



*College
of Arts
& Sciences*

DISCOVERY CORE (ENGLISH)
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This report provides evidence that students are achieving end-of-program learning goals and that graduates are attaining achievement outcomes established by the program.

Name of the program: Discover Core (English)
Year (e.g., AY17-18) of assessment report: 17/18
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1. GOALS

I. COMMUNICATION. Students communicate clearly, concisely, and accurately through writing, speaking, and visual representations appropriate for various topics and audiences.

- Upon graduation students will be able to prepare communications in which the content is well organized, the central message is compelling, and supporting materials are highly credible.

II. CRITICAL/ANALYTICAL THINKING. Students make decisions and solve problems based on research, logic, and qualitative and quantitative analyses of appropriate and relevant data and information. Upon graduation students will be able to:

- Identify and summarize the problem, issue, or question to be investigated.
- Present existing knowledge, research, and/or views.

2. METHOD

Assessment of students' thesis statements from final essay assignment in ICLT300. A total of 117 students were assessed: 60 sophomores (CS) taking the class in the Fall 2017 semester and 57 juniors (SoM) enrolled during the Spring 2018 semester.

A thesis statement can be defined as “The basic idea of an essay, usually stated in a single sentence. In expository and argumentative writing, the thesis is the unifying force that every word, sentence, and paragraph of the essay must support” (McCuen and Winkler 771). A successful thesis statement thus communicates clear and effectively (PLO#1), identifies a problem of conflict (PLO#2), and proposes a tentative solution in the form of a research-based or analytical argument (PLO#3).

A staple assignment in most introductory courses to literature, the literary-analysis essay (4-5 pages) asks students to analyze how a sequence of passages, details, or moments in one of the literary texts we have read suggests what the author is saying or showing about a particular keyword (or keywords). In their essays, students are asked to elaborate and support an argument, identifiable by a thesis statement. The thesis statement should be underlined and placed at the end of the first paragraph. Students are encouraged to offer an original and persuasive analysis of the text, especially of themes and elements that may have escaped us in our first reading.

“Keyword” in the context of this course refers to big thematic categories: history, memory, trauma, violence, war, gender, marriage, the self, individual vs. society, technology, the environment, cross-cultural differences, racism, migration, etc. Students tackle these themes through our weekly reading assignments (one short story every week).

By the time students receive their literary-analysis essay assignment, they have been familiarized with the concept of thesis statement through several layers of instruction and practice. Students receive two handouts with specific examples of thesis statements, titled “How to Plan a Literary-Analysis Essay” and “How to Write a Successful Thesis Statement” respectively. Using these materials as a guide, they practice designing and writing thesis statements with their peers in several in-class workshops. Finally, every student has to submit a “false introduction” assignment two weeks before turning in the final draft of his or her essay. In the “false introduction,” the student offers a tentative version of his or her argument and thesis statement. Students thus receive early feedback from the instructor, which they can use into the final version of their thesis statements.

To evaluate their final thesis statements, I have identified seven areas of assessment, each one to be measured on a 1 to 5-point scale:

TABLE 1: Seven area of assessment

Clarity	The author writes prose that is accessible, simple, and reader-friendly.
Vocabulary	The author uses accurate and sophisticated vocabulary, avoiding vague terms and/or malapropisms.
Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation	The author avoids typical errors in these areas, including but not limited to: subject-verb agreement, incoherent verb tenses, run-on sentences, noun-pronoun agreement, and comma splices.
Persuasion	The author’s thesis statement is argumentative enough. The author is aware of rhetorical persuasion strategies (ethos, logos, pathos).
Originality	The author delivers an original argument, taking risks and thinking beyond the familiar content of class notes, discussions, and presentations.
Focus	The theme of the essay is narrow enough. The author has concretized his or her focus so that the topic can be successfully explored in a short essay.
Concision	The thesis statement adjusts to standard length (1-2 sentences).

