

2nd Annual Assessment Symposium

Friday, March 18, 2016

Sponsored by the Office of the Provost



Plenary Panel:

Comprehensive Program Assessment

Moderator: Gillian Pierce, Director of Learning Assessment

Assessment and Curricular Change in the CAS Writing Program

- **Joseph Bizup**, Associate Professor, English; Assistant Dean and Director, CAS Writing Program
- **Sarah Madsen Hardy**, Senior Lecturer, CAS Writing Program; Writing Coordinator, Core Curriculum

Competency Mapping: Assuring Quality and Outcomes for Public Health Educators

- **Anneke Demmink**, Program Manager, Education, Community Health Sciences, SPH
- **Lois McCloskey**, Associate Professor, Community Health Sciences, SPH

Assessment and Curricular Change in the CAS Writing Program

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What is the CAS Writing Program?

- **Mission:** To help BU undergraduates acquire writing and communication skills and more general habits of mind essential both to their full participation in the intellectual life of the university and to their future personal, professional, and civic lives.

- **Courses:**
 - **WR 100 & WR 150:** A sequence of theme-based writing seminars through which most BU students satisfy their colleges' and schools' respective writing requirements.
 - **WR 097, WR 098, WR 100 ESL:** Courses for ESL (English as a Second Language) students who would benefit from additional coursework before entering WR 100 (or WR 150 if taking WR 100 ESL).

- **Writing Center:** Provides one-on-one writing tutorials to any CAS student or student enrolled in a CAS class.

The Writing Program is BU's largest single general education unit.

Full-Time Faculty (F15)	52
Part-Time Faculty (F15)	35
Graduate-Students (F15)	27
Writing Tutors (F15)	28
Sections Offered (AY 15-16)	402
Student Enrollments (AY 15-16)	6448
Tutorials Offered (14-15)	3377

Writing programs in general have a long tradition of assessment.

Edward M. White's First Law of Assessodynamics:

“Assess thyself or assessment will be done unto thee.”¹

Corollary:

“The pressure on a unit to conduct assessment is inversely proportional to its institutional and disciplinary stature.”

1. White, Edward M. “The Misuse of Writing Assessment for Political Purposes.” *Journal of Writing Assessment*. 2.1 (2005): 21-36. Web.

Issues in writing assessment:

- What are you trying to assess?
 - Formal features of texts?
 - Rhetorical performances?
 - Curricular features?
- What is your source of data?
 - Pre-test/post-test?
 - Examples of student work?
 - Student reports of learning?
- How do you ensure reliability and validity?
 - Do you want inter-rater agreement?
 - Do you want conversation and debate?
- How do you “close the loop”?

The CAS Writing Program likewise has a long tradition of program assessment.

2001-2009: Boston University Writing Assessment

- Extemporaneous writing test: read and analyze a passage of prose
- Administered to all students upon entering the university
- Administered again to all students at the end of each WR course
- Used for placement, student assessment, faculty assessment, and curricular assessment

2009-Present: Writing Program Portfolio Assessment

- Accompanied shift to portfolio assessment in WR 100 and WR 150
- Systematic sample of WR 100 and WR 150 portfolios
- Over-sample of ESL portfolios
- Separate placement test given only to students required to submit proof of English proficiency along with their applications
- Portfolio assessment for curricular assessment *only*

WR 100 and WR 150 course learning goals (outcomes):

In WR 100, students develop their abilities to

- craft substantive, motivated, balanced academic arguments
- write clear, correct, coherent prose
- read with understanding and engagement
- plan, draft, and revise efficiently and effectively
- evaluate and improve your own reading and writing processes
- respond productively to the writing of others
- express yourself verbally and converse thoughtfully about complex ideas.

