Standard Setting: Written Communication & Information Literacy
May and June 2014

Executive Summary

The Assessment Office, Institutional Learning Objectives Implementation Committee, and the General Education Office at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UH Mānoa) gathered three groups of faculty in summer 2014 to establish institutional-level performance expectations for UH Mānoa seniors in the areas of written communication and information literacy. Performance expectations were needed because UH Mānoa faculty had never answered the question, “What level of performance is good enough?” This project answered that question for seniors near graduation.

In carrying out this project, the Assessment Office followed accepted practices in setting performance expectations which include assembling a group of knowledgeable stakeholders (in this case, UH Mānoa faculty), holding an orientation and training session, and facilitating a discussion of participants’ rationales related to student performance and exit-level expectations. In addition, as a recommended practice, the Assessment Office obtained feedback from participants regarding the session itself and whether they felt they were adequately trained to set the performance expectations.

Assessment Office faculty specialists facilitated the sessions in which groups of 11-14 faculty members set the performance expectations based on a modified Written Communication VALUE rubric and Information Literacy VALUE rubric. In total, 39 faculty members from 31 different academic departments participated. The participants established the average scores needed for students to meet UH Mānoa’s expectations for seniors near graduation.

**Performance Expectations:**

- Written Communication = **2.2** score or higher\(^1\)
- Information Literacy = **2.3** score or higher\(^1\)

In future institutional-level assessment projects, these performance expectations will be used as the “cut score”: students at or above the score will be deemed as “meeting expectations.” The results of the future projects will be reported in the aggregate; no individual student or professor will be identified (e.g., a future report might state, “80% of a representative sample of UH Mānoa seniors met the performance expectations in written communication”).

To assist with program-level assessment, the Assessment Office will distribute the performance expectations and examples of student work that “meets” and “does not meet expectations” to program assessment coordinators for their consideration. We expect that some programs will establish a higher performance expectation for their students. In fact, the faculty members in the session recommended that programs in the arts and humanities\(^2\) expect students to score 3.0 or higher score on the Written Communication rubric and 3.1 or higher on the Information Literacy rubric.

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\(^1\) On a 0-4 point scale, with 4 being the highest score, on the modified VALUE rubrics; rubrics are in Appendix A and Appendix B.

\(^2\) Note: “arts and humanities” does not refer to only programs and courses in the College of Arts and Humanities; instead, it refers to all courses, programs, and written genres commonly associated with arts and humanities.
Session Report

1. Purpose and Use of Results
   As part of implementing UH Mānoa’s institutional learning objectives for undergraduates, the Assessment Office, Institutional Learning Objectives Implementation Committee, and General Education Office held three standard setting sessions to set performance expectations in the areas of written communication and information literacy. The “performance expectation” takes the form of an average score on a rubric. In institutional-level assessment, students whose work receives an average score at or above the minimum expected score are considered meeting UH Mānoa’s expectation for seniors near graduation. In future institutional-level assessment projects, the performance expectation will be used as the “cut score” and assessment results will be reported in the aggregate; no individual student or professor will be identified (e.g., “XX% of a representative sample of UH Mānoa seniors met the performance expectations in written communication”). The results will be used to guide institutional- and program-level improvement planning.

2. Method to Establish Performance Expectations
   Overview. Faculty members attended a 5-hour session in which they learned the purpose of performance expectations, intended use of results, the process, and key terms. They also discussed the scoring rubrics (Appendix A and B) and discussed their evaluation of student writing using the scoring rubrics before they collaboratively established the average score on the rubrics that a borderline senior who just meets UH Mānoa expectations will receive. When establishing the performance expectations, the facilitators provided participants with normative data from other participants and gave participants opportunities to revise their performance expectations after discussion.

   Rubrics and student work samples. The rubrics are modified VALUE rubrics (see also the Association of American Colleges and Universities VALUE web site). Prior to the session, faculty read and scored six pieces of student writing. The student writing represented a range of quality written by seniors. Each piece of student writing contained references to sources and a bibliography/works cited/reference list. When the course instructor’s assignment guidelines were available, these were included with the student writing. The student work samples were obtained from the Assessment Office’s longitudinal study of learning in the general education program and also solicited from faculty members teaching writing-intensive courses. The student work was divided into three groups based on the course content and genre: arts and humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences.

   Participants. We invited the 774 faculty members who taught a writing-intensive course, fall 2012 to spring 2014. In addition, we invited faculty members serving on the Writing-intensive Focus Board, Institutional Learning Objectives Implementation Committee, Mānoa Assessment Committee, Foundations Board, and the General Education Committee.

