IN THIS ISSUE of EVIDENCE

Using Waypoint to Teach Literature
Ken Tompkins

Late this summer, the college agreed to support a proposed Pilot Project in which ten faculty would use Waypoint to support writing evaluation in a variety of classes. The ten faculty are Pam Cross, Heather McGovern, Tom Kinsella, Lisa Honaker, Scott Rettberg, Ken Tompkins, David Burdick, Sonia Gonsalves, Tim Haresign and Wendel White.

Waypoint (http://www.gowaypoint.com) is a rubric managing program that supports evaluating writing in the classroom. It works like this:

Using Grading Rubrics for Program Assessment in Literature
Deborah Gussman

Once, when I was in my twenties, I consulted a psychic about the direction my life was taking. She told me that I had two younger sisters who needed my help, and that I was dating a man who drove too fast. "True," I thought. "Now tell me something I don't already know."

While formal assessment of teaching is obviously more serious than consulting psychics, it is nonetheless difficult at times to persuade faculty to see its value, particularly when the information it yields seems to do little more than validate what we already believe to be true. The Literature program's recent experiences with program assessment, however, have not only confirmed what we knew (i.e. we are doing a good job of teaching our students!), but have also made us aware of questions and issues we hadn't thought of asking and pointed us in some new and unexpected directions.

Over the last few years, the Literature faculty has been gradually incorporating assessment into our annual program review. This has taken a variety of forms, including developing a set of webpages that articulated our program's mission and learning objectives for students and participating in a survey on student perceptions of learning administered and analyzed by Sonia Gonsalves, with her advanced Psychology students. Last year, the program decided to assess student learning by creating a grading rubric that reflected our common goals and using it to evaluate graduating Literature majors' Senior Seminar theses.

Reflections on Using Rubrics for Writing Assignments
Heather McGovern

This year I'm participating in a pilot test of a computer system called WayPoint, which provides a system for building, using, and sharing online rubrics. While I've used rubrics for seven years, revisiting them as I enter them into WayPoint is improving them. I've been using a rating system I'll describe here (check minus, check, check plus), but WayPoint encourages ranking from 1-4, or more, which allows for finer distinctions and prevents placing most students in the middle. Also, WayPoint makes it efficient to provide additional instruction, something I'll try to balance with giving students feedback they can handle. Whether or not I finally support WayPoint, piloting it means revisiting my rubrics in a helpful way.

Some of my rubrics are simple, like this one for a claim letter students write about a real-life situation:

__Letter is in proper letter format and signed

__Letter clearly explains your problem or need

__Letter appropriately uses a direct or indirect approach

__Letter uses language effectively and correctly

__Letter should be persuasive to its audience for its purpose

__Letter clearly states what action you expect from the recipient

__Letter provides adequate information for recipient to take action

__Letter uses paragraphs effectively

__Letter has an appropriate intro, body, and conclusion

__Letter is in standard edited English (spelling, punctuation, etc.)

__Letter has a formality and tone appropriate for the audience

I use more detailed rubrics for longer assignments or earlier assignments in the class. I use the rubric above for a one page letter as the last assignment in a class. Earlier in the course, on an advertising analysis paper rubric, I introduce elements in "using paragraphs effectively":

__Body paragraphs each discuss only one main topic

__Body paragraphs evaluate how the ad tries to persuade its audience

__Body paragraphs discuss both the textual and visual elements of the ad

__Body paragraphs each contain adequate supporting detail

__Body paragraphs each further your essay, supporting and developing your thesis

In addition to using different rubrics based on when the assignment is in the semester, I use different rubrics to reflect specific assignment foci. What for the ad analysis is "Body paragraphs each contain adequate supporting detail" is, for the longer research paper (here with the topic of exploring a problem in a community to which you belong) items including:

__explains the problem(s) and its (their) effects on you and/or others in your community

__convinces the reader that the problem you describe occurs and is serious, using a variety of supporting evidence

__introduces several possible solutions to your problem

__explains the advantages and disadvantages of these potential solutions

__as appropriate, addresses whether or not or to what degree these solutions have been tried, either in your community or other communities

__cites articles, interviews, and websites on your issue and possible solutions to it

__argues for the best solution or combination of solutions for your problem

__provides breadth and depth of support for your

Using Waypoint
(Continued from page 1)

- the teacher creates an assignment using elements from a public library or creating them. Elements are collections of rubrics describing some aspect of writing that is to be evaluated.