In WR 150, students

- continue developing abilities from WR 100
- work intensively on prose style
- learning to conduct college-level research

Scale of quantitative assessment: portfolios collected

	General Population	ESL Oversample	Total
WR 100 F 2014	224	14	238
WR 100 S 2015	85	0	85
WR 150 F 2014	65	0	65
WR 150 S 2015	176	11	187
Total	550	25	575

The Writing Program's portfolio assessment is quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative Assessment

- Performed in odd academic years (e.g., 2014-2015)
- Twenty evaluators from WP faculty (\$1000 stipend/rater)
- Portfolios rated according to a rubric keyed to learning outcomes (~25 dimensions, 1-6 scale)
- Each portfolio read by two raters
Rubric adjusted each assessment
- Data made available to WP faculty
- **GOAL: "Snapshot" that can frame conversations and raise questions about WP curriculum**

Qualitative Assessment

- Performed in even academic years (e.g., 2015-2016)
- Assessment groups of WP faculty read and discuss eight portfolios
- Assessment groups meet twice
- Groups draft reports documenting their discussions, insights, and recommendations
- Reports made available to WP faculty
- **GOAL: Occasion for reflection, interpretation, conversation among WP among faculty**

Quantitative and qualitative assessments complement one another to inform decisions about curriculum.

Sample prompts from quantitative assessment rubric

Assess *the final version of the final paper* in the portfolio with the following elements in mind.

2. INTRODUCTION: We are interested in how well students use the elements of a standard introduction: common ground, problem statement, claim or promise of a claim. The quality of the claim itself is covered in the next question. Here the focus is how the writer signals or establishes the “motivation” for the paper.

- 1-2 Does not specify context/ground, articulate problem, and/or claim
- 3-4 Some elements present, others inadequate; diffusely or vaguely
- 5-6 Fully developed, with sufficient background to orient reader; explicit problem statement and claim or signal of argument

3. ARGUMENT: We are interested in the intellectual quality of the main claims the paper makes and in how well it supports those claims with reasons and evidence.

- 1-2 No claims or weak or very general ones; little or no specific evidence or analysis presented
- 3-4 Specific but simplistic or obvious claims; evidence present but does not support reasons, or lacks explication/analysis, or is spotty, insufficient, etc.
- 5-6 Claims clearly articulated, complex, insightful; relevant, specific, sufficient evidence properly introduced, sufficiently analyzed and interpreted to advance argument

Writing Program's portfolio assessment is one element in a rich assortment of assessment, research, and professional-development activities.

Beginning-of-Year Meetings

Each full-time lecturer meets with director or associate director to discuss performance, plans, perspectives on the program.

Administrative observations

Faculty are observed in penultimate year of contract or when candidates for promotion

Mentoring and peer-to-peer observations

Any faculty member may request a mentor or participate in voluntary peer-to-peer observations

Faculty Seminars

Three- or four-session seminars exploring research on topic relevant to teaching writing.

Situated Research

Program encourages and supports site-specific research into writing and teaching practices.

WRX

Structured context for WP faculty to propose and pilot curricular innovations

WRX offers faculty a structured opportunity to experiment with innovative writing pedagogies and course models.

Goals

- Opportunity for faculty to propose, document, reflect on, and refine alternative approaches
- Same learning goals as other WR sections
- Small-scale changes to allow for curricular evolution over time
- Feedback loop: propagate good ideas throughout WR curriculum

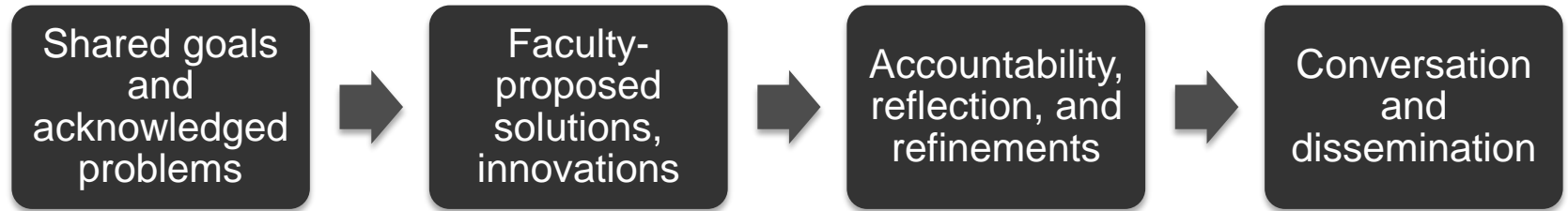
Procedures

- A structured process
- A few new pilots each year
- Two-year pilot cycle
- Participants write formal proposals, including assessment plan
- Regular meetings at which participants share materials, experiences
- End-of-semester written reflections

The overall objective is to foster purposeful, open-ended innovation

How does WRX foster a culture of assessment in the Writing Program?

