

1. *Describe changes that have been implemented towards improving students' attainment of outcomes that resulted from outcome assessments carried out in the previous academic year.* Last year's indirect assessment exercise told us that students believed they were challenged to think critically, and the papers to which we applied our rubric demonstrated a "developing" level of attainment, which is appropriate for the level at which we teach. We agreed that we needed a larger group of papers next time, a better rubric, and a more organized system of tracking the assessment results.

2. *Identify the outcomes assessed this year, and describe the methods used.*

The History SAC agreed to assess "Communication" and "Cultural Awareness" this year. One faculty member with feedback from a subcommittee wrote the rubrics which are included here:

**Communication Rubric**

"Communicate effectively by determining the purpose, audience and context of communication, and respond to feedback to improve clarity, coherence and effectiveness in workplace, community and academic pursuits."

	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Emerging</b>	<b>Weak</b>
<b>Focus on the Assignment</b>	Essay clearly and consistently focuses on the assigned question, and includes a strong thesis statement.	Essay generally but inconsistently addresses the question posed, and features a thesis statement that is not entirely relevant to the question.	Essay does not focus on the question posed, and either lacks a thesis statement or has a thesis statement that is not pertinent to the assignment.
<b>Use of Supporting Materials</b>	Provides abundant and relevant supporting evidence that effectively sustains the essay's argument.	Makes use of some supporting evidence, but does so inconsistently.	Makes use of little or no supporting evidence.
<b>Syntax and Organization</b>	Essay is gracefully and straightforwardly written with few or no grammatical errors and has a clear and effective organizational scheme; prose effectively and clearly conveys meaning to the reader.	Essay is generally well written and organized, but has some grammatical, organizational, and stylistic errors that may impede the reader's ability to grasp the writer's points.	Essay lacks an effective system of organization and has many grammatical and stylistic errors that obscure the arguments the author's ideas.

**Cultural Awareness Rubric**

"Use an understanding of the variations in human culture, perspectives and forms of expression to constructively address issues that arise out of cultural differences in the workplace and community"

	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Emerging</b>	<b>Weak</b>
<b>Cultural Awareness</b>	Demonstrates a strong awareness of how culturally-based assumptions influence perceptions, behaviors, and policies.	Demonstrates some awareness of how culturally-based assumptions influence perceptions, behaviors, and policies.	Demonstrates little awareness of how culturally-based assumptions influence perceptions, behaviors, and policies.
<b>Historical Bases of Cultural Ideas</b>	Exhibits a clear grasp of the historical bases and evolution of diverse cultural ideas, behaviors, and issues.	Exhibits some understanding of the historical bases and evolution of diverse cultural ideas, behaviors, and issues.	Exhibits little understanding of the historical bases and evolution of diverse cultural ideas, behaviors, and issues.
<b>Hierarchy</b>	Shows a strong understanding of the ways in which social institutions perpetuate systems of privilege and discrimination.	Shows some understanding of the ways in which social institutions perpetuate systems of privilege and discrimination.	Shows little understanding of the ways in which social institutions perpetuate systems of privilege and discrimination.

Four instructors obtained permissions from individual students to assess their work. In all, there were 24 essays from HST 105, online; 12 from HST 201; 13 from HST 104, online; 18 from HST 270– a total of 67 papers. All four instructors were full-time faculty members.

On April 26, 2011 at the Subject Area Committee (SAC) meeting, sixteen faculty, both full-time and part-time, assessed two essays together to establish a norm. Then each paper was read by two faculty members and rated. We agreed that if papers were scored within one point of each other, that was reasonable, whereas if they were two points apart, we would have those two readers discuss the paper and come to a consensus and/or include a third reader’s opinion.

Sally Earll and Gabe Hunter-Bernstein assisted us during the compilation and discussion stage. We tallied up the answers, allowing two numbers for each paper, resulting in the following:

**Communication:**

	1 (Strong)	2 (Emerging)	3 (Weak)
Focus	64	52	17
Support	54	67	13
Syntax	51	51	27

**Cultural Awareness:**

	1 (Strong)	2 (Emerging)	3 (Weak)
Awareness	40	59	32
Hist. Bases of Cultural Ideas	30	56	47
Hierarchy	15	58	53

***What did you learn? Interpretation of Data and Proposed Changes:***

**Communication**

We read this data as very positive in terms of our assessment of “Communication.”

However, we all have noticed a general lack of student skill in the use of proper punctuation and spelling, and these papers were no exception. Comma splices, “it’s-its” confusion, incorrect use of apostrophes, and sentence fragments are a few examples of typical errors. These and similar deficiencies are an ongoing problem.

**We think that all college level students should know how to write a grammatically complete sentence with proper punctuation, and we strongly feel that PCC as a whole needs to take this discussion beyond the individual SACs. In too many cases our students move on without having remedied some of these basic issues –issues that should have been resolved before they enrolled in our courses.**

What if PCC determined that all students will meet this criterion before students leave the college? Could there be an online modular workbook required for students who have not learned a particular

skill? Could there be a required course that covers these basic grammar and writing skills? We do not know the solution, but we feel that working together PCC could certainly come up with something.

**The History SAC will do its part in attempting to remedy the situation. Each of us will work on it in our own way, but we will all work on it.** Individual faculty members' efforts may include:

- Beginning classes by writing a statement on the board that pertains to the day's topic, while including a common writing problem within the statement. Discuss the error with the class in a mini grammar lesson. One instructor using this method is noticing improvements.
- Giving students a list of "Punctuation Peeves."
- Requiring students who have handed in sub-par work to go to the Student Success Center for help before handing in the next paper.
- Recommending a trip to the Student Success Center but not absolutely requiring it.
- Researching websites students may access for help.

### **Cultural Awareness**

In terms of "Cultural Awareness," we find that the numbers, while reasonable, tended to be weak in the second and third categories. Upon discussion, we realized that while the rubric was written very specifically, the assignments collected were really only a snapshot in a whole class trajectory, and the assignment instructions didn't necessarily point the student in that specific direction. In some cases we found many good aspects of cultural awareness within a fine paper, yet the score was low based on the specifics of the rubric.

In short, there was a mismatch between the assignments and the rubric. In many cases, the aspects of cultural awareness listed in the rubric would be addressed in different assignments throughout the term. This was noticeably true in the "Historical Bases of Ideas" and "Hierarchy" lines of the rubric, the very lines with lagging scores. We discussed the possibility of writing a more flexible rubric with the words "or" rather than "and," for instance, to get a more accurate picture of the students' competence.

The history faculty recognizes the importance of addressing cultural literacy in the classroom and in course assessments. As such, we discussed the potential for embedding cultural literacy themes in future essay assignments. By clarifying the expectation that students address cultural awareness within certain assignments (using similar terminology to that used in the rubric) we feel our performance on these criteria would improve across the department.

Another option discussed was to provide students with the cultural awareness rubric (the existing or a revised one) in advance with their understanding that it will be used, in part, to determine their assignment grade. This would clarify the cultural awareness expectations while simultaneously enabling students to thoughtfully consider such issues.