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Student Performance with and Attitudes toward Electronic Distributed Assessment in First-Year Composition Classes

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STUDENT PERFORMANCE WITH AND ATTITUDES TOWARD ELECTRONIC DISTRIBUTED ASSESSMENT IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION CLASSES

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STUDENT PERFORMANCE WITH AND ATTITUDES TOWARD ELECTRONIC DISTRIBUTED ASSESSMENT IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION CLASSES

By

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................ iv

ABSTRACT ....................................................................................................................... v

1. INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................... 1

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ..................................................................................... 10

3. PROCEDURES ......................................................................................................... 30

4. RESULTS ................................................................................................................. 36

5. CONCLUSION ......................................................................................................... 64

LIST OF REFERENCES .................................................................................................. 75

APPENDIX A: SURVEYS AND FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS ..................................... 79

APPENDIX B: INTRODUCTION TO REDESIGNED ENGLISH 1312 COURSE .......... 84

APPENDIX C: EVALUATOR TRAINING SCHEDULE ............................................... 85

APPENDIX D: ENGL 1312 COURSE ASSIGNMENTS OVERVIEW ...................... 86

APPENDIX E: EXAMPLE EVALUATOR COMMENTING GUIDELINES .................... 87

APPENDIX F: LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH REPORT ASSIGNMENT .... 88

APPENDIX G: LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH REPORT RUBRIC ........... 92

CURRICULUM VITA ..................................................................................................... 94
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ABSTRACT

In Fall 2008, UTEP’s composition department implemented a pilot program to test a redesign of English 1312, their second-semester freshman composition course. In addition to a redesigned curriculum, a system of electronic distributed assessment was implemented in ten sections of English 1312. Instead of the traditional format of a class where instructors grade all student assignments, a group of teaching assistants graded student writing anonymously using standardized grading rubrics. The system, which has been used at Texas Tech University since 2002, was put in place at UTEP in order to enhance efficiency and consistency in the teaching of this course.

Previous research on electronic distributed assessment has focused on instructor and administrator perspectives on the grading system; comparatively little research has been done on student attitudes toward and performance with electronic distributed assessment. To measure this, two electronic surveys about the grading system were administered to students in the redesigned sections of the course. Student dropout rates and final grades in the redesigned sections of the course were compared with data from traditionally taught sections of the course. Finally, data from group interviews was collected to determine student attitudes toward the electronic distributed assessment system used in the Fall 2008 semester.
1. INTRODUCTION

In the fall semester of 2008, a pilot program was started at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) composition department. Ten of 23 sections of UTEP’s second semester composition courses, required for all entering students, were introduced as redesigned courses.

The redesigned course was dramatically different from the course taught in previous years. Traditionally, the course, titled Research and Critical Writing, entailed the teaching of the process of writing an 8-12 page research paper. Students would analyze arguments, prepare an annotated bibliography, write a persuasive essay, and at the end of the course complete a long research paper. The course was similar in format to many other universities’ second-semester composition courses. The majority of classes were taught in the traditional face-to-face manner, though UTEP did offer several sections of online hybrid courses (courses that met once a week face-to-face, typically in a computer classroom, and online the rest of the time) in the past few years.

While a comprehensive overview of the changes to the 1312 curriculum is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note the context for changes to the system of assessment. Through a grant funded by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, a team comprised of professors Kate Mangelsdorf, director of the University Writing Center, and Beth Brunk-Chavez, director of First-Year Composition, and six experienced composition lecturers designed the changes to the content and delivery of the 1312 courses. They began the redesign work in January of 2008 and met regularly through the summer to discuss this redesign.

Although the purpose of the grant was to redesign the delivery of the course, the pilot instructors agreed that a curriculum redesign was long overdue to make the course more relevant to students’ lives and allow students to develop skills that they could use in other courses and in
the workplace. Anne Beaufort’s book *College Writing and Beyond* was influential in instructors’ changes to the assignments for the course. Beaufort emphasizes the need to make students aware of genres and of audience in their writing for composition courses, in order to help students adapt their writing to the various discourse communities they will encounter throughout their college education (9-12). In addition, instructors wanted to make the course more helpful to students entering the workforce. Clay Spinuzzi describes how the work structures that characterize the Information Age are very different from those in a past era of “relatively stable, rationalized, modular work structures” (“Technical” 266). He writes that the knowledge work that is required of 21st century workers demands “different sorts of texts, and it also demands different ways of thinking about how those texts are produced, received, and managed” (Spinuzzi, “What” 3).