Assessment

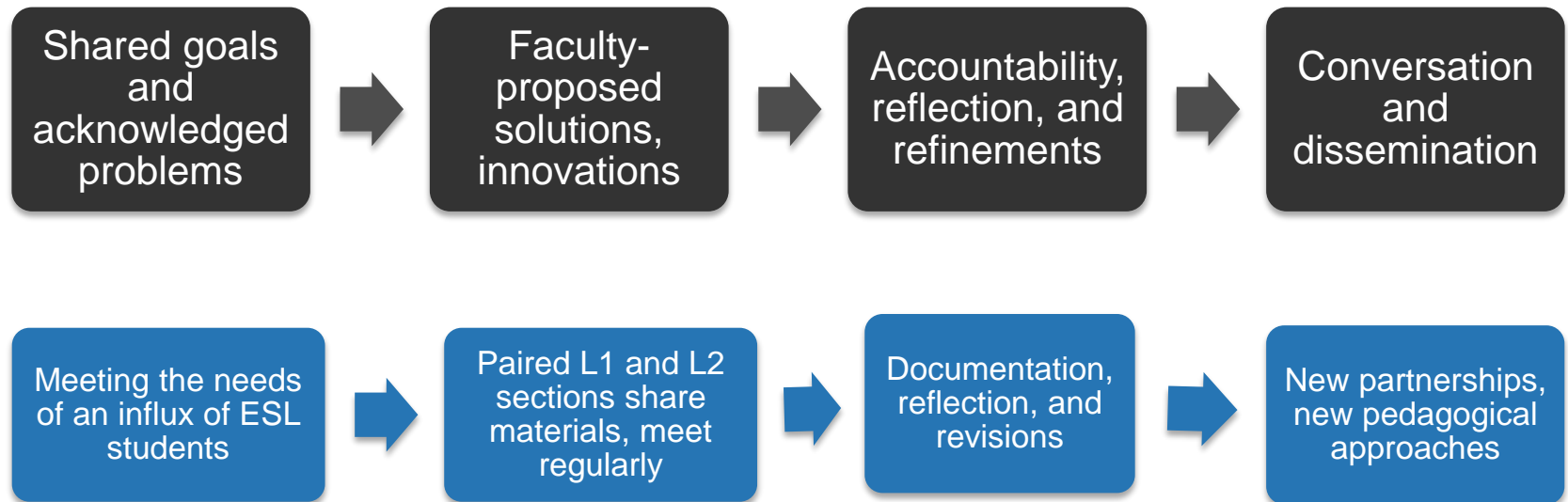


**Thoughtful,
collaborative
curricular
change**

Example: “Mediated Integration” Cluster

Innovation: Integrate L1 and L2 students in a way that more fully benefits both.

