

# 2012

College of Charleston  
Wabash Assessment  
Portfolio

Submitted by the College  
of Charleston



## **[SECTION V: HOW STUDENTS GROW ON THE OUTCOMES IDENTIFIED (1.15.12)]**

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**College of Charleston**  
**Institutional Assessment Portfolio: Section V**  
**How Students Grow on the Outcomes the Institution**  
**Identified as its Focus in the Wabash Study**

**Brief overview of The College and the incoming class of 2015**

The College of Charleston has approximately 10,000 undergraduate students and 1,500 graduate students. The campus is composed of 66% female students, 16% minority students, and approximately a third of our students are residential.

The Class of 2015 is composed of 2361 freshmen representing 42 states and 13 countries. The incoming class is a high achieving group with SAT scores averaging between 1060 and 1220 for in-state students and 1130 and 1270 for out-of-state students. There are 198 first year students enrolled in the Honors College with an average SAT of 1358.

**Assessment question to be addressed**

How, when, and under what conditions does integrated learning occur in the First Year Experience (FYE) and other high impact learning experiences (such as senior capstone, undergraduate research, internship/field placement, global immersion, study abroad, and community engagement), and in interdisciplinary minors, majors, and programs of study?

**AAC&U definition of integrative learning**

Integrative learning is an understanding and a disposition that a student builds across the curriculum and co-curriculum, from making simple connections among ideas and experiences to synthesizing and transferring learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus.

**The first outcome for this study**

**Freshman seminar course:** First-Year Seminars (FYSM) are 3 credit courses in the FYE that focus on topics within or across the disciplines of study in the College curriculum. Seminars introduce students to the discipline, its ways of thinking and methods of conducting research. Seminars also address the needs of first-year students: introducing students to the College's liberal arts and sciences curriculum and to resources such as the library, computing facilities, advising and other student support services.

**Learning communities:** Learning communities (LC) include peer groups enrolled in two classes together with a connecting reflective seminar that is peer facilitated by upper-division students who complete classroom training.

- Outcome 1: Students will demonstrate integrative learning skills through their FYE coursework based on the AAC&U Value Rubric.
  - Expectation: scores will fall within the levels of 1 and 2 for the elements "connections to experience" and "connections to discipline;" measured on a 4 point continuum where 0 is a possible score.

## Summary and Conclusions

### 1. Conclusion 1

Some of the evidence collected indicates that first-year students demonstrate integrative learning in writing samples more often when asked to make “connections to experience” as compared to “connections to discipline”.

- More writing samples scored a 1 or higher in Evidence 1.1 when comparing “connections to experience” (Pre - 73.5%, Post - 64.9%) samples to “connections to discipline” (Pre - 42.8%, Post - 35.7%) samples. (Figures 2 and 3)

### 2. Conclusion 2

In general, Learning Community (LC) students scored higher in both “connections to discipline” and “experience” as compared to the FYSM students when given a single prompt late in the semester. This makes some sense since LCs are combinations of two courses and this arrangement may make students more aware of integrative approaches to subject matter.

- 68.5 % of LC student samples scored a 1 or higher as compared to 50% of FYSM student samples when asked to make integrative “connections to discipline” (Figure 7)
- 86.6 % of LC student samples scored a 1 or higher as compared to 40% of FYSM student samples when asked to make integrative “connections to experience” (Figure 8)

### 3. Conclusion 3

In aggregate, the samples collected for Evidence 1.1 did not show significant growth between the beginning and the end of the semester. When examined individually, some students showed growth in integrative learning while others showed a decrease in integrative learning. This conclusion corroborates much of the research in rhetoric and composition on students' development as writers. Numerous longitudinal studies of student writers show that students' progress unevenly as writers, and our findings seem to confirm this. On average, the pool of first-year students examined demonstrated integrative learning outcomes consistent with a 1 in the modified VALUE Rubric employed in this assessment.

- Figure 1 shows little overall change in the scoring profile when comparing pre- and post- writing samples. The average scores were also similar, with pre- samples scoring an average of 0.85 and post- samples scoring an average of 0.76.