- once the assignment has been created student writing is then graded (Waypoint does NOT grade essays) by the faculty and, when appropriate, one of the rubrics is checked. For example, I would mark, say, sentence fragments in a paper I was correcting but I would also select the rubric that describes the problem.

- When all of the papers in a class have been corrected and graded, an email is sent to each student with a listing of the rubrics selected by the faculty that best describe – positively or negatively – each student's writing.

The Waypoint assignment is viewed in any browser and rubrics can be selected quickly and accurately.

Waypoint is a powerful addition to the tools we all use to evaluate student writing. The library of elements/rubrics offered by Waypoint is large and growing. All of the rubrics that we create for the Pilot Project will be added to the library as our contribution.

Finally, Waypoint has the capability of organizing student/peer evaluations and teams of evaluators sharing assignments and rubrics.

We are fortunate in having the following disciplines included in the Pilot Project: Literature, Gerontology, Composition, General Studies and Photography.

We hope that, as a result of the Pilot Project, more faculty will want to join the Project and use Waypoint.

Using Grading Rubrics
(Continued from page 1)

Senior Seminar is the required capstone course for all Literature majors and is usually taken in the Fall or Spring of the year. All Literature faculty take turns teaching the Seminar, so that each semester's class features a different teacher and theme, though the requirements for the final paper are the same. Literature Students must have 96 credits to enroll in the course. The course is usually capped at 30. This section, which I taught last Spring, had 34 students originally, with 32 students completing the course. Students are required to complete a 30-page research paper (including an annotated bibliography of at least 20 secondary sources) that incorporates the theoretical concerns of the seminar while focusing on a literary topic, text, or author of interest to the student.

In preparation for the assessment, I drafted a grading rubric (by adapting one I had used previously for the course), reviewed it with Sonia Gonsalves, shared it with LITT faculty for comments, and made some minor revisions. Students were given the rubric at mid-semester and we reviewed it in class, explaining how it and their final papers would be used for both individual and program assessment. After the Spring term ended, I randomly distributed five different papers to each of the LITT faculty to grade using the rubric. Readings were not blind; the faculty were familiar with some but not necessarily all of the students whose papers they read.

The data yielded by this assessment are generally positive. In the broadest terms, we can claim that an overwhelming majority of our Seniors are meeting our expectations for achievement in the major; 97% of students received a passing grade for the course. More specifically, 76% received a grade of B or higher on the senior thesis, while only 21% received a passing grade lower than B. Only one student in this group received a non-passing grade.

Beyond providing information about student achievement, the assessment revealed some inter-

Rubrics and Grade Plateaus
Tim Haresign

This past August I volunteered to take part in pilot project to test an online system for creating and using rubrics for evaluating and providing feedback for students' work. I've just started using it so it is too early to report back on the relative merits of the system, but the development process has forced me to think more systematically about the mental rubrics I have always used for student evaluation.

Every one of us who teaches and evaluates students has rubrics we use for grading. In its most basic form a rubric is simply a set of criteria or conventions we use when assessing student performance. The rubrics most teachers use are both explicit, in the form of written and verbal instructions to the students, and implicit, in the form of pre-established mental criteria we use during evaluation. If we are doing a good job, we convey our expectations for each assignment to the students, and these expectations are a good match to the mental rubric we use when we provide evaluative feedback (i.e. grades).

I think one of the things we need to ask ourselves is: How well do the students understand the connection between their grade and the multiple criteria we all use to assign those grades? I know that a common trend in my classes is for some students to show improvement through the first two or three assignments (maybe they go from a 'C' to a 'B-') but then they seem to peak and hover around that B- mark the rest of the semester. I often feel, and I think I'm not alone, that for about 80% of the students the average they have two thirds of the way through the semester is an almost perfect predictor of their final average. For 'A' students this isn't a big problem, but for other students it means that there will be no further cognitive advancement in the class (assuming that's what we think our grades measure).