Assessment

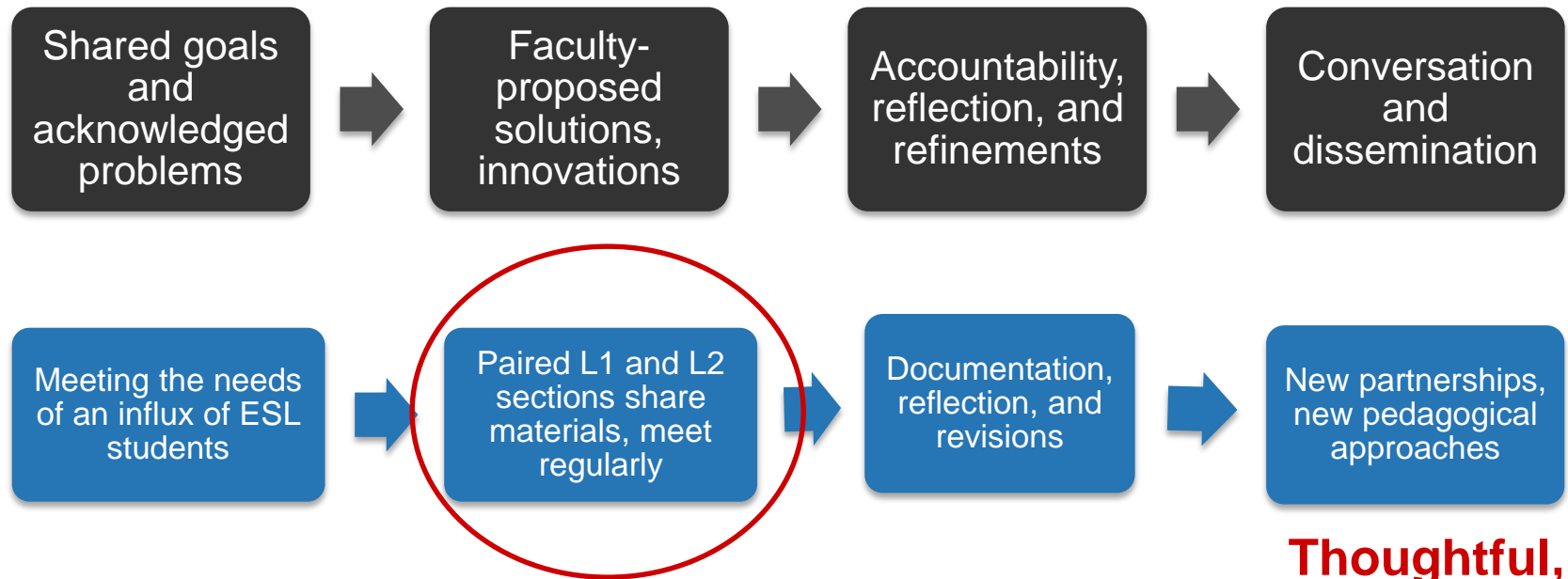


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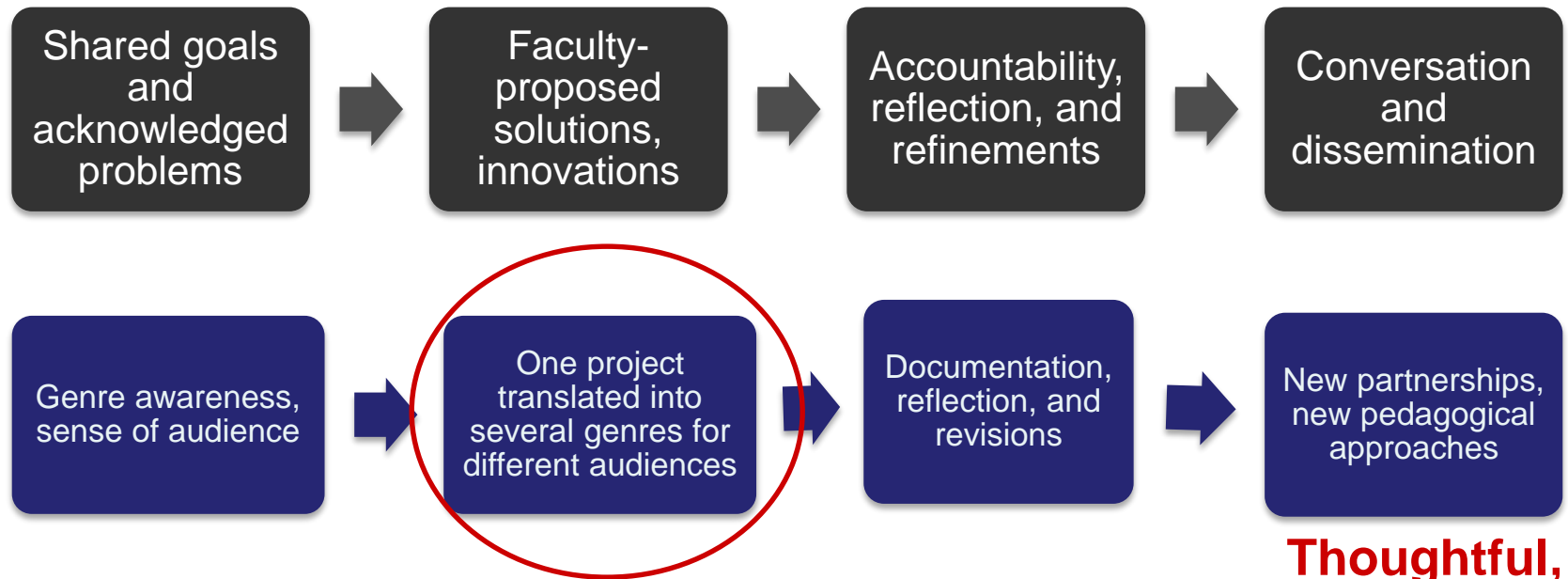


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Example: “Genre & Audience” Cluster

Innovation: Cultivate genre awareness and flexibility to translate arguments across genres

Assessment



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