- When examined individually in Evidence 1.1, students showed uneven learning gains: 28.8% of students showed an increase in integrative learning, 31.9% showed no change, and 39.1% showed a decrease in integrative learning (Figure 4).
- Consistent with what was observed in Evidence 1.1, students given the single prompt at the end of the semester scored an average of 0.83 (Figure 5).

### **Lessons learned (path forward)**

1. The reading workshop that assessed the writing samples produced a significant discussion about integrative writing and how to best teach in an interdisciplinary way and how to assess student learning through writing samples. A positive finding is that even with an imperfect tool, a fruitful discussion about teaching approaches and student learning can be created. This suggested to the readers that the results could be used to generate more discussion among faculty teaching in the first-year. In addition it was clear that more effort needs to be placed on educating faculty about interdisciplinary teaching and on how to assess/teach integrative writing. This could help us target FYSMs to increase the level of interdisciplinary teaching that occurs in those single topic seminars. We propose that our path forward in the coming year would entail three distinct pieces.

- A spring mini-workshop where the results of this assessment are presented and used as a catalyst for discussion about integrative learning in our first-year. Part of this workshop would be getting faculty to begin creating a more standardized prompt (yet still useful for individual classes) to assess our first-year students.
- Our spring First-Year Experience workshop will build on the fall and spring writing assessments to create a half day workshop on interdisciplinary teaching. This would include thinking about creating assignments that engage students in integrative learning and learning how to best teach written communication in their specific disciplines.
- We will run the writing prompt assessment again with more standardized prompts in the Fall 2012-2013 academic year.

2. Based on what we have learned to date, we are curious to look further at how students may develop these skills at later points in their academic careers. Thus, we are considering revising our second outcome to look at writing samples from senior capstone courses. A review of other findings (BCSSE and NSSE, in particular) of incoming students' expectations and actual experiences regarding academic challenge indicate a need for further study of our senior courses. It seems pertinent to determine if increased integrative learning is more apparent to our upper-level students and to determine if they have developed, as one would expect, a maturity in their abilities to integrate knowledge, particularly as it relates to a disciplinary perspective.

3. Reviewing the earlier sections of the assessment portfolio, several findings are consistently evidenced. 1) Our first year students do not come in to the institution with extensive experience in integrative learning. 2) Their expectations for experiencing integrative learning in college do not match their actual experiences during the first year. And, 3) First-year students' writing that reflects integrative learning tends to be very elementary even when prompted. Focus group work revealed that some faculty seem to have low expectations for freshmen understanding of integrative learning, and those faculty may not provide enough intentionality or encouragement for students producing this type of work. More broadly, student focus groups and survey data cited high percentages (40%) of freshmen being "frequently" bored in class and their freshmen year to be less challenging than they expected in their first year in college. Finally, incoming students' levels of interaction with faculty are low during their high school years, and the interaction remains low during their first year. Increased discussions with faculty outside the classroom are an integral component in making an academic experience a high impact experience, and this is an area that requires further discussion on our campus.

## Summary of Evidence: Integrative Learning and the FYE Individual Pieces of Evidence

Papers written in response to a prompt regarding integrative learning were collected from 13 first-year seminars and 15 learning communities. To determine our sample, we selected all pre-post papers written in four different courses and five randomly selected papers from each of the remaining 24 courses. We included papers from all courses whose work was submitted, regardless of the prompt, except in four cases where the materials submitted were incomplete or the prompt asked students to prove mathematical statements using mathematical language. There were at least two cases where instructors who did not design a pre/post assignment submitted two batches of student papers. In these cases, we used the first batch of papers for our sample.