In view of this, the long research paper began to seem like a relic, considering the emphasis of shorter formats in writing on the Internet and other media. In addition, the traditional English 1312 curriculum offered few chances to incorporate digital media into projects. In previous years, individual instructors had leeway to offer some projects that incorporated more technology; however, it was not a standard part of the curriculum.

To address these issues, instructors changed the required assignments for the course (see Appendix D to view a list of the major assignments in the course). A discourse community map and a genre analysis assignment were added to address issues brought up by Beaufort. Other assignments required students to use digital media to a much greater degree than before. A group documentary project required students to use filmmaking software such as iMovie or GarageBand. In place of the long research paper, the final project was an advocacy website that included assignments completed throughout the semester.
The committee also decided to look at ways to address nagging problems in the way composition courses are delivered. Mangelsdorf was particularly concerned about the “one size fits all” model of composition. In a grant proposal for the pilot program, she writes, “Although instructors and administrators in the First-Year Composition program are dedicated to student progress, the program structure limits its ability to respond effectively to the wide range of skills students bring to the classroom” (4). In particular at UTEP, many students whose second language is English enroll in composition courses. An instructor would typically find students ranging from those highly proficient in written English to those who struggled to produce a short essay (Mangelsdorf 4). Many instructors found they did not have the time or training to adequately help these students.

To help ESL students as well as other students who typically struggle in composition courses, a major component of the redesign was to direct students who needed extra help to tutoring sessions at the Writing Center, where they could receive help for specific issues that could not be provided in class. All students who received less than a C- on an assignment were required to visit the Writing Center at least twice before the next assignment. The Writing Center would allow students not meeting the expectations of the course to get additional, individualized feedback on their writing.

The committee also looked at other inefficiencies in the way these courses were administered. Classes were capped at 25 students, due primarily to the time-intensive nature of grading writing assignments. There was no standardized curriculum for 1312 beyond a few broad requirements. Each 1312 instructor could have widely-varying grading standards and widely-varying styles of providing feedback on assignments. Lack of a standardized grading rubric did not allow for fair comparison of grades across courses. Mangelsdorf reports that grade inflation
had been a problem in previous semesters, with 29 percent of students receiving As in 2006, and 33 percent receiving failing grades or withdrawing from the course (4).

The lack of standardization was made worse by the fact that the instructors who taught 1312 courses were often graduate students and part-time or even full-time lecturers with no background in the field of composition studies. There was little composition specialists could do to monitor the teaching of the course and the evaluation of assignments. Student experiences in the course could vary widely, with some students taught by instructors with years of experience and others taught by instructors with no previous classroom experience.

In order to allow English 1312 courses to be delivered more uniformly and more efficiently, some dramatic changes were made to the redesigned sections. One major shift was to change the format of the classes in the pilot program to online hybrid classes, where students would meet once a week in a classroom for 80 minutes and then “meet online” the other class day. Part of the motivation behind this change was to use classroom space more efficiently; another motivation was to allow students to develop their online literacy skills.

However, a more dramatic change in the way the course was administered was in the way students were assessed, which is the subject of this study. In the redesigned courses, grading was separate from classroom teaching, with outside evaluators grading most student assignments rather than instructors. The Texas Tech University composition program had had much success (from an administrative standpoint) with “electronic distributed assessment” in their Texas Tech Online Print Integrated Curriculum(TOPIC)/ Interactive Composition Online (ICON) program that was adopted in 2002. Seeing this success, the department decided to implement a similar electronic grading system for the redesigned courses.
While I discuss TOPIC/ICON in more detail in Chapter 2, in brief, TOPIC/ICON is a system that utilizes sophisticated software to separate classroom grading from teaching in order to maximize the efficiency of composition courses. In TOPIC/ICON, all student writing assignments in both first- and second-semester composition classes are submitted to a software program called ICON. Rather than instructors grading student assignments, pools of “document instructors” grade and comment on all assignments, and “classroom instructors” provide classroom instruction to students. A database called TOPIC stores student data and grades (Kemp). See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of the benefits and drawbacks of TOPIC/ICON.

