



2012 UW-La Crosse Student Writing Survey Highlights

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Background

According to NSSE 2011 results, **UW-L seniors report that their experience at UW-L contributed to their ability to write clearly and effectively to a greater degree than students in all other comparison groups** (UW Comprehensives, Carnegie Peers, and NSSE Participating Institutions). This follow-up survey was developed to:

- Assess UW-L students' perceptions of writing experiences, improvements in writing, and writing practices
- Develop an institution-wide picture of student writing
- Gather data that may inform direct and indirect assessments of writing courses
- Generate conversations about writing among faculty and staff

Survey Design and Analysis

The survey had five parts: demographic information, writing experiences (WPA-NSSE questions), writing improvement, writing practices, and open-ended questions.

A total of 1271 complete responses were received (16% of 7,825 full-time undergraduates).

A review of overall results examined average scores and frequency of response for each item. Possible differences across classification levels was analyzed using ANOVA and post-hoc t-tests. Additional analyses of possible differences between juniors and seniors in Writing in the Major programs (WM) and Non-WM majors was conducted using t-tests.

Student Perceptions of Improvement

Students in general reported improvement in each skill area. **On average 74% of students reported some or a lot of improvement across all skill areas.** Below are some highlights, sorted by overall means for all students:

- *A Lot of - Some Improvement:* Incorporating sources into their writing, citing or referencing sources in a bibliography, focusing ideas in their writing, analyzing or evaluating something they have read, researched, or observed
- *Some - Very Little Improvement:* Narrating or describing one of your own experiences, writing informally to figure out ideas, explaining in writing the meaning of numerical or statistical data, creating a project with multimedia, allowing enough time to work through the composing process, and including drawings, tables, photos, or visual content.

First-year students reported more improvement than any other group in "using feedback from peers to make revisions" and "giving feedback on writing to peers." **Seniors reported more improvement than any other group in numerous areas.**

Typical Writing Practices

First-year and sophomore students reported the following items as more typical of their writing process than other groups:

- I include a thesis statement in the opening paragraph of each paper I write (Fy > So, Sr; So > Jr, Sr);
- I write using an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion (Fy > Jr, Sr ; So > Jr, Sr);
- I assume my readers are unfamiliar with the subjects I am writing about (Fy > Sr ; So > Sr);
- I use feedback from others to improve my own writing (Fy > So, Jr, Sr).

Typical Writing Practices (continued)

Seniors reported the following items as more typical of their writing process than other groups:

- I refer to assignment guidelines when I am writing (Sr > Fy);
- It is easy for me to be detailed while I write (Sr, Jr > Fy).

Writing in the Major

The following significant differences were revealed between upper division students who were enrolled in Writing-in-the-Major (WM) programs versus those who were not.

| Writing Practices Item | Overall | WM | Non-WM |
|---|---------|-------------|--------|
| Practicing different types of writing | 2.96 | 3.07 | 2.89 |
| Being clear and concise in your writing | 3.05 | 3.19 | 3.05 |
| Citing or referencing sources in a bibliography | 3.21 | 3.34 | 3.19 |
| Allowing enough time to work through the composing process | 2.68 | 2.70 | 2.54 |
| Using UW-L Library resources such as books, reference materials, etc. | 2.87 | 3.06 | 2.84 |
| Writing in the style and format of a specific discipline | 2.92 | 3.19 | 2.94 |

Next Steps

Additional future indirect assessments—by level, discipline/major, and college—could provide a higher level of resolution on student writing experiences, writing improvement, and writing practices.

For more information about this survey, which is available for use in your program, please visit:
<https://sites.google.com/a/uwlax.edu/writing-survey>