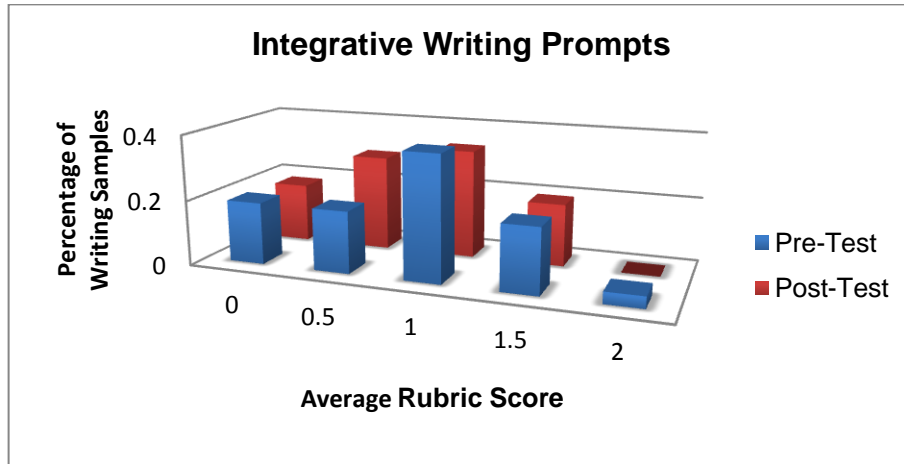
Nine faculty members from different disciplines (including psychology, English, Asian studies, and biology) scored papers using the following rubric adapted from the AAC&U VALUE Rubric on Integrative Learning:

	0	1	2
<b>Connections to Experience</b>	Makes no attempt to identify connections between life experiences and academic texts and ideas.	<b>Identifies</b> connections between life experiences and those academic texts and ideas <b>perceived as similar and related</b> to own interests.	<b>Compares</b> life experiences and academic knowledge to infer differences, as well as similarities, and <b>acknowledge perspectives</b> other than own.
<b>Connections to Discipline</b>	Makes no attempt to present examples, facts, or theories from more than one field of study or perspective.	When prompted, <b>presents</b> examples, facts, or theories from more than one field of study or perspective.	When prompted, <b>connects</b> examples, facts, or theories from more than one field of study or perspective.

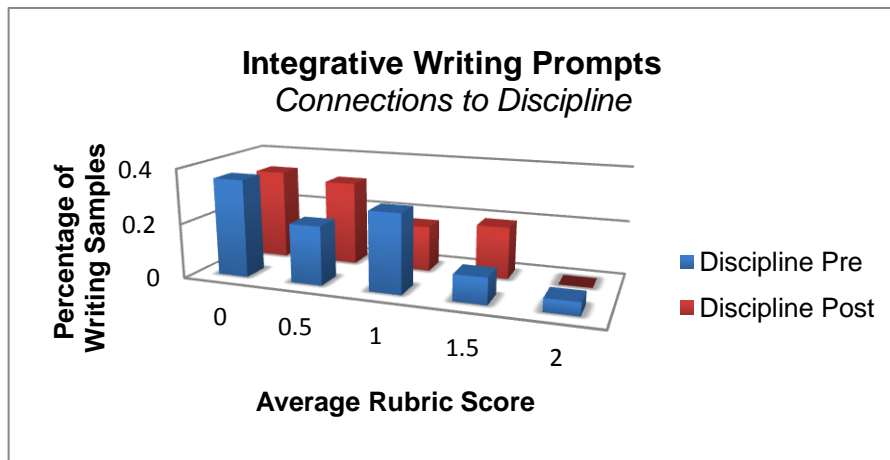
In cases where a reader determined that a student earned a 1 in one category and a 2 in another, readers were instructed to score the paper using the higher score. Each paper was scored by at least two readers. In cases where one reader scored a paper 0 and another scored it 2, this paper was read by a third reader. Final scores were tabulated by averaging readers' scores.

### Evidence 1.1

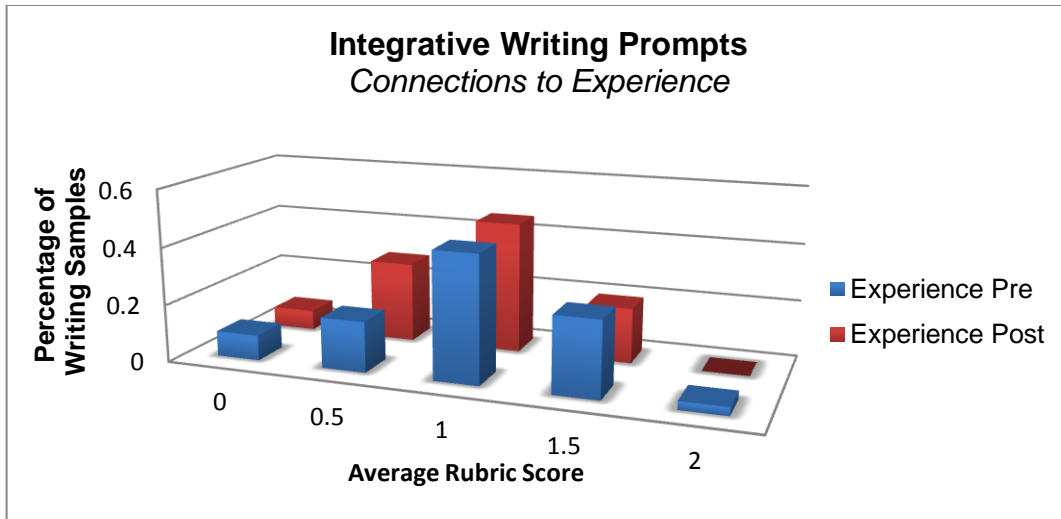
Data collected from a pre-post assessment of papers written by FYE students in response to prompts delivered at the beginning and end of the semester regarding integrative learning (Figures 1-4).