The system of assessment implemented in Fall 2008 in UTEP’s English 1312 classes was conceptually based on Texas Tech’s and had the following features: A pool of 13 teaching assistants (master’s students studying literature, creative writing, and rhetoric and writing studies as well as one rhetoric and composition Ph.D. student) were trained as evaluators to grade most student writing assignments. (Instructors graded three assignments and had some input into the students’ final project grades. They also were in charge of students’ participation grades). Students submitted assignments to the online classroom management system WebCT. For each assignment, one or two evaluators were assigned to grade and comment on all submitted assignments for each section. All grading was done anonymously. Evaluators commented on drafts of assignments using the comments feature on Microsoft Word. They graded final submissions of assignments using an online grading rubric with preset comments to assign grades. The evaluators could also add a summary comment to the rubric if they wished. The rubrics were saved as PDF files and provided to students through WebCT. 

To try to ensure consistency in grading, before each grading cycle, evaluators met with the director and the associate director of composition for a norming session to review the
assignment and rubric, read several documents, and apply the rubric together. They met for approximately two hours seven times during the semester. See the appendices for examples of grading rubrics used during the semester, the schedule of meetings to norm papers, and the guidelines for commenting on student assignments. The director and associate director would also randomly check the comments and grades before they were released to students. Students could appeal grades to a committee if they thought an evaluator grade was unfair. In the future, additional quality control features may be added to the system (for example, Texas Tech allows students to rate grader feedback).

Due to technological constraints, in the first semester of implementation, only one evaluator graded each final draft (Texas Tech typically has two graders for each final draft, with an average of the two scores taken as the final grade, to make sure each grade is fair). Also, the process of assigning evaluators to assignments was done manually. To avoid an evaluator getting too familiar with students’ writing in one section of the course, administrators assigned evaluators to different sections for every assignment, although the same TA did comment on drafts and grade the final version.

Six instructors taught the ten sections of 1312 in the pilot program. Four instructors were experienced full-time lecturers who each had several years of experience teaching hybrid courses and had helped develop the new 1312 curriculum. One instructor who was expected to teach two sections of the program unexpectedly quit at the beginning of the semester, so two rhetoric and composition Ph.D. students each volunteered to teach one of the sections assigned to this instructor although these two assistant instructors had neither the experience of teaching hybrid courses nor the ability to prepare to teach the new curriculum in advance, the director determined—because of their disciplinary knowledge—that they would be the ideal
replacements. While more experienced instructors would have been preferable to teach the two sections, the sudden switch of instructors was necessary due to the circumstances.

In comparison, one teaching assistant, one assistant instructor, and four part-time instructors taught the thirteen traditional sections of 1312 in Fall 2008.

At the beginning of the Fall 2008 semester, a total of 338 students enrolled in the pilot sections of English 1312 at UTEP (versus 282 who enrolled in the traditionally taught sections). The sections were identified as hybrid courses in UTEP’s Fall 2008 class schedule, though students were not aware of the other changes to the course, including the new grading system, until the semester started. However, instructors did make students aware of the changes to the course through a letter from the director of composition, which can be viewed in Appendix B. While not encouraged, students did have the option to switch to traditional sections of the course, though no data is available on how many students did this.

Until a new software system planned for future semesters could be designed and launched, many aspects of the grading process were handled manually in UTEP’s program. This is in contrast to Texas Tech’s TOPIC/ICON, where most of the grading process is handled by software. However, the system was similar enough to Texas Tech’s that it would allow administrators and instructors to determine whether the distributed assessment system was viable to implement in future semesters.