   Based on participant availability and academic discipline, we divided the 45 faculty members who responded to the invitation into three groups (Table 1): (A) arts and humanities, (B) natural sciences, (C) social sciences. Each group included faculty members who taught in and out of the academic area. Thirty-nine faculty members attended a session, representing 31 different academic fields (Table 1); six did not attend. Faculty in the arts and humanities group discussed
student writing with arts and humanities content/genres, faculty in the natural sciences group discussed student writing with natural science content/genres, and faculty in social sciences group discussed student writing with social science content/genres.

Process to set performance expectations. After the participants had spent several hours sharing their evaluations of the student work using the rubric and learning how their colleagues evaluated the six pieces of student work, they shifted focus to setting performance expectations. The Assessment Office followed accepted procedures in setting performance standards: participants envisioned the borderline student who just meets UH Mānoa’s expectations for senior-level work and with that student in mind, they answered the question, “What will be the average score on the rubric of the borderline student?” The participants discussed the concept of borderline student until they were comfortable with their conceptualization. The participants’ initial scores were posted on a bar graph along with the group average (see photo in Appendix C). Faculty participants discussed the rationales for their score. After discussion, they had an opportunity to revise. The final score from each faculty member was averaged for the final performance expectation on the rubric. We followed this procedure for written communication and then information literacy.

3. Results

Performance expectations. Each group established performance expectations for written communication and expectations for information literacy for their group’s content area: arts and humanities, natural sciences, or social sciences (Table 2). The UH Mānoa performance expectation is equivalent to the group that set the lowest average expectation. Individual degree programs may set a higher expectation for their students using the faculty recommendations (Table 2) as a guide.

Table 1. Faculty Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group*</th>
<th># of faculty from a field related to the content/genre of the student work</th>
<th># of faculty from a field not related to the content/genre of the student work</th>
<th>Total # of faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Arts and humanities’ student writing, May 2014</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Natural sciences’ student writing, June 2014</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Social sciences’ student writing, May 2014</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In institutional learning assessment, students whose average score on the modified VALUE rubric is **2.2 or higher** on the Written Communication rubric and **2.3 or higher** on the Information Literacy rubric will be deemed “meeting expectations” for a UH Mānoa senior.

Table 2. Performance Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Written Communication</th>
<th>Information Literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts and humanities</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural sciences</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UH Mānoa</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Session evaluation. A recommended practice in setting performance expectations is an evaluation of participants’ perceptions in regards to whether the task and purpose were clear. We also included questions related to effect on their teaching and view of assessment.

Thirty-seven (95%) of the faculty participants completed a session evaluation form. Highlights are as follows (detailed results available in Appendix D):

- 100% stated the session was worthwhile.
- 95% would recommend a similar session to their colleagues.
- 95% indicated that the facilitator provided them with a clear understanding of the purpose and tasks.
- 86% indicated that participation in the session led to a change in how they will teach and/or their views of assessment.

4. Next Steps

In future institutional-level assessment projects, we will use these performance expectations as the “cut score”: students at or above the score will be deemed as “meeting expectations.” The results of the future assessment projects will be reported in the aggregate; no individual student or professor will be identified (e.g., “XX% of a representative sample of UH Mānoa seniors met the performance expectations in written communication”). The results will be used to guide institutional- and program-level improvement planning.

In fall 2014, the Institutional Learning Objectives Implementation Committee will assist in distributing the performance expectations to department chairpersons and explain how the performance expectations can be used at the institutional, program, and course level.

To assist with program-level assessment, the Assessment Office will distribute the performance expectations and examples of student work to program assessment coordinators for their consideration. We will recommend that some programs, particularly those in the arts and humanities, consider a higher performance expectation for their students. In addition, the results will be presented to the Writing-intensive Focus Board for discussion and action.
APPENDIX A

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION VALUE RUBRIC [adapted]\(^4\)

*for more information, please contact value@aacu.org*

**Definition:** Written communication is the development and expression of ideas in writing. Written communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles. It can involve working with many different writing technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images. Written communication abilities develop through iterative experiences across the curriculum.