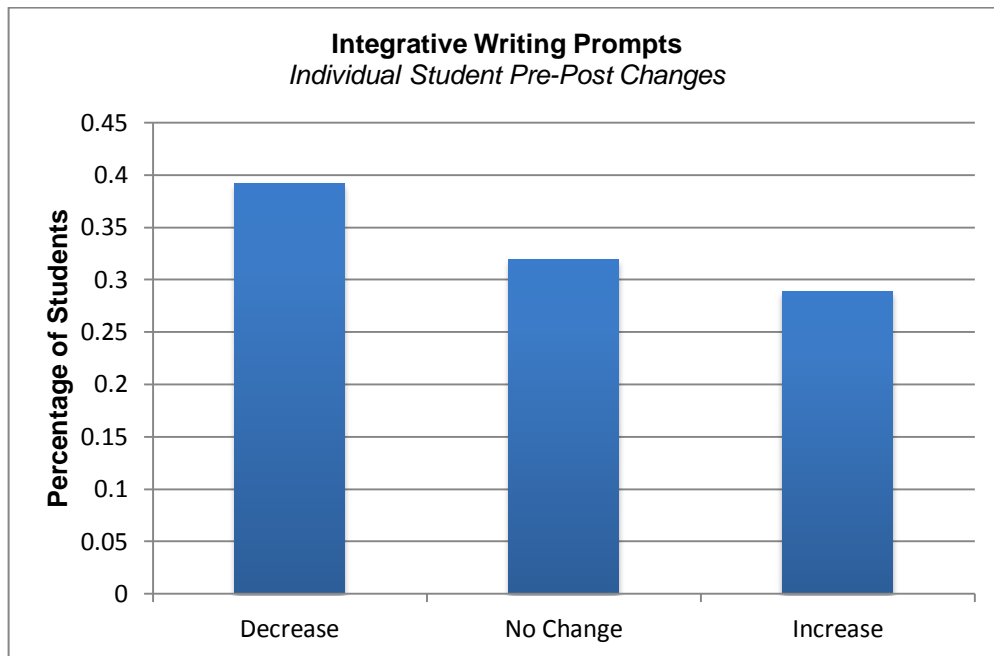
**Figure 1: Overall Rubric Scores for Pre/Post Prompt Responses.** A graph depicting the percentage of writing samples that scored within each Rubric Scoring category. The rubric only has possible scores of 0, 1 or 2. The graph shows the average score of each writing sample from two independent readers. The analysis pooled the data from the four courses that were analyzed. (n=110 Pre-Test Samples, n=99 Post Test Samples)



**Figure 2: Pre/Post Responses Addressing Connections to Discipline.** A graph depicting the percentage of writing samples that scored within each Rubric Scoring category. This graph further analyzes the data presented in Figure 1 by subdividing the data set to look at only those making Connections to Discipline. (n=42 Pre-Test Samples, n=42 Post-Test Samples, 2 Learning Communities)



**Figure 3: Pre/Post Responses Addressing Connections to Experience.** A graph depicting the percentage of writing samples that scored within each Rubric Scoring category. This graph further analyzes the data presented in Figure 1 by subdividing the data set to look at only those making Connections to Experience. (n=68 Pre-Test Samples, n=57 Post-Test Samples, 2 Learning Communities)