Pilot instructors who planned UTEP’s redesigned course saw the following benefits to using the system: Class capacity in the sections could be raised from 25 to 35 due to reduced instructor grading load. Instructors would also be more able to focus on content and pedagogy rather than assessment. From a work distribution perspective, the electronic distributed assessment system would allow administrators to give first-year TAs (who typically could not
teach until earning 18 hours in graduate-level English classes) time to gradually adjust to the composition program as evaluators while being trained to teach students in the classroom.

A standardized set of assignments would allow the course to be taught in a consistent way that was more connected to the goals of the composition program than in previous 1312 classes. In addition, pilot instructors believed uniform procedures for grading carried many benefits. Students would be evaluated based on pre-determined rubrics developed by the composition program rather than those developed by individual instructors. Evaluators would be given extensive training in providing student feedback, reducing instructor feedback that was limited or not useful to students. Grading would also be more consistent across class sections, likely resulting in less grade inflation. The more standardized grading would allow administrators to more easily compare grade data across class sections, which would help them make changes to the program.

In addition, instructors would be able to give students more assignments throughout the semester, and students could receive feedback on those assignments more quickly. With the new system, evaluators could provide feedback in days rather than in a week or more, which is typical grading time for many instructors.

Though adopting electronic distributed assessment clearly has many potential benefits from an administrator’s perspective, little has been written about the effects of the system from a pedagogical perspective. Though some research has been published about electronic distributed assessment since TOPIC/ICON’s inception in 2002 (which I will discuss in Chapter 2), most of it has been written from the perspective of administrators and faculty. None, to my knowledge, have focused on student response to the system. It is still unclear whether the system improves student writing performance or makes students more successful in composition courses. In
addition, no studies have discussed in detail student satisfaction with electronic distributed assessment.

In this study I will report on student attitudes and performance using electronic distributed assessment. To study this, I will analyze student surveys and interviews as well as dropout rates and final grades.

Here is an overview of the chapters that follow:

In Chapter 2, I will review previous studies on electronic distributed assessment as well as previous research on assessment of writing.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the methodology used in this study.

In Chapter 4, I will provide a review of the results of the study.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss the implications of the results.
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Composition departments have been dealing with a challenging set of problems for years, in terms of curriculum, delivery, and assessment in first-year composition classes. In this chapter, I will discuss a system I will term “electronic distributed assessment” (EDA) as a measure to address some of these problems. I will begin by addressing issues of course delivery. I will then give a brief overview of writing assessment theory as it relates to this study. Finally, I will discuss research on specific issues relating to how EDA affects students.

Kathleen Blake Yancey has described the model of delivery for composition courses at colleges and universities as a “laboratory model” (“Delivering” 8) or a “one-to-one tutorial model” (“Made” 310). Yancey characterizes the courses taught under this model as a single teacher in a small class with many assignments. Under the tutorial model, compositionists have sought to “reduce class size…to conference with students, to respond vociferously to each student paper, and to understand that in our students’ eyes we are the respondent who matters” (Yancey, “Made” 310).

However, composition programs across the United States, including at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), have struggled with this model. At UTEP, as at a majority of universities across the United States, two semesters of composition courses are required for all entering freshmen, unless they test out of the course or take it at a community college. A great number of sections are required to accommodate students, since maximum class capacities are typically set at between 20 and 25 students.

Due to the number of sections required, schools often struggle with hiring qualified staff to teach these students. Composition departments at large public universities such as UTEP rely heavily on adjunct faculty and teaching assistants, many of whom have little or no background in
composition studies. Adjuncts and teaching assistants typically receive only a semester or two of training in teaching composition before entering the classroom. Often there is not much oversight into how individual teachers develop syllabi and grade assignments.

Recently, institutions have begun to look for systematic reforms in the way composition classes are delivered. Some schools have reformed the requirements for composition. At Purdue University, the traditional two-semester course has been condensed into a four-credit one-semester course (Weiser 36). Many states, including Texas, are allowing students to fulfill composition requirements in high school through growing dual credit programs.

Some schools are tinkering with the tutorial model of composition. Joyce Mangano Neff proposes restructuring composition classes to a “lecture-and-lab” model common in other departments. Large lecture sections of 200 to 300 students, taught by specialists in rhetoric and composition, would be accompanied by lab sections with 20 to 25 students, headed by teaching assistants or instructors (Neff 55). However, models like Neff’s have yet to be widely adopted.