For the purposes of assessment and quantification of data, I have used the following rubric:

TABLE 2. Showing the rubric for quantification of data

Points	1	2	3	4	5
Clarity	The thesis statement is completely unintelligible. The reader cannot discern basic information about the topic or argument of the essay.	The thesis statement is mostly unclear.	The central idea of the thesis statement is clear and accessible enough, but for two or more details.	The thesis statement is almost completely clear, but for one or two details.	The thesis statement and core theme(s) are perfectly clear. The writer shows a good command of vocabulary and written expression.
Vocabulary	Generic and/or confusing vocabulary renders the thesis statement completely unintelligible	Generic and/or confusing vocabulary renders the thesis statement partially unintelligible	Vocabulary is mostly accurate, but the writer could use more specific/technical language	For the most part, the writer uses relevant vocabulary without odd or imprecise word choices.	The writer shows a masterful command of English vocabulary. Word choice are accurate and sophisticated.
Grammar, spelling, punctuation	5 or more errors	4 errors	3 errors	2 errors	0-1 error
Persuasion	No argument whatsoever.	Flawed argument (too factual, openly biased).	There is an argument, but it fails to persuade because of a fallacy and/or contradiction.	The argument is clear but could use some rephrasing/revision for additional persuasion.	Strongly argumentative thesis expressed using persuasive language. The author is aware of rhetorical persuasion strategies (ethos, logos)
Originality	The student reproduces class notes verbatim and/or information from other sources (e.g. plagiarism)	The student paraphrases class content and/or information from external sources (without proper citation)	The student paraphrases class content and/or information from external sources (with proper citation)	The thesis statement is argumentative enough but rests mostly on familiar knowledge (class notes, class presentations, etc.)	The thesis statement opens up a new and complex interpretation of the text that is unprecedented in the context of the class.
Focus	The essay does not have a discernible topic or core issue.	The topic is too vague and general.	The topic of the essay/thesis statement shows some specificity.	The topic of the essay/thesis is defined enough.	The topic of the essay is narrow and well specified. The author knows how to tackle an abstract concept and identifies specific examples and sub-topics.
Concision	Either too lengthy and digressive (5+ sentences) or incomplete (less than one sentence)	The thesis deviates from standard length in 2 sentences.	The thesis deviates from standard length in 2 sentences.	The thesis deviates from standard length in 1 sentence.	Standard length (1-2 sentences)

3. ANALYSIS

The average scores in each area for the sophomore and junior classes appear in the following table 3 and Figure 1.

TABLE 3: Average score in each area for sophomore and junior classes

Area	Sophomores	Juniors
Clarity	2.93	3.32
Vocabulary	2.77	3.32
Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation	3.13	3.62
Persuasion	3.43	3.83
Originality	3.43	3.80
Focus	3.12	3.64
Concision	4.2	4.62

