

# Assessing Learning in Transfer-Level English

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# Some Background . . .

- **Riverside Community College District:**
  - A three-campus college becoming a three-college district (effective 2008).
  - Total student headcount 30,179 (9/17/06)
- **English at RCCD**
  - 37 full-time, 128 part-time instructors (fall 06)
  - 72 sections of English 1A (fall 06)
  - Three levels of pre-1A English
  - Less than 20% of new students place into English 1A

# Course-Based English Assessment at RCCD: Challenges

- RCCD departmental structure
- Multi-campus structure
- Institutional preoccupation with planning for separate college status
- Number of part-time instructors

## ... And Advantages

- English discipline culture (not an intensely partisan or ideological group)
- Good informal leadership (including discipline members on RCCD assessment committee)
- History of holistic scoring (readily adaptable to analytic scoring)

# RCCD Assessment History

- Formal efforts began in fall, 2000, with formation of district assessment committee (DAC).
- DAC spent a year studying assessment before beginning to develop RCCD assessment plan.
- RCCD requires disciplines undergoing program review to develop and implement course- or program-based assessment plans as a condition of approval.

# RCCD Assessment History, Continued

- RCCD curriculum committee now requires that course outlines contain SLOs and that methods of evaluation and instruction be clearly tied to course SLOs as a way of making them operational.
- DAC supports assessment work of disciplines in various ways, including stipends for workshops, scoring sessions, etc.
- Consult DAC website for further information about RCCD assessment processes:  
<http://www.academic.rcc.edu/dac/>

# Overview of Outcomes Assessment in English at RCCD

- Beginning with English 1A as pilot project in 2004, all composition courses are assessed at least every two years on a regular cycle
- SLOs for all English courses established between 2004 and 2006

# Outcomes Assessment in English at RCCD, Continued

- Course-embedded summative assessment of student writing in all composition courses, using common prompts in some courses
- Representative samples of student writing read against analytic rubric after norming session
- Consistent effort to use assessment results to improve teaching and learning

# English 1A Assessment: 2002-4 Pilot Project

- **2002-3:**
  - Developed and administered survey on learning goals of individual 1A instructors
  - Reviewed survey results
  - Drafted (in a subcommittee of eight 1A instructors) English 1A SLO statement
  - Reached agreement as a discipline on the statement and on plan to sample late-1A essays to score against an analytic rubric

# 2002-4 Pilot Project, Continued

- **2003-4:**
  - Chose specific SLOs to assess
  - Developed rubric
  - Developed plan to select representative sample of late-1A writing
  - Met in June 2004 to read and score 115 essays (about 10% of those actually written in the course-- 1222 English 1A students completed it)
  - Interpreted results, returned essays to instructors with comments, and reported back to the discipline on findings in summer-fall 2004

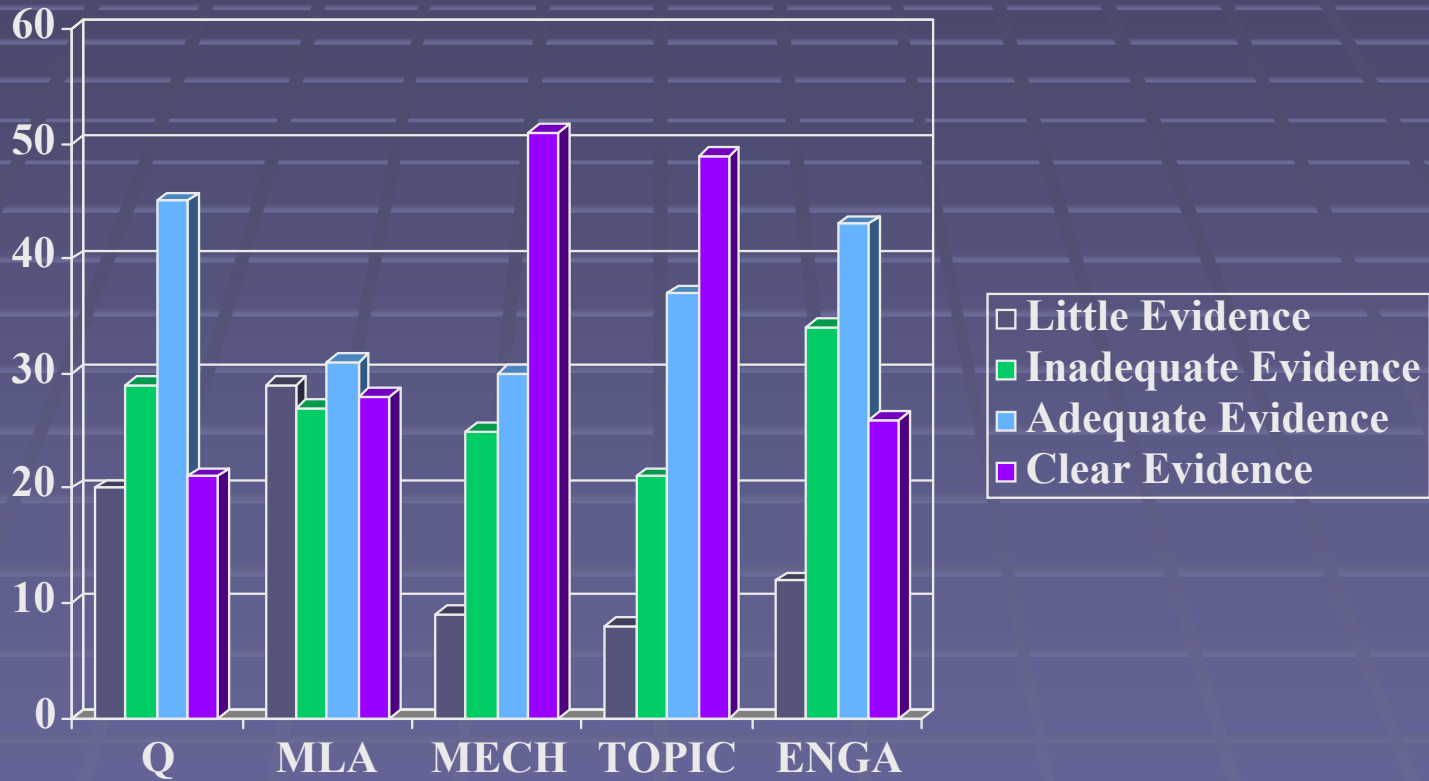
# Outcomes Assessed:

