Expected Outcome: Demonstrate Effective Written Communication
Students in the ENGL 4810, the Professional and Public Writing capstone, will demonstrate effective written communication skills in the form of a substantial portfolio of work, in which they

1. write effective prose;
2. demonstrate mastery of effective editing principles using traditional and computer-based techniques;
3. discuss theories relevant to professional and public writing;
4. discuss the application of those theories in portfolio documents;
5. analyze and address a particular audience.

Assessment Method 1: Capstone Portfolio

Assessment Method Description
During the capstone course, students developed portfolios of their work. Using a rubric developed by the track faculty, two members of the Undergraduate Studies Committee assessed each portfolio. Disagreements were resolved by a third committee member.

Each student portfolio was assessed whether the student was able to

1. write effective prose;
2. demonstrate mastery of effective editing principles using traditional and computer-based techniques;
3. discuss theories relevant to professional and public writing;
4. discuss the application of those theories in portfolio documents;
5. analyze and address a particular audience.

Writing effective prose means that the portfolio consisted of works that were clear, persuasive, and used standard written American English.

Demonstrating a mastery of effective editing principles means that a student shows an ability to edit effectively on a computer or on paper,
using appropriate marking techniques, a style sheet, and conforming to appropriate standards (e.g., *Chicago Manual of Style*).

*Discussing the theories relevant to professional and public writing* means that the student demonstrates an ability to engage with theories of professional or public writing in the texts he or she produces.

*Discussing the application of those theories* means that the student should also be able to demonstrate this knowledge of theory with regard to his or her own documents in the portfolio.

*Analyzing and addressing a particular audience* means that the student is able to recognize the needs of a specific audience and write effectively to that audience.

Four student portfolios were assessed in the Fall and nine in the Spring for a total of thirteen portfolios in academic year 2012-2013.

### Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion #</th>
<th>Fall 2012</th>
<th>Spring 2013</th>
<th>Total 2012-2013</th>
<th>Total 2011-13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Write effective prose</td>
<td>100% (4/4)</td>
<td>88% (8/9)</td>
<td>92% (12/13)</td>
<td>85% (23/27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Demonstrate effective editing</td>
<td>100% (4/4)</td>
<td>88% (8/9)</td>
<td>92% (12/13)</td>
<td>89% (24/27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Discuss theories</td>
<td>100% (4/4)</td>
<td>44% (4/9)</td>
<td>62% (8/13)</td>
<td>70% (19/27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Apply theories</td>
<td>100% (4/4)</td>
<td>11% (1/9)</td>
<td>38% (5/13)</td>
<td>59% (16/27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Analyze &amp; address audience</td>
<td>100% (4/4)</td>
<td>67% (6/9)</td>
<td>77% (10/13)</td>
<td>89% (24/27)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Percent of students achieving objectives of for the Professional and Public Writing Track

The rater-training session substantially improved inter-rater agreement in Fall. However, inter-rater reliability decreased to 69% in Spring 2013, perhaps because this is the first time the committee members assessed e-Portfolios. Another norming session will be held in spring.

It can be observed that students consistently perform well on criteria 1 (write effective prose), 2 (edit well), and 5 (analyze and address a
particular audience). Student ability to discuss theories (criterion 3) was marginally better than student ability to apply the theories (criterion 4). In fact, criterion 4 (explaining how they apply the theories they encounter to the documents they produce) has proven the greatest challenge for students in this track.

**How did you use findings for improvement?**

The number of students taking each of our capstone classes is relatively low because they are distributed across the Department’s three tracks. This raises the issue of reliability with respect to annual assessment results. Nevertheless, faculty members will be particularly focusing this coming year on improving students’ abilities to analyze and apply theories of professional and public writing.

We currently use a two-category (i.e., yes/no) system of assessment but plan to move to a four-category system (i.e., advanced, intermediate, basic, little or none) for the next academic year. This will better reveal areas of success and those in need of improvement. Faculty members are committed to helping students develop capstone portfolios that more directly address the assessment rubric.

**Additional Comments**

In order to create an indirect measure, we will be working with OIRA this year to develop and draw data from a survey of recent graduates in the Professional and Public Writing Major to target the five criteria:

1. writing effective prose;
2. demonstration of the mastery of effective editing principles using traditional and computer-based techniques;
3. discussion of theories relevant to professional and public writing;
4. discussion of the application of those theories in portfolio documents;
5. analysis and addressing of a particular audience.