Technology has provided more opportunities for systematic reform of composition programs. At UTEP and many other institutions, composition courses have been offered as online hybrid courses. Of course, one motivation for the move toward hybrid classes is to utilize classroom space more efficiently. However, Brunk-Chavez and Miller note the benefits of the hybrid format, particularly in encouraging collaboration, and describe how the hybrid format is particularly compatible with the type of learning done in first-year composition courses: “[the course’s] process-oriented pedagogy, its emphasis on collaboration, and the kind of learning students generally do in first-year writing; these aspects coincided with current scholarship on teaching online” (“Hybrid” 3).
TOPIC/ICON: A NEW WAY TO DELIVER COMPOSITION

However, even with the use of technology, efforts at changing the laboratory model of teaching composition have been stymied by the time-intensive nature of assessing student texts. Raising course capacities puts an unfair burden on instructors who are expected to grade students’ writing assignments. It also reduces the time instructors can spend responding to each student’s work. In one of the most radical efforts to make composition classes more efficient, writing program administrators at Texas Tech’s composition department attempted to reduce the bottleneck of assessment by separating teaching from assessment. In 2002, the university implemented Texas Tech Online-Print Integrated Curriculum (TOPIC), a sophisticated online software program and database, as part of the Interactive Composition Online (ICON) program to facilitate assessment of student texts in first-year composition courses. By making assessment more efficient, Texas Tech was able to raise class capacities in its composition classes from 25 to 35 students (Rickly 192).

As I described in Chapter 1, the basic premise behind Texas Tech’s EDA model is that rather than instructors grading student assignments, as is done under the laboratory model of teaching, pools of “document instructors” grade and comment on all assignments anonymously using standardized rubrics, and “classroom instructors” provide classroom instruction to students using a common curriculum. TOPIC stores student data and grades. In addition, first-year composition courses are taught as hybrid courses, meeting face-to-face once a week for 80 minutes. As mentioned earlier, this reduces the amount of classroom space required for composition classes (Kemp, “TOPIC”).

Rebecca Rickly, a writing program administrator at Texas Tech at the time of the switch to EDA, describes the benefits of the change in an essay for Delivering College Composition.
Rickly describes how WPAs collaborated to discuss how TOPIC was developed as a means to achieve programmatic goals given the constraints of the writing program. The system has allowed first-year composition to be administered in a way that is in line with departmental goals, such as “more and varied writing experiences,” “timely, helpful feedback,” and “frequent peer and self-critique” (191). Rickly notes that first-year composition is now “fiscally responsible” and more “criteria-driven” (193). She also describes how students now receive more of a standardized education. Criteria for each draft or critique is presented in class and then used by document instructors to assess each draft or critique. Through technology, composition specialists can now easily monitor the quality of assessment of document instructors through the use of technology (Rickly 192).

As I discussed in Chapter 1, UTEP’s composition program has decided to adopt EDA for an overall redesign of its English 1312 course, with the additional component of an enhanced Writing Center, for many of the same reasons as Texas Tech. The model is intended to improve the efficiency and consistency of the program. In a grant proposal to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Mangelsdorf cites four major reasons for changing to EDA:

- Fewer classroom instructors will be needed because of larger class size.
- Teaching assistants without 18 hours of coursework in the field will be able to fully participate in instruction by grading papers and tutoring.
- Half as many classrooms will be needed.
- Fewer students will need to repeat the course. (5-6)

Like at Texas Tech, it seems a large motivation for the change to EDA is a more efficient use of labor and resources.
However, while the success of electronic distributed assessment in increasing efficiency from an administrative standpoint is clear, pedagogically, EDA remains to be studied in depth. To my knowledge, Texas Tech is the only institution to have adopted EDA for first-year composition courses. While several Texas Tech faculty and students have published research on TOPIC since its inception in 2002, most of the research has focused on administrator and faculty reaction to the system; none to my knowledge has focused on student performance and attitudes under this system of assessment.