What does this have to do with rubrics? While there are a number of factors that probably contribute to grade plateaus, one aspect may be a form of learned helplessness. Writing down the rubrics (making them explicit) that I use has made me realize how many different factors go into evaluation. For example, for a freshman writing assignment I'm looking at grammar and spelling, overall organization and clarity, flow, thesis, evidence and a clear connection between thesis and evidence. Normally I read through a paper, making corrections and writing comments as I go, and at the end of the paper I assign a grade along with a summative statement. The grade represents my holistic judgment about how all the different factors come together. The early gains in performance that I see may be due to students picking up on and improving their major deficiencies through my feedback. The plateau I see may be partly caused by the students' lack of understanding as to how to make further (often more subtle) improvements.

The rubrics I will use will provide the students with a checklist showing their level of performance in multiple criterion areas for every assignment. Further, the system we are using will allow both the students and the instructors to see how their performance tracks in multiple areas from assignment to assignment over the course of the semester. For example, a student might see that their performance in clearly stating a thesis had gone to the highest level by the third assignment, but they had made little gain in improving spelling and grammar, or making clear connections. This would give the student clear feedback on a specific area to work on. These rubric forms are also handed out to the students with each assignment, making more explicit the criteria I use to categorize work into different performance levels. The rubric checklist will not replace hand-marking of the paper which will still serve as a valuable form of feedback. The rubric feedback is supplemental.

If my hypothesis has validity then I would expect that the use of explicit rubrics (and the tracking of different areas of performance) should allow students to make greater and more continuous improvements throughout the course of the semester. I will compare changes in performance this semester to changes in previous (non-explicit rubric) semesters to see if the types of changes seen support this hypothesis. I hope to report back in a future article.

Reflections on Using Rubrics
(Continued from page 2)

     solution

__addresses disadvantages of your solution and objections others might have

__explains how your solution is good despite its disadvantages and others' objections

__explains how others can learn more about or help solve your problem if they want to

__uses sources adequately to support your points and add credibility to your paper

__incorporates sources so that your voice is always the loudest

__uses specific details and examples to make ideas vivid and support your points

__quotes and paraphrases effectively, choosing to do both and when to do either well

__uses signal phrases (tag lines) when you quote and paraphrase, as needed

__uses internal citations correctly and as needed

__correctly punctuates all quotations, including long quotations

The rubric for the research paper also provides students with an outline, although we read samples and discuss how they can include required elements in many ways. I vary rubrics according to assignment complexity and student experience, but they all serve many functions. Students receive the rubrics and so know how their work will be evaluated. I refer to them as we practice specific skills, like direct and indirect letter writing. Students also use them to critique their peers' writing, and I use them to evaluate and respond to their writing.

In evaluating student work, I use rubrics like those above by indicating how well students have done on an assignment with a check plus, check, or check minus for each item on the checklist. This allows me to ensure I evaluate all students' assignments using the same criteria, determine the strengths and weaknesses of each student's work, and give quick feedback.

I return completed rubrics to students, supplemented with comments. Using a rubric allows me to focus my comments on just a few items that I think were particularly good or need urgent attention and allow the rubric to let students know how they did in other areas. This assists students in revising by providing a comprehensive written record to use even much later—it also reminds me if they conference with me while revising to resubmit or while I grade revisions.

Are rubrics a perfect answer? No. They take time to create, and sometimes I've neglected to put something on a rubric that I discovered affected how I wanted to evaluate student writing (i.e. having a title or varying sentence length). Also, rubrics change how I grade. When using rubrics, I often assign students lower grades. This means I am more objective, but it also sometimes means that almost no one gets an A and that the lowest grade is a 30%. Therefore, after I grade a set of papers, I sometimes adjust grades uniformly before recording or communicating them.