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet column one (1) level performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context of and Purpose for Writing</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates a <strong>thorough</strong> understanding of context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task(s).</td>
<td>Demonstrates <strong>adequate</strong> consideration of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task(s) (e.g., the task aligns with audience, purpose, and context).</td>
<td>Demonstrates <strong>awareness</strong> of context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., begins to show awareness of audience's perceptions and assumptions).</td>
<td>Demonstrates <strong>minimal attention</strong> to context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., expectation of only instructor or self as audience).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Development</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uses appropriate, relevant, and <strong>compelling</strong> content to <strong>illustrate mastery of the subject</strong>, conveying the writer’s understanding, and shaping the <strong>whole work</strong>. Sharply focused central idea.</td>
<td>Uses appropriate, relevant, and <strong>compelling</strong> content to <strong>explore ideas</strong> within the context of the discipline and shape the <strong>whole work</strong>. Clear central idea.</td>
<td>Uses appropriate and relevant content to <strong>develop and explore ideas</strong> through <strong>most of the work</strong>. Central idea exists in most of the work.</td>
<td>Uses appropriate and relevant content to <strong>develop simple ideas</strong> in <strong>some parts</strong> of the work. Central idea exists in some parts of the work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre and Disciplinary Conventions*</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates <strong>successful execution</strong> of a <strong>wide range of</strong> conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s) including organization, content, presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices.</td>
<td>Demonstrates <strong>consistent use</strong> of <strong>important</strong> conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s), including organization, content, presentation, and stylistic choices.</td>
<td><strong>Follows expectations</strong> appropriate to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s) for basic organization, content, and presentation</td>
<td><strong>Attempts</strong> to use a consistent system for basic organization and presentation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control of Syntax and Mechanics</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uses <strong>polished</strong> language that <strong>skillfully communicates</strong> meaning to readers with <strong>clarity and fluency</strong>, and is virtually <strong>error-free</strong>.</td>
<td>Uses <strong>straightforward</strong> language that <strong>generally conveys meaning</strong> to readers. The language has <strong>few errors</strong>.</td>
<td>Uses language that <strong>generally conveys meaning</strong> to readers with clarity, although writing may include <strong>some errors</strong>.</td>
<td>Uses language that sometimes <strong>impedes meaning</strong> because of errors in usage.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Genre & disciplinary conventions:* Formal and informal rules inherent in the expectations for writing in particular forms and/or academic fields. Conventions related to appropriate introductory strategies, use of passive voice or first person point of view, expectations for thesis or hypothesis, logic, organization/structure, headings, formatting, word choice, etc.

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\(^4\) This rubric is to be used in conjunction with the Information Literacy rubric when examining student writing that includes source material.
### APPENDIX B

**Information Literacy VALUE Rubric** [adapted]

*for more information, please contact value@aacu.org*

**Definition:** The ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively and responsibly use and share that information for the problem at hand. - The National Forum on Information Literacy

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet column one (1) level performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Determine the Extent of Information Needed</strong></td>
<td>Effectively and consistently determines key concepts that require information (sources).</td>
<td>Determines key concepts that require information (sources).</td>
<td>Does not consistently determine key concepts that require information (sources)—some may be missing, too broad, too narrow.</td>
<td>Has difficulty determining key concepts that require information (sources)—may be missing, too broad, too narrow, included when not needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluate Information and its Sources Critically</strong></td>
<td>Chooses a variety of credible sources appropriate to the scope and discipline of the research question. Selects sources based on multiple criteria, such as relevance to the research question, currency, authority, audience, and bias or point of view.</td>
<td>Chooses a variety of credible sources appropriate to the scope and discipline of the research question. Selects sources using multiple criteria, such as relevance to the research question, currency, and authority.</td>
<td>Chooses a variety of sources. Selects sources using basic criteria, such as relevance to the research question and currency.</td>
<td>Chooses a few sources. Selects sources using limited criteria, such as relevance to the research question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use Information Effectively to Accomplish a Specific Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Communicates, organizes, critically analyzes, and synthesizes information. Seamlessly incorporates information to fully achieve a specific purpose, with clarity and depth.</td>
<td>Communicates, organizes, analyzes, and synthesizes information from sources. Coherently integrates information. Intended purpose is achieved.</td>
<td>Communicates and organizes information from sources. The information is not yet synthesized and only supports the flow of the content to some extent. The intended purpose is not fully achieved.</td>
<td>Attempts to communicate information from sources. The information is fragmented and/or misrepresented (misquoted, taken out of context, or incorrectly paraphrased, etc.) so the intended purpose is not achieved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use Information Ethically and Legally</strong></td>
<td>Students use correctly all of the following information use strategies:</td>
<td>Students use correctly three of the following information use strategies:</td>
<td>Students use correctly two of the following information use strategies:</td>
<td>Students use correctly one of the following information use strategies:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• use of citations and reference;</td>
<td></td>
<td>• use of citations and reference;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• choice of paraphrasing, summary, or quoting;</td>
<td></td>
<td>• choice of paraphrasing, summary, or quoting;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• use information in ways that are true to original context;</td>
<td></td>
<td>• use information in ways that are true to original context;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• distinguish between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• distinguish between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS AND GROUP AVERAGE

BAR GRAPH
### APPENDIX D: SESSION EVALUATION DETAILED RESULTS

- **Number of participants**: 39
- **Evaluation form return rate**: 95%

1. Respondent would recommend a similar session to his/her colleagues: 95%
2. Respondent stated the session was worthwhile: 100%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>“YES” % of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. The facilitator provided the respondent with a clear understanding of the purpose.</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The facilitator clearly explained the tasks.</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The performance descriptors (i.e., does not meet &amp; meets expectations) were useful.</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The group discussions aided my understanding.</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The time provided for discussions was adequate.</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. There was an equal opportunity for everyone in my group to contribute his/her ideas and opinions.</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I was able to follow the instructions and complete the recording forms accurately.</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Today’s discussions after the first round of setting performance expectations were helpful to me.</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The information showing the distribution of participants’ performance expectations was helpful to me.</td>
<td>97%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I am confident about the defensibility and appropriateness of the final recommended performance expectations (the &quot;cut scores&quot;).</td>
<td>89%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The facilities and food helped create a positive working environment.</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Participation in session led to a change in how they will teach and/or view assessment.</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Two did not answer the question.