STUDENT WRITING ASSESSMENT BACKGROUND

The lack of research about student performance and attitudes under EDA highlights a general lack of research on student writing assessment, particularly classroom assessment. Only recently has student writing assessment been a topic of scholarly research, and much of that research has been focused on developing tests to place students in composition classes.

Recently, some compositionists have called for administrators to carefully consider the effects of assessment on students. Clearly, assessment is an integral part of teaching writing to students and of their progress in the academy. Performance on tests often determines where students are placed, and performance on important class assignments determines whether students pass or fail classes.

In her history of assessment in composition, Kathleen Blake Yancey states that we need to ask the question, “Whose needs does this writing assessment serve?” (“Looking” 498). Yancey sees the need to balance the needs of individuals and of programs in looking at assessment, both programmatic and classroom. Yancey focuses on three major issues: 1) the role that the self should play in any assessment, 2) programmatic assessment, specifically, how assessments can be used to help students, and 3) research, or assessment as “knowledge-making
endeavor” (“Looking” 484-85). She states the need to examine how others understand themselves as a result of “our interpretations, our representations, our assessments” (Yancey, “Looking” 498).

Brian Huot emphasizes the importance of gauging the effects of assessment on stakeholders – administrators as well as teachers and students: “Any use of any writing assessment should be accompanied with a validity argument that addresses technical documentation important to those who work in educational measurement, honors political considerations important to administrative and governmental agencies, and most importantly considers the impact on the educational environment and the consequences for individual students and teachers.” (“(Re)Articulating” 55). While Huot is referring to programmatic assessment in this statement, one can easily see how this type of consideration of stakeholders applies just as well to classroom assessment, particularly in the case of EDA.

While not as widely theorized about as program assessment, classroom writing assessment clearly also has a powerful effect on students. Yancey describes how classroom assessments have the power to shape the students themselves. “[W]riting assessment, because it wields so much power, plays a crucial role in what self, or selves, will be permitted” (“Looking” 498). She describes how agency of students is limited by those who create assignments and the criteria by which it is scored: “[T]he authorship of such a text is likely to be a static, single-voiced self who can only anticipate and fulfill the expert’s expectations” (Yancey, “Looking” 499). Huot notes the power of grades as “evaluative judgment(s) that connect our judgments with specific cultural beliefs and assumptions that affect both group and personal identity beyond our classrooms” (“Toward” 167). De-emphasizing grades, Huot discusses how assessment should be
directly linked to teaching, with students coming away from the classroom being able to assess their own texts, whether graded or not (“Toward” 165).

However, despite the importance of assessment, both Huot and Yancey note writing teachers’ lack of interest in and even opposition to writing assessment in the past half-century. Yancey notes that for a discipline grounded in humanism, assessment is often “still associated with number-crunching and reductionism” (“Looking” 495).

HISTORY OF WRITING ASSESSMENT

At this point I will give a brief history of writing assessment in the past 50 years. While much of the history relates to standardized placement testing procedures, I believe the history is very relevant to the development of recent classroom grading procedures, particularly in the case of EDA, where administrators are seeking to develop standards of grading for classroom writing.

Early assessments of writing were developed by test-makers, not instructors, and were designed more for reliability in placing students in courses than for their validity as measures of writing ability. In the first half of the 20th century, assessment and classroom teaching were generally considered separate spheres. According to Yancey, “in the 1950s, 90 percent of a survey of 100 schools used a placement test, and 44 percent used an exit exam” that was factored into the course grade (“Looking” 489). Many of the exams included no writing at all and were multiple choice reading comprehension tests (Yancey, “Looking” 488). Yancey refers to these assessments, with their emphasis on reliability, as the “first wave” of assessment.

Yancey characterizes teachers as instrumental in urging the development of more valid direct measures of student writing ability. Yancey states that “the last 50 years of writing assessment can be narrativized as the teacher-layperson (often successfully) challenging the psychometric expert, developing and then applying both expertise and theory located not in
psychometrics, but in rhetoric, in reading and hermeneutics, and increasingly, in writing practice” (“Looking” 484).

