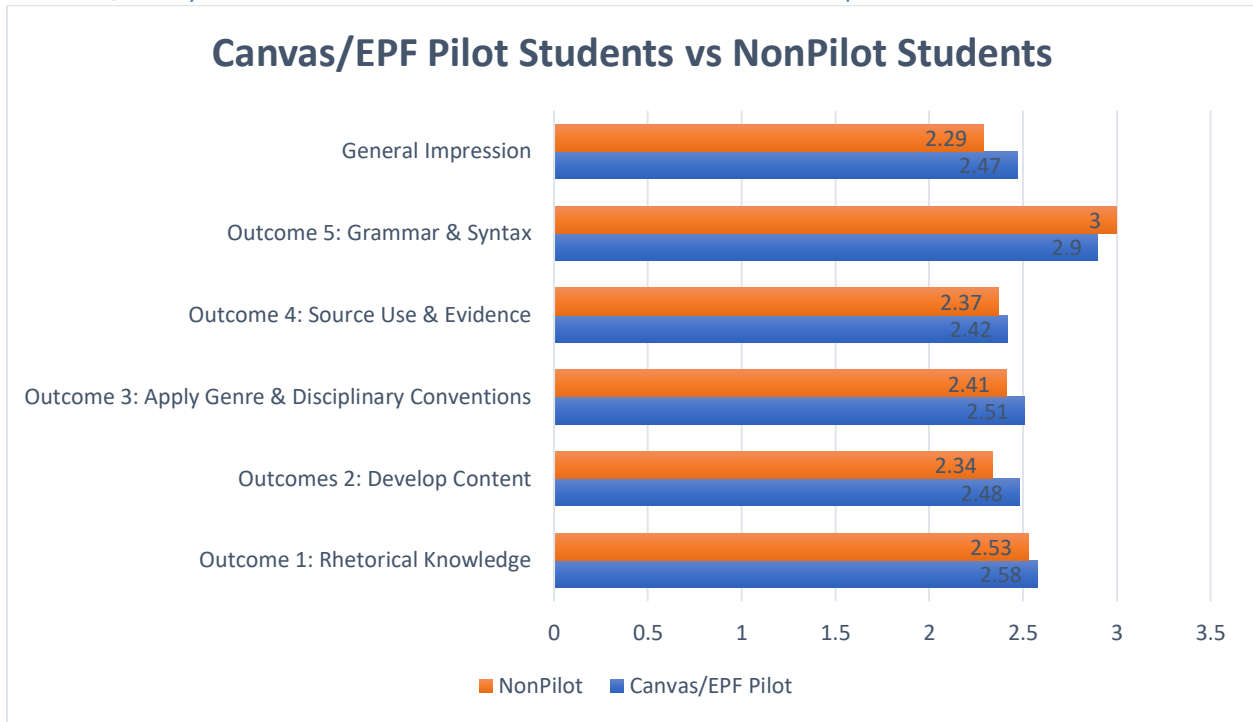
Students taking ENG 122 three days per week outperform students who take ENG 122 only two days per week.

Gender Analysis



Students who identify as female outperform students who identify as male on all outcomes.

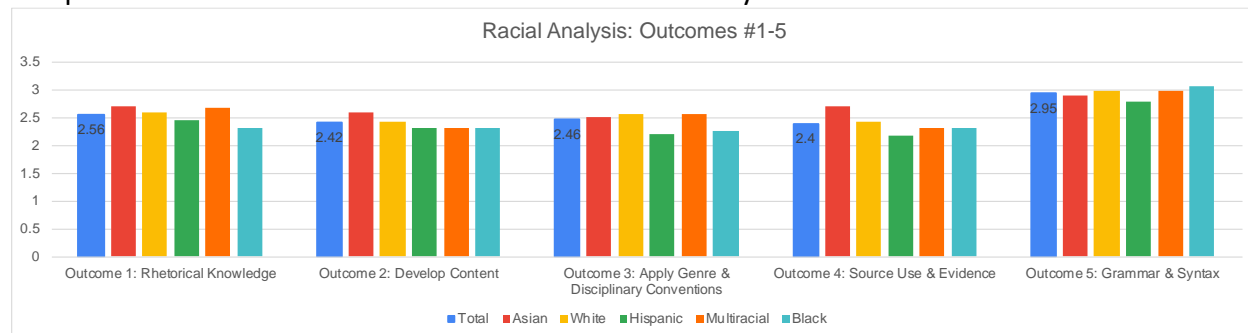
Canvas / Early Performance Feedback Pilot sections vs. Non-pilot sections



Students enrolled in Canvas/EPF sections outperformed students in non-pilot sections on all outcomes except outcome 5: grammar and syntax.

Racial Analysis Outcomes #1-5

Note: two non-resident aliens and one Native American student were also included in the sample. Those scores have been excluded from this analysis.



