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# CLA Project Report

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**CLA Project Report: Dean Swinford**

1. Course information
   a. In what course(s) did you administer your CLA performance task?

      ENGL 120 Section 18

   b. Please indicate if the majority of students enrolled in this class are freshmen, sophomores, juniors, or seniors.

      I administered my CLA performance task in a section of ENGL 120. The majority of students enrolled in the class are in their first year. Also, a majority of students in this particular section are participants in the FSU Learning Community Program.

2. Performance task
   a. What was the task?

      A group of faculty from English and Foreign Languages devised a task that focused on a campus specific issue. Our task asked students to evaluate a proposal to increase study abroad opportunities for FSU students. The specific features of the task also took into account the economic realities of the current fiscal crisis: students were to determine whether or not to support the program by weighing its benefits in relation to its perceived costs. The task asked students to choose between recommending a significantly expanded study abroad program and concentrating available funds on improvements and innovations to currently existing language study programs on campus.

   b. Describe the documents you included in the task. Why did you choose these specific documents?

      Our documents provided a range of responses that supported and refuted the proposal outlined in the prompt. We modeled our documents on those included in the CLA handbook. The documents included the following:

      A. January 2009 News Release: In this document, the Dean of the School of International Studies describes a plan to expand study abroad programs on the FSU campus. The piece mentions, however, that no funds have been made available for this ambitious program.
      B. Report from Miskatonic University: This document, from the Office of Promotions and Institutional Growth at Miskatonic University, details the successes of enhanced study abroad. This includes numerical data. At first glance, the numbers seem to support enhanced study abroad; however, analysis of the numbers show that they do not prove that study abroad leads to enhanced language ability.
      C. University Research Abstract: Benjamin & Hundley: This abstract describes educational benefits of students who participated in study abroad. However, it does not convincingly establish a link: correlation is not causation.
      D. University Research Abstract: Millman: Millman's abstract critiques the findings of another report and reveals its limitations.
      E. University Research Abstract: Shelby, Nadir, & Schults: This abstract reports data on the primary goal of a study abroad program, but does not establish a clear connection between study abroad participation and enhanced foreign language ability.
      F. Study Abroad in Spain: This flyer describes the benefits of study abroad, but does not mention enhanced foreign language acquisition as one of these benefits.
      G. The Benefits of Study Abroad: This document shows students commenting on the benefits of study abroad, but the survey is opinion based. Also, as it has no date provided, there is no way to verify whether or not the data is current.

   c. To what extent did a successful response to the performance task require students to integrate information and data in both narrative <u>and</u> quantitative forms? Explain.

A successful response to the performance task required the effective integration of data in narrative and quantitative forms. Our rubric, for instance, reveals a variety of discrepancies in the data provided that students needed to discuss in order to provide an effective exploration of the topic. For example, Document B includes a study that shows that study abroad participants actually received a lower GPA. Effective analysis of the data resulted in students pointing out this numerical data.

3. Performance Task Administration
   a. When did you administer the performance task?

      The performance task was collected on March 24. We spent the previous two class periods discussing the features of the CLA.

   b. Was the student's score on the assessment calculated in the final grade? If yes, what weight did it have?

      I included the performance task as one of the five short writing practice assignments I assign over the course of the semester. Each of these assignments is worth 2% of the overall semester grade. I generally score these on a 1-10 scale. Scores reflected achievement in the following four categories: evaluation of evidence; analysis and synthesis of evidence; drawing conclusions; and acknowledging alternative explanations/ viewpoints. I modified the scale provided in the CLA Diagnostic Scoring Faculty Handbook so that scores of 10-9 indicated strong to excellent skills; 8-7 indicated acceptable skills; and 6-5 indicated emerging skills.

4. Student Performance
   a. Identify any consistent strengths you found in student performance.

      My students did an effective job of citing evidence and making direct reference to at least three of the sources. We have focused on the effective use of secondary sources over the course of the semester and this class emphasis was apparent in the end products. Also, I was surprised by the number of students who incorporated the weaknesses of arguments into their assessments of the evidence. Generally, teaching disadvantages, counterarguments, or the acknowledgement of alternative viewpoints is one of the most difficult components of teaching first year composition. In this assignment, students did a surprisingly thorough job of framing arguments in direct response to perceived weaknesses in the source material.

   b. Identify any consistent weaknesses you found in student performance.

      The main weakness I noticed had to do with overall argument formation. While the students tended to do a good job of reviewing sources, they had a more difficult time assembling their responses to the evidence into a single, well organized argument. I think that this emphasis on organization should be evaluated as a key component of the CLA, but it does not appear to be given the rubrics provided in the handbook.

   c. (optional) If you reviewed the results with your students, what kind of comments did they make about it? Did they indicate whether they believe their FSU experience is preparing them to take assessments like the CLA?

5. Recommendation and follow up
   a. Knowing that our students' performance on the CLA will be part of our institutional assessment, what will you will do in the courses you teach to address the skills and competencies assessed by the CLA?

      I have been assessing and grading for the overall categories identified by the CLA for some time now. That said, I like how the CLA materials codify these areas of student learning and provide tools that enable instructors to assess critical thinking and analytic reasoning abilities in a regimented manner. The most difficult of these would have to be acknowledging alternative explanations/ viewpoints. I have revised the drafting process of my final research based

proposal arguments so that we spend some time researching and constructing responses to counterarguments. I plan to use CLA Performance tasks in my composition classes, and am currently considering including at least two of these per semester. I thought that the task of designing the performance task was useful as well; I plan to eventually ask my students to develop their own performance tasks. I think this kind of project could be particularly useful for classes in the Learning Communities program.

b. What recommendations would you offer for all faculty members?

I would encourage faculty members working as part of a group to make sure to delegate responsibilities. Also, I would suggest that faculty members try to incorporate the CLA into the course as a graded assignment. Finally, I'd urge faculty members to spend enough time on the assignment to help students understand the skill set that is tested by the task.

**Please submit your report on your project as soon as possible, but no later than May 1, 2009.**