This resulted in what Yancey calls the “second wave” of assessment that started about 1970, when holistic writing assessment came to be seen as a reliable measure of student writing (“Looking” 484). The Advanced Placement (AP) assessment at was a major milestone in this second wave. The AP assessment included a standardized course curriculums, and the course culminated in a final essay test. The test was notable in that test-makers were able to develop standardized procedures to grade the essays in a reliable way. The test used carefully developed writing prompts, scoring guides, and methods of calculating acceptable rater agreement (Yancey 490). Edward M. White, who helped develop methods for holistic assessment in the 1970s, states that by the early 1980s, a survey showed almost 90 percent used holistic scoring for writing assessment (qtd. in “Holistic” 83). While not as reliable or as inexpensive for administrators as a multiple choice test, Yancey characterizes the holistic assessment of student writing as a victory for classroom instructors who saw the assessment as more relevant to classroom teaching than multiple choice tests.

It was in the second wave of assessment when control of grades generally shifted to classroom teachers, and the holistic scoring model was replicated as the model for classroom grading: “When these same writing teachers returned to their classrooms, they found that their teaching had changed. With newfound confidence in their ability to give consistent and fair grades, they were able to use evaluation as part of their teaching…Some teachers brought scoring guides, sample papers, and peer evaluation directly into their teaching of writing” (“Holistic” 89).
In the late 1970s and early 1980s, classroom assessment began to take on increased importance and researchers viewed it as a valid field of study. In 1981, Nancy Sommers published “Responding to Student Writing,” the first formal study of classroom assessment (Yancey “Looking” 497). Other research by compositionists followed, including *Teaching and Assessing Writing* by White and *Encountering Student Texts* by Bruce Lawson, Susan Sterr Ryan, and W. Ross Winterowd, as well as textbooks on pedagogy. Research tended to be based on classroom experience rather than student data and was focused on practical classroom issues of developing fair grading rubrics, providing helpful response to student writing, and on newly developed portfolio methods of grading. More recently, scholars such as White, Huot, and Lester Faigley have attempted to give classroom assessment a more theoretical footing.

**FUTURE OF WRITING ASSESSMENT**

As the field of writing assessment faces the future, developments in the field include a greater emphasis on context and the development of local standards of assessment based on discourse communities. Huot argues for the establishment of local standards, and for developing new means of validating them:

Developing writing assessment procedures upon an epistemological basis that honors local standards, includes a specific context for both the composing and reading of student writing and allows the communal interpretation of written communication is an important first step in furnishing a new theoretical umbrella for assessing student writing...We must also develop procedures with which to document and validate their use…more qualitative and ethnographic validation procedures like interviews, observations and thick descriptions. (“(Re)Articulating” 106)
Meanwhile, calls for changes to the curriculum of composition courses also necessarily involve changes to assessment. Anne Beaufort points out that writing in first-year composition courses is often not taught as tied to a specific discourse community, which she sees as a disservice to students: “Freshman writing, if taught with an eye toward transfer of learning and with an explicit acknowledgment of the context of freshman writing itself as a social practice, can set students on a course of life-long learning so that they know how to learn to become better and better writers in a variety of social contexts” (7). Yancey ties the idea of reforming composition classes to emphasize writing as social practice with a call for changes in the standard model of grading: “But if we believe that writing is social, shouldn’t the system of circulation – the paths that the writing takes – extend beyond and around the single path from student to teacher?” (“Made” 310).

In addition, recently, there has been a greater emphasis on the need for research in the field of assessment, as much remains unknown about the most effective means of assessment. It seems the struggle is still ongoing to balance the interests of all parties involved in assessment, particularly the sometimes competing interests of administrators, teachers, and students. In their histories of assessment, both Yancey and Huot ultimately recast assessment as a knowledge-making endeavor, from which much can be gleaned to inform classroom practices and to improve student writing.

While neither Yancey nor Huot make mention of TOPIC/ICON in their histories of writing assessment, in keeping with this discussion, I will further examine several specific issues in how EDA, combined with a hybrid model of course delivery, may affect students’ learning.
DISCUSSION OF ISSUES RELATED TO STUDENT EXPERIENCE WITH EDA

A largely ignored issue in existing research on EDA is whether students are satisfied with their experience in classes that use EDA. What do students learn under EDA, and is it a more effective system of teaching and assessing than the traditional model used for teaching composition classes?