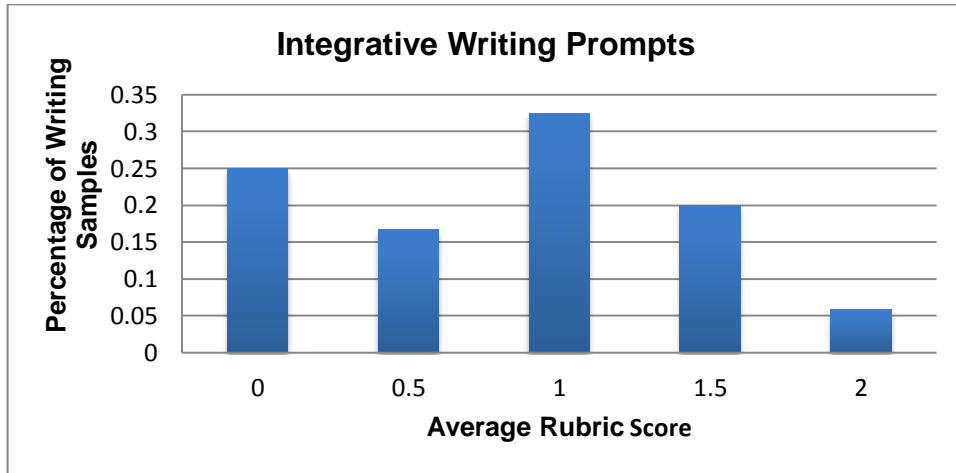


**Figure 4: Individual Student Pre-Post Writing Sample Scores.** A graph depicting the percentage of students that showed a decrease, increase, or no change in their rubric scoring when comparing their pre and post writing samples. (n=97 students)

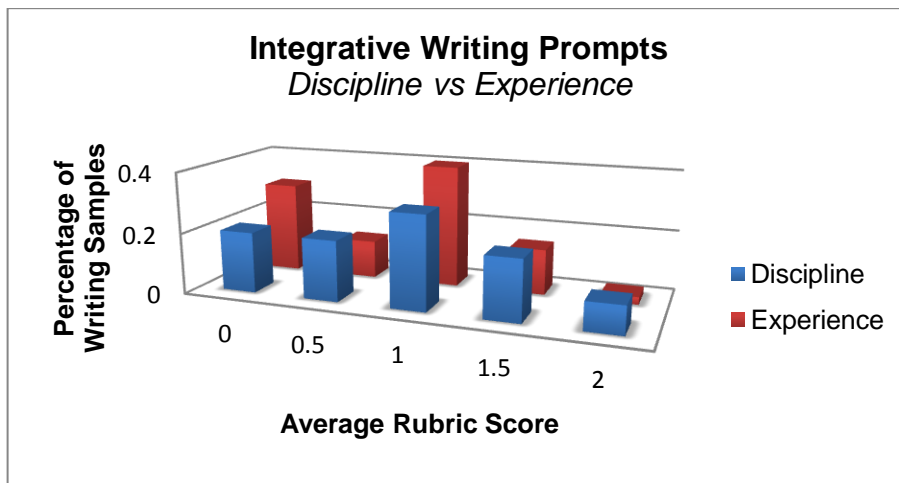


### Evidence 1.2

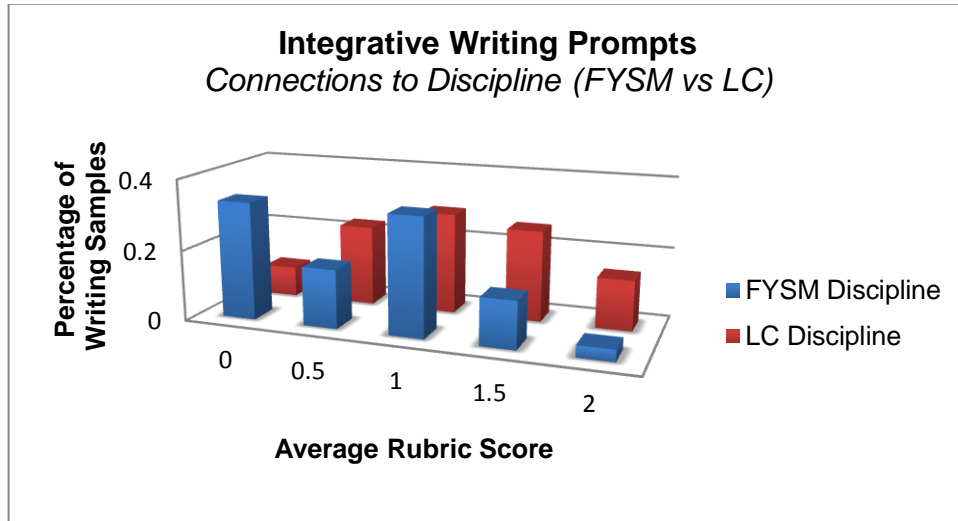
Data collected from an assessment of papers written by FYE students in response to a prompt delivered in the last five weeks of the semester regarding integrative learning (Figures 5-8)