Another advantage to a more comprehensive written record is that it allows me to more easily compare how students did on various criteria. Sometimes I note that almost no students did well on a given criteria, so I may not count it against them, but instead revisit it in class. I may note almost everyone did very well on something we just covered intensely, and praise the class for its performance. One can have a general sense of class performance without using rubrics, but the record from a rubric means in ten minutes I can count, then give students numbers in class, supporting my praise to them with specific quantitative and qualitative evidence and demonstrating by example what I want them to practice in their writing.

Not only writing faculty find rubrics helpful: engineering faculty I consulted with used rubrics to provide feedback on student writing in engineering courses in an effort to improve majors' communication skills. If you've never used rubrics, try them.

Using Grading Rubrics
(Continued from page 3)

esting things about LITT faculty expectations and grading. By comparing my grades to those of four other LITT faculty members, we observed that the Literature faculty seem to agree on large-scale issues; there was only one discrepancy (C/C-) between passing/not passing grades. However, we tend to disagree on specific elements, assigning the same final grade to only 1 out of 25 total papers. However, this disagreement is generally small with less than a full grade difference up or down 64% of the time. There was significant disagreement (more than a full grade) in only 2 cases. While we have not yet completed our examination of these discrepancies, they suggest at least two courses of action: first, a need to discuss and clarify the various elements on the rubric in order to "norm" our responses, and second, a need to revise the rubric by making finer distinctions among the elements graded.

In addition to using the grading rubric, I also wrote a ten-item questionnaire administered to students on the last day of class to get a sense of their perceptions of the Literature program. Twenty-nine students completed the questionnaire. Four of the questions related specifically to the program assessment. Students responded to these as follows:

1. Did you feel that your course work in the Literature program prepared you for Senior Seminar?

    YES – 18   SOMEWHAT – 11
    NOT AT ALL – 0

2. Did any particular course or courses help provide you with the skills required for Senior Seminar (writing, critical thinking, research, computer skills)?

    LITERARY RESEARCH (24)
    LITERARY METHODOLOGIES (7)
    ALL LITT CLASSES (2)
    ENGLISH LANGUAGE & GRAMMAR (2)
    RESTORATION LIT (2)
    AMERICAN LIT (1)
    MICROCOMPUTERS (1)

NEW MEDIA STUDIES (1)
ALL GUSSMAN'S CLASSES (1)
WRITING LAB (1)

3. Were the goals and requirements of Senior Seminar clearly articulated?

    YES – 28   SOMEWHAT –1
    NOT AT ALL – 0

4. Was the grading rubric useful in preparing your final paper?

    YES – 24   SOMEWHAT – 4
    NOT AT ALL – 0   N/A – 1

These responses are generally consistent with the evidence provided by the review of final papers, indicating that the program as a whole, specific program courses (especially the required Research and Methodologies courses), and the use of a grading rubric helped them to do well in the Senior Seminar course and in the major. Their soft comments tend to support these conclusions. A number of students expressed enthusiasm for using the grading rubric in particular:

- "This was the first time I used a grading rubric; I wish other teachers would offer this.

- "With this form [grading rubric] I was able to see exactly what you were looking for in my paper."

- "[The grading rubric was] Extremely useful. I used it as a checklist to make sure I was completing paper requirements."

- "By evaluating the rubric, we were able to tell what was necessary."

- "The culmination of [all my LITT classes] allowed me the confidence I needed to write this monolith of a paper. I am forever indebted."

- "I know what you (Deb) look for in terms of writing, but having it spelled out for me [with a rubric] was helpful."

Using Grading Rubrics
(Continued from page 6)

While additional analysis of our results may provide new insights, our assessment, thus far, has given us relevant information we can use to guide our teaching, grading, and discussions of curriculum and pedagogy. It has revealed our effectiveness in providing students with the knowledge and skills we think they should have, as well as the need for program-wide discussion over grading and expectations. We will be repeating the assessment this Spring with Lisa Honaker teaching the course, and we intend to revise the rubric signifi-cantly. Indeed, one of the unexpected directions assessment has taken us is the piloting of Waypoint, an on-line system for developing and implementing rubrics for classroom use, led by Ken Tompkins, and in which several LITT and other faculty across the college are participating. We expect that the Waypoint pilot project will generate new ideas for creating a more effective grading rubric for Senior Seminar. We see program assessment as an on-going process; this is one of many steps the Literature program will be taking to ensure we are delivering, and students are receiving, the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. No psychics required.