Perhaps the biggest student concern under EDA is the way the system changes the traditional teacher-student relationship. By design, the system is meant to make most of what is taught in first-year composition more uniform. This necessarily means that instructors are given less power to develop their own syllabi and set their own grading standards. Under Texas Tech’s version of EDA, Kemp writes that classroom instructors are more like “coaches” who help students to achieve success on their assignments (“TOPIC”).

CHANGE IN TRADITIONAL TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

Several reports indicate that Texas Tech composition students expressed frustration at the loss of the traditional teacher-student relationship under the new model. Rickly summarizes some students’ frustrations with EDA: “Showing eagerness, being prepared, speaking out in class, and simply ‘working hard’ did not influence their grades, and many who had relied on these strategies in the past felt frustrated” (194). Kemp also reports that in the first semester of TOPIC’s use, many students complained about the disconnect between students and graders and described teachers as unknowledgable about TOPIC (“TOPIC”). In a 2006 Chronicle of Higher Education article, Wasley quotes a student as saying the system was “impersonal.” Teachers were similarly frustrated. Wasley states that the most common complaint of graduate student
instructors she interviewed was that “the system erodes their authority and autonomy as teachers.” One instructor said she felt “emasculated.” While the second wave of assessment gave teachers more authority over grades, EDA seems a step back to the first wave assessment, with assessments done outside the classroom.

Despite frustrations at the loss of this relationship, it is important to consider the constraints of many first-year composition programs. While even Kemp acknowledges the laboratory model of pedagogy as an ideal (“a mentorship connection, a skilled and empathetic teacher working with fifteen or sixteen students” (“Colloquy”)), this is not often possible given the resources at a large public university. As mentioned earlier, composition instructors are often graduate students and part-time faculty who have a background in literature rather than rhetoric and/or composition. Yancey observes that “the result of this staffing practice—that is, staffing courses with faculty who are underpaid and also underprepared for the teaching task—is that composition itself is too often not defined as the concepts, materials, and methods of a discipline” (“Delivering” 204). In addition, instructors are often not trained teachers. Kemp estimates that Texas Tech’s composition department experiences a turnover rate of 25 to 30 percent per year. He argues that most composition teachers are so inexperienced that students learn virtually nothing from being taught by them: “I simply don't believe…that much very productive goes on in general education required classes taught by inexperienced teachers” (“Colloquy”). Yancey states that “how composition can be delivered in terms of faculty agent is very much part of curricular design” (Yancey, “Delivering” 205).

However, it seems that under EDA, Texas Tech and UTEP attempt to balance the lessened face-to-face classroom learning with other modes of learning. These include online
learning, one-on-one conferences with instructors outside of class, and, in UTEP’s case, an increased presence of the Writing Center.

ONLINE LEARNING

While a hybrid delivery format is not strictly a part of EDA, I believe it is important to consider the hybrid format in considering student satisfaction with first-year composition courses that implement EDA, since both UTEP and Texas Tech have implemented the hybrid format along with EDA. Texas Tech’s research about EDA is notably silent on the results of adopting the hybrid format.

Research on hybrid and fully online classes shows both positives and negatives about online learning. Brunk-Chavez and Miller note the changes in society require changes in the way university courses are taught: “Understanding that the culture at large is moving toward an increased use of technology for collaboration, communication, document sharing, research, and so on, creates a strong case for academia’s embrace of that increase” (“Hybrid” 10). In studies of English 1312 courses taught as hybrid classes at UTEP in previous semesters, Brunk-Chavez and Miller found positive results among students. At the end of a pilot semester, survey results showed over 70 percent of students accepting and/or recommending hybrid courses (“Hybrid” 24). Kemp reported a withdrawal rate of about 6 percent in TOPIC’s first semester of use, showing that most students did not dislike the course enough to drop it. In 2006, Kemp reported that there was no significant variation in freshman enrollment or retention in four years using the program (“Freshman”) (though it must be noted that Texas Tech does not currently offer the option of traditional face-to-face sections of first-year composition classes).
As mentioned previously, online discussions may be