- Effective use of quotation
- Effective use of MLA conventions in citing sources
- Effective control over conventions of written English (including grammar, punctuation, etc.)
- Suitable choice and conception of topic
- Sufficient cognitive engagement with topic

# English 1A Assessment Results

N = 115	Little or No Evidence (1)	Inadequate Evidence (2)	Adequate Evidence (3)	Clear Evidence (4)
Use of Quotation	20	29	45	21
Use of MLA Conventions	29	27	31	28
Grammar and Punctuation	9	25	30	51
Quality of Topic	8	21	37	49
Engagement with Topic	12	34	43	26

# Assessment Results (Graph)



# Assessment Results (Simplified):

- Percentage of sample essays demonstrating clear or adequate evidence of SLO achievement:

Choice of topic	74.4
Grammar, etc.	70.4
Engagement w/topic	68.7
Use of quotation	57.4
Use of MLA conven.	51

# Interpretation of Results

- **Choice of Topic:**

- 75% of students sampled chose (or were assigned) topics that seemed suitable for late-1A writing.
- But 25% did not (including a number of high schoolish reports or “all-about” essays, too-broadly focused essays, etc.).
- Disagreement among readers whether I-Search papers were suitable for late 1A.
- Some sense that “choice of topic” was difficult to separate from “engagement with topic”--this criterion produced the greatest number of discrepancies (nearly 20%).

## ■ **Control over Conventions of Written English:**

- A very low discrepancy rate (3%), though some readers thought it difficult to distinguish between “frequent” and “occasional” errors.
- The 70% success rate was mildly reassuring (we thought), since control over language and mechanics is at least partly a function of how difficult the writing task is.
- We routinely see 80% (or higher) success in basic skills classes with the equivalent SLO when we do assessment readings--still considering what that means.

- **Engagement with Topic:**

- Readers agreed that this was a difficult criterion to define, but it produced an acceptable discrepancy rate of less than 15%.
- Nearly 70% of the students sampled wrote essays that did an adequate or better job of recognizing topic complexity, understanding and evaluating sources, displaying a sense of purpose, and pursuing a clear line of reasoning.
- A candidate for some primary trait analysis in our 1A assessment planned for spring 07.

## ■ **Effective Use of Quotation:**

- Our 8% discrepancy rate suggests that we defined this criterion sharply enough to get accurate data.
- The 57% success rate is disquieting.
- Discussion during and after the reading suggested that students were having equal difficulty with the mechanics of quoting, the ability to contextualize and analyze quotation effectively, the process of deciding when and how much (or little) to quote.

- **Use of MLA conventions:**

- Barely half of the essays demonstrated competency in this area, with a discrepancy rate of 12%.
- Students unable to demonstrate competency with this SLO had recurring problems with providing correct in-text citations as well as formatting Works Cited pages correctly.
- Discussion at the reading speculated that we aren't spending enough time teaching MLA conventions and quotation methods--or holding students to sufficient standards in our grading practices.

# Using the Results to Improve

- As a model for doing course-based assessment, this approach has been modified to assess learning in English 60A, 60B, and 50.
- English 1A assessment report sent to all English 1A instructors, underscoring evidence that we need to teach and assess quotation and MLA usage.
- Workshops on these SLOs in our WRC's
- Discussion and professional development activities on how to teach to these SLOs in discipline meetings.
- Development of course committees and course handbooks to make expectations clearer and provide pedagogical advice to all instructors.