**Type of change (will not sum to 100% because respondents could select all that apply)**
- Change in how the participant will teach students: 51%
- Change in how the participant will design assignments: 54%
- Change in how the participant will evaluate student work: 95%
- Change in participant’s views of assessment: 49%
- Other change: 5%

Note: one person responded both change “views of assessment” and “no change.”
Responses to Open-Ended Questions
Twenty-four respondents (65%) described a change(s) they experienced or plan to make:

Rubrics/student evaluation methods (N=13)
   a. Be specific about what constitutes a given grade to students (rubrics, e.g.)
   b. I will be more rigid with my students so they could be better prepared in the real world.
   c. I will try to adopt both rubrics in written assignments. I am especially going to find a way to explicitly evaluate information literacy.
   d. I will use rubrics at times. Although I know I should use them all the time since I believe in it. It's just that high volume of work can make this unrealistic.
   e. I would like to use rubric to grade students’ paper.
   f. I'm going to incorporate/articulate more sophisticated rubrics in my grading--This was a very good experience for my professional development.
   g. It gives me a clearer idea of how assessment works. In future assessment design, I will try to a) make my expectations more clearly stated and b) incorporate components that help student meet the assessment goals.
   h. It was amazing to see how differently we all scored using the rubrics. I think I could use rubrics more effectively in my classes after this workshop.
   i. May use the rubrics provided to guide assignments and grading.
   j. Rubric helpful in aligning expectations for assignments
   k. The use of a rubric to assess student communication and value.
   l. Use the rubrics in my WI classes.
   m. Use/apply rubrics for providing feedback to students.

Content/what's taught/what's assigned (N=7)
   a. Ask for more references. Encourage more faculty to use CPR (Calibrated Peer Review) in large lectures.
   b. Challenging students to expand writing skills and take advantage of UHM resources.
   c. Depending upon the implementation of the expectations, I will alter assignments and evaluations to make sure students get the chance to perform well on the performance measures.
   d. Focus more on awareness of sources, and integration/synthesis of sources into a student’s argument.
   e. I am going to require my students to do some sort of refresher on writing and grammar.
   f. I will adapt my teaching and grading to incorporate the competencies that I want my students to leave with.
   g. More emphasis on grammar and mechanics in written assignments.

Other (4)
   a. Work with our U.G. assessment team. 2. Try to get some faculty to these workshops.
   b. I have more confidence in my ability to assess student work.
   c. I plan to ask my students for their expectations in the areas of Written Communication & Info. Literacy. Very thought provoking session!
   d. It was interesting to hear the different views from different disciplines.

Eighteen respondents (49%) wrote a comment under "is there anything else you'd like us to know?" question.

General and specific positive comment (N=10)
   a. [smiley face]
   b. Both Yao & Monica are great at keeping these sessions positive.
   c. Clear and organized session.
   d. I learned a lot about time management. [smiley face] Really great food, thank you.
   e. I like the graph visual.
   f. Keep up all the wok you are doing!
g. Monica did a good job of facilitating the session. I enjoyed the opportunity to hear other faculty member's assessments of student writing.

h. Thank you!

i. Thank you for food.

j. Thanks for the M&M

Observations related to assessment and processes (N=4)

a. Assessment seems to be a challenging concept for many [faculty]

b. Many issues related to complexity of teaching and assessment emerged from the discussions.

c. Participants need to be kept on task & discuss relevant issues. Since we were given a rubric, participants may have been given specific instructions regarding the use of language of the rubric to guide their comments. Yao was very patient, more than I would have been.

d. Very difficult/complex subject

Suggestions (N=4)

a. For questions 8 and 9, I would characterize it more as "interesting" rather than "helpful." 2) I think the distinction between expectation and aspiration for borderline students needs to be separated. Perhaps have a number for each?

b. Clarify the need for global scores in general directions. Changes the day's process.

c. First day was slow. [Instructions to complete the recording form] kinda confusing to be honest . . . Please, please put the groups in separate rooms! It was absolutely ridiculous that there was so much noise--it was distracting and made it very difficult for me to participate.

d. I think using all parts of each of the assessment rubric would help identify areas that need resources to improve student outcomes.

Other (N=1)

a. I look forward to details of what these rubrics actually look like in practice.