Grading Rubric for Senior Seminar/SP 05

A (SUPERIOR)

_____Insightful, cogent response to a literary text and the questions that the text raises

_____Demonstrates a familiarity with literary terms and theories in general, and literary criticism of the primary text being analyzed specifically

_____Incorporates theories and secondary source material smoothly into an argument.

_____Reasoning is persuasive and supported by detailed, relevant examples

_____Central point or thesis is focused for a specific audience, clearly defined, and gracefully stated

_____The writer's rhetorical stance is clearly articulated

_____Organizational strategies are appropriate to the topic and consistently controlled

_____Paragraph breaks correspond to shifts in topic; paragraph topics are focused and clearly articulated; transitions are smooth and logical.

_____Original imagery may be used to convey thoughts and emotions.

_____Ideas are expressed clearly and directly; sentences are varied and consistently well-constructed.

_____Research is thorough, well documented, and effectively integrated into the text.

_____Final draft is close to error-free.

B (GOOD)

_____Provides a thoughtful, well-developed response to a literary text & the questions the text raises.

_____Shows a familiarity with literary terms and theories, as well as related critical texts, incorporates them into an argument.

_____Reasoning is sensible and supported by appropriate examples.

_____The writer's rhetorical stance is clearly stated or implied.

_____Organizational strategies are appropriate to the topic and usually controlled.

_____The central idea or thesis is focused and clearly defined.

Grading Rubric for Senior Seminar

_____Paragraph breaks correspond to shifts in topic. The paragraph topics are usually focused; transitions are attempted although they are sometimes weak or ineffective.

_____No original imagery is used, or imagery may be ineffective.

_____Ideas are usually expressed clearly, but prose is characterized by a lack of directness and/or conciseness; occasionally imprecise word choice; little sentence variety; occasional major and minor errors in grammar.

_____There is clear evidence of research, but it is not always appropriately used or effectively integrated into the text.

C (AVERAGE)

_____Presents an adequate response to a literary text and the questions the text raises.

_____Demonstrates some familiarity with literary terms and theories, as well as related critical texts, but does not incorporate them clearly.

_____Paper is developed with acceptable reasoning and adequate examples, but these examples are sometimes sketchy, vague, or repetitious.

_____Central point or thesis is apparent, but not clearly stated.

_____The writer's rhetorical stance is implied, but not clearly stated.

_____Organizational strategies are usually controlled.

_____Paragraph breaks usually correspond to shifts in topic. The paragraph topics are usually focused.

_____Some transitions are attempted, but are weak or ineffective. Imagery lacks effectiveness.

_____Ideas are usually expressed clearly but the prose is characterized by a lack of directness and/or lack of conciseness; frequently imprecise word choice; little sentence variety; occasional major errors in grammar and frequent minor errors.

_____There is evidence of research, but it is not always appropriately used or effectively integrated into the text.

D (POOR)

Responds to a literary text in an illogical and/or incomplete way. While some good examples are provided, for the most part the essay is underdeveloped. The paper displays little or no familiarity with literary terms, theories or criticism. The central point or thesis is confusing, sometimes contradictory, and/or not explicitly stated. The paper relies on summary, rather than analysis. No rhetorical stance is articulated. Organizational strategies are only partially in control and applied inconsistently. Paragraph breaks are arbitrary and paragraph topics are not always apparent. Transitions are choppy. Ideas are often obscured by repeated major errors in grammar and usage. There is little evidence of research, and that is poorly documented and ineffectively used to develop the paper.

F (UNACCEPTABLE)

An "F" paper presents a simplistic, inappropriate and/or incoherent response to a literary text. The central point is not apparent. The paper relies on summary, rather than analysis. The argument is inappropriately brief. Organizational strategies are not apparent. Ideas are obscured by repeated major errors in grammar and usage. No research is evident.