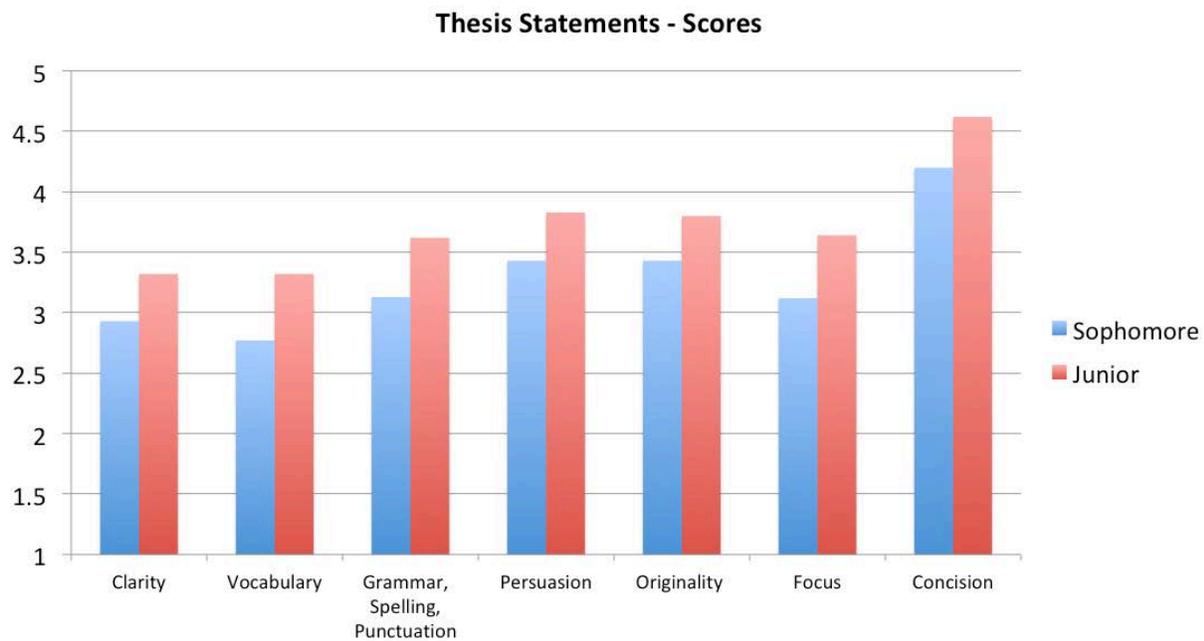


Figure 1: Average score in each area for sophomore and junior classes

4. INTERPRETATION

- Overall scores prove satisfactory in terms of students' communication and critical thinking skills, although there is also room for improvement, especially for students in their first two years of instruction.
- Scores also reflect a steady progress in all seven areas in the transition from sophomore to junior year.
- Students are aware of the need for concision when communicating an argument or idea, this being the highest score in the assessment.
- The weakest area is vocabulary, closely followed by clarity. This low vocabulary

score is concerning, since many of our students actively train for English Proficiency exams (TOEFL, GRE) with a strong vocabulary component. How can we create opportunities for them to internalize and use this vocabulary in our classes?

- Communication skills (vocabulary, clarity, grammar) slightly lag critical-thinking and problem-solving skills (persuasion, focus, originality). This gap suggests that students can think of original and persuasive arguments yet struggle to put them in writing and/or oral presentations. How can we bring communication skills up to par with critical/analytical thinking skills?
- Overall uniformity of scores has positive and negative implications:
 - Positive: no significant imbalance among different communication and critical-thinking skills.
 - Negative: generalized need for improvement in almost all areas assessed.

5. IMPROVEMENTS

- Incentivize students to think critically and communicate effectively:
 - Student essay competitions (across sections of the same course, e.g. ICLT300, ICPH301, FCWR161, etc.)
 - More initiatives like SOURCE, styled after professional conferences in different academic fields (MLA, APA,)
- Facilitate extracurricular activities for students to practice communication skills:
 - Student-run magazine or newsletter
 - Student-run blog (co-written by students in New York City and Nanjing)
- Promote a less remedial culture of academic writing. Focus on student accomplishments as much as on shortcomings.
- Faculty should learn more about students' formal and informal training for TOEFL and GRE exams. Integrate this training into our Discovery Core curriculum. Faculty could use NUPT resources to find out more about the official training students receive in preparation for these exams and, then, tap into this instruction to make students perceive it as relevant for Discovery Core courses as well.

I. **Summary of Improvements Made in Response to Assessment Results in the past few years**

TABLE 4: Improvements Made in Response to Assessment Results in the past years

Year of Assessment Results	Brief Name of Program Learning Goal (e.g., Writing)	Improvements Implemented Based on Assessment Results	Impact of Improvements (report) reassessment results if available)
AY14-15	PLO #2: Identify and summarize the problem, issue, or question to be investigated.	<p>Suggestions for improvement have been partially implemented. New faculty cohorts have paid attention to communicating the importance of critical/analytical skills to students and shared short critical-thinking exercises in class on a frequent basis.</p> <p>The Writing and Tutoring Center has revamped its mission statement, focusing exclusively on Communication Skills.</p>	Not available
AY15-16	Discovery Core was not assessed during this AY	NA	NA
AY16-17	<p>PLO #2: Identify and summarize the problem, issue, or question to be investigated.</p> <p>PLO #3: Present existing knowledge, research, and/or views.</p>	No recommendations appear in the Assessment Report for PLOs #2 and #3	NA

II. Brief Description of Faculty Engagement in the Current Annual Assessment Report:

I once gave a status update on the assessment to the other full-time faculty members of the English department, as well as to the Dean of Communication Arts Professor Geoffrey Bell. I ran the details of the assessment with the other assessment committee members as well. I run the assessment in late April and early May 2018, and then presented the results of the assessment on 14 May 2018. Several faculty members shared their thoughts on possible solutions to the concerns I have from the results of the assessment. I have incorporated some their suggestions to my “Improvements” section above.

III. Annual Program Achievement Goals: I do not have access to this data.