

**RESULTS OF ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP
ON USING WRITING AND DHCP RUBRICS**

Monday, Nov. 3, 3:30-4:30 p.m.

The Foundation

BACKGROUND: Isothermal Community College, which emphasizes writing across the curriculum, has eight general education competencies, each with at least one rubric for evaluating assignments. The focus for 2008-2009 is promotion and assessment of the rubrics for writing and for diverse historical and cultural perspectives (DHCP).

On November 3, faculty, staff, and administrators gathered in groups to apply each of these two rubrics to sample student writing. Individuals first wrestled with the rubrics on their own, then discussed the process with their group. Most were able to focus on only one sample, a biology assignment on health care in Senegal. Below are observations and recommendations that emerged from this process.

1. How comfortable did you feel with using the writing rubric? Can you suggest ways to use the writing rubric more effectively?

Some said it took a while to warm up to it, but it was easier to use than the DHCP rubric.

Some who do not teach writing are not sure they understand what we're looking for with manuscript format, varied sentences, standard English, and so on.

Do we need to enforce one standard of English? If we are expected to enforce one standard, we need more information on how English teachers grade an assignment. We could follow this workshop with one that focuses on what English instructors expect of acceptable writing so we can be more standardized across campus.

On the other hand, should we have a different level of expectation for, say, a written biology assignment? What if the student has not yet taken ENG 111 (Expository Writing)? How strict we should be on the grading also depends on directions for the assignment. With the biology sample, for instance, the instructions clearly tell students to document their sources, but the sample had no citations. Using information without giving due credit should be a problem in any discipline.

Some participants thought we need point values and weights on the rubric. They would prefer a clearer idea of how errors should affect the overall grade. For instance, how many will drop the grade to a B, how many will drop it to a C, etc.? Also, there should be a clearer sense of whether content is more important than technical errors and so on.

Some thought certain parts should be listed separately rather than together. For instance, they would like a separate line for the quality of the introduction and a separate line for the conclusion. They would also like to separate spelling and grammar.

On the other hand, some participants emphasized that we do not always have to use a full rubric. We can adapt it to fit our assignments, and we can assign our own point values. We can also expand certain line items to fit what we're emphasizing.

2. How comfortable did you feel with using the DHCP rubric? Can you suggest ways to use the DHCP rubric more effectively?

The general consensus was that this rubric is much harder to use than the writing rubric. A couple of participants said they could not use it at all.

One suggestion is to change the title to Diverse Historical **and/or** Cultural Perspectives.

Culturally, we need to be aware that "America" should not be used in place of the United States or USA. We do, after all, have North, Central, and South America.

Some participants liked the specific definition of values in each of the four categories; others thought we needed more explanation of what the terms means.

Most, however, thought too much was included in each area. Many suggested that we simplify the rubric. It is not user-friendly at present.

In some sections, adding the words "or" or "such as" would clarify that each assignment does not have to address everything in the list.

One group thinks the verbs on the coordinates of 1-4 are confusing. Also, should we have a zero (for "does not recognize")?

It may be helpful both to students and instructors to include at the top of the rubric a statement that not all categories apply to every assignment. We can disregard some categories or emphasize one more than others. Or, we can modify the rubric to fit individual assignments.

The rubric can serve as a checklist; it does not have to have a grade. If an instructor goes this route, however, he/she needs to give written feedback as well.

3. What are general recommendations with regard to using these rubrics?

- a. Give rubrics to the students ahead of time. If you are modifying the rubric, give them the modified version.
- b. Feel free to add certain elements to a rubric and delete others depending on the level of the course and the nature of the assignment.
- c. Using the numbers of 1-4 implies that a student did at least something in a category. We need a starting point of zero for areas in which they were supposed to accomplish something but did nothing at all. (Editor's note: Using 0-4 rather than 1-4 would also

simplify converting a rubric score to one of the 5 letter grades. Another option is just not to check any box on that line if a student does not meet the most basic requirement. If no box is checked, however, the instructor needs to write an explanation.)

d. Rubrics do not have to have a letter grade. When an instructor uses the rubric as a checklist, however, he/she needs to explain a student's grade in writing on the assignment itself. At the same time, seeing the checklist can help students understand what they did well or what they needed to improve.

e. It's a good idea to read a whole stack of papers before grading them and/or applying these rubrics.

f. It may be helpful to standardize all of our rubrics to the same format. Is that possible?

g. What does "standard English" mean? It would be helpful to clarify our expectations and set them up as links on our website.

i. For assessment purposes, it would be helpful to keep a copy of a random 10% of the rubrics we fill out for student assignments. This may help us monitor progress in different areas.

Assessment Chair: Dr. Kim Gold

Group leaders: E. Barrows, J. Councill, K. Dedmon, T. McEntire, T. Tucker

Notes originally compiled by Sandra Boyd and Rhonda Davis

Edited and distributed by Elisabeth Barrows, ebarrows@isothermal.edu