For Outcome #1: Rhetorical Knowledge, the baseline was a 2.56. Asian (2.7) and Multiracial (2.67) performed above this baseline. White (2.59) students performed marginally above this baseline. Hispanic (2.45) and Black (2.33) students performed below this baseline.

For Outcome #2: Develop Content, the baseline was a 2.42. Asian (2.6) students were the only demographic to perform above this baseline. White students (2.42) performed equal to the baseline. Hispanic, Multiracial, and Black students all performed below the baseline (all scored a 2.33).

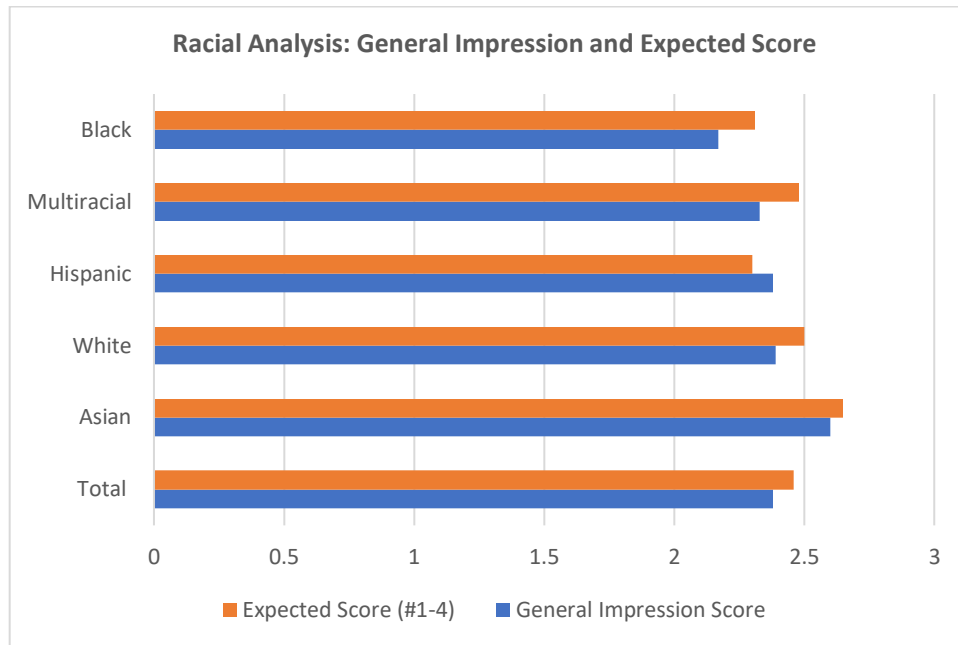
For Outcome #3, Apply Genre and Disciplinary Conventions, the baseline was a 2.46. Multiracial (2.58) and White (2.56) students performed above this baseline. Asian (2.5) students performed marginally above this baseline. Hispanic (2.21) and Black (2.25) students performed below the baseline. As we note below in our discussion, this is one of the largest demographic discrepancies in the study.

For Outcome #4, Source Use and Evidence, the baseline was a 2.4. Asian (2.7) students outperformed this baseline. White (2.43) students performed marginally above this baseline. Hispanic (2.19), Multiracial (2.33), and Black (2.33) students performed below this baseline.

For Outcome #5, Control Grammar and Syntax, the baseline was a 2.95. Black (3.08) and Multiracial (3.0) students performed above this baseline. White (2.99) students performed marginally above this baseline. Asian (2.9) and Hispanic (2.79) performed below this baseline.

Racial Analysis General Impression

Because we hypothesized this effect might be amplified for non-SAE, we eliminated outcome 5 from our expected score analysis.



Eliminating outcome 5, the baseline expectations for outcomes #1-4 is a 2.46. Asian students are performing 6.3% over that baseline expectation. White students are performing 1.6% over that baseline expectation. Black students are performing 6.1% under that expectation. Hispanic students are performing 6.7% under that expectation.

Discussion

General Results

Overall, this study shows that the vast majority of students in ENG 122 fall somewhere between developing and competent across all outcomes. Students struggled most with Outcome #4: Using Sources and Evidence; although this is not too surprising, since that outcome is the focus of ENG 123 and does not receive as much attention in ENG 122.

Students performed strongest on Outcome #5: Control Syntax and Mechanics. We should acknowledge that, in line with contemporary research on antiracist writing assessment and social justice pedagogy, our evaluators are encouraged to overlook surface level errors when assessing student writing. This commitment can be seen in the assessment rubric distributed to evaluators, which identified developing (2) as errors that impacted clarity or coherence, or an abundance of minor usage errors. We should also note that the racial analysis for Outcome #5 was unexpected, as Black students outperformed all other demographic groups. This finding differs from other research studies. We interpret this as a result of our work on antiracist writing assessment, and hypothesize that, because evaluators have been made aware of persistent inequalities, and the structurally racist analysis of SAE, they are hyper-vigilant against biasing non-SAE English. However, this hypothesis does not necessarily explain why Hispanic students received significantly lower scores than the baseline.

Demographic Analysis

While we are limited by our sample size, our findings show that non-first generation, female students, enrolled in ENG 122 sections using the Canvas master shell and meeting three days a week *generally* outperform other students with various other identifiable markers (e.g. first-generation). Asian and white students outperformed Hispanic and Black students; this was especially significant regarding Outcome #3, Applying Genre and Disciplinary conventions, where Hispanic and Black students are underperforming their White peers by more than 10%. Again, while our sample size is small, these results echo other assessment projects (Arum and Roksa 2011; Inoue 2015). These results could indicate that greater support structures are needed for students with particular risk indicators. However, this support requires a strategy that offers support but does not assume all students in a particular marker are, in fact, “at risk.”

These findings had interesting and somewhat unexpected logistical findings. First, the findings also suggest that the Canvas master shell may be contributing to student success. A larger sample size is required to confirm this finding. Second, the finding that students in MWF sections outperform students in TR sections should inform (at least somewhat) future scheduling decisions; scheduling MWF courses should be given preference whenever possible for ENG 122 sections.

For Future Studies

Above, we noted a general trend that general impression values tended to lag behind expected scores (based on the average score a paper received on outcomes #1-5). This tendency should

be addressed in future orientations and grade-norming sessions for upcoming assessment projects, such as the ENG 123 assessment study planned for fall 2020-spring 2021.

Alignment to Institutional Learning Outcomes

As part of our mini-grant for ENG 122, we aligned two of the GtP outcomes with two of our Institutional Learning Outcomes.

Institutional Learning Outcomes at the University of Northern Colorado (area 1 only)

Mastering Foundational Skills

- a. Describe how knowledge is discovered in various fields of study.
- b. Apply critical thinking to analyze, integrate, and evaluate information.**
- c. Apply ethical principles to evaluate and make decisions.
- d. Make informed decisions using numeric and scientific information.
- e. Express ideas through multiple media and modes of communication.**

Rather than having an additional rubric for the ILOs 1a-1e, we will align GtP outcome 4a to ILO 1b and GtP outcome 2a to ILO 1e.

ILO	GtP Outcome	Scores
<i>Apply critical thinking to analyze, integrate, and evaluate information.</i>	Critically read, evaluate, apply and synthesize evidence and/or sources in support of a claim.	The mean score for Outcome 4 was a 2.5. The mode was a 2. 29% of papers earned a competent (3) or higher. 44% of papers earned a developing (2) or lower, the majority of these (30 out of 42) were developing (2).
<i>Express ideas through multiple media and modes of communication</i>	Create and develop ideas within the context of the situation and the assigned task(s).	The mean score for Outcome 2 was a 2.42. The mode was a 2. 29% of papers earned a competent (3) or higher. 43% of papers earned a developing (2) or lower; the majority of these (30 out of 41) were developing (2).

Achievement Gap Comparison

As part of our mini-grant project, we also endeavored to see how our assessment results would compare to institutional data on achievement gaps.

Achievement Gaps: GENDER

	Average from Fall 2016-Spring 2020	Achievement Gap from Institutional Data	Comparison to Performance Gap in Assessment Data
Female Success Rates (C- and above) in ENG 122	81.75%	Achievement Gap = 7.35%	Institutional Data on gender achievement gaps aligns with our assessment results. Female students outperformed male students on all outcomes.
Male Success Rates (C- and above) in ENG 122	74.4%		

Achievement Gaps: FIRST-GEN STATUS

	Average from Fall 2016-Spring 2020	Achievement Gap from Institutional Data	Comparison to Performance Gap in Assessment Data
First Generation student Success Rates (C- and above) in ENG 122	71.62%	Achievement Gap = 10.45%	Institutional Data on first-generation vs non-first-generation achievement gaps aligns with our assessment results. Non-first-generation students outperformed first generation students on all outcomes.
NON-First-Generation student Success Rates (C- and above) in ENG 122	82.07%		

Achievement Gaps: Underrepresented Minorities

	Average from Fall 2016-Spring 2020	Achievement Gap from Institutional Data	Comparison to Performance Gap in Assessment Data
URM Student Success Rates (C- and above) in ENG 122	70.61%	Achievement Gap = 12.73%	Cannot be determined. Institutional data provided calculates based on whether a student is identified as an under-represented minority. However, we coded data for individual identity markers on race/ethnicity (i.e. Asian American, Black, White). However, with the exception of Asian American performance, White students outperform URM on at least 4/5 outcomes.
Non-URM Student Success	83.34%		