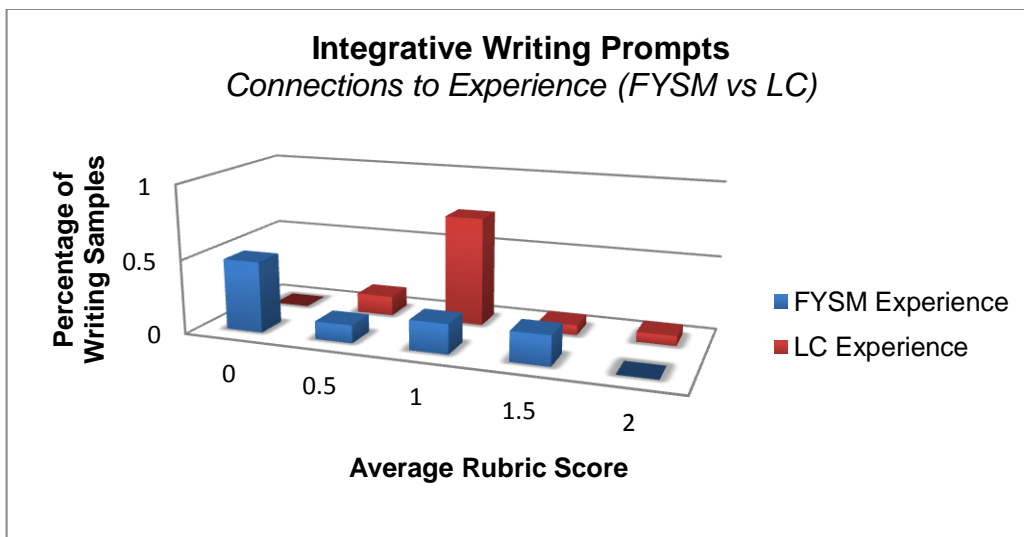
**Figure 5: Overall Rubric Scores for Single Writing Prompt Responses.** A graph depicting the percentage of writing samples that scored within each Rubric Scoring category. The rubric only has possible scores of 0, 1 or 2. The graph shows the average score of each writing sample from two independent readers. (n= 120 samples)



**Figure 6: Writing Prompt Responses Separated by Connections to Discipline or Experience.** A graph depicting the percentage of writing samples that scored within each Rubric Scoring category. This graph further analyzes the data presented in figure 5 by subdividing the data set by the prompt’s targeting of integrative connections to “Discipline” (n=65 samples from 13 courses) or “Experience” (n=40 samples from 8 courses)



**Figure 7: Writing Prompt Responses Addressing Connections to Discipline within FYSMs or LCs.** A graph depicting the percentage of writing samples that scored within each Rubric Scoring category. This graph further analyzes the data presented in figure 6 by subdividing the Connections to Discipline data set by the type of FYE course the prompt was delivered in, either a First Year Seminar (FYSM, n=30 samples from 6 courses) or Learning Community (LC, n=35 samples from 7 courses).



**Figure 8: Writing Prompt Responses Addressing Connections to Experience within FYSMs or LCs.** A graph depicting the percentage of writing samples that scored within each Rubric Scoring category. This graph further analyzes the data presented in figure 6 by subdividing the Connections to Experience data set by the type of FYE course the prompt was delivered in, either a First Year Seminar (FYSM, n=25 samples from 5 courses) or Learning Community (LC, n=15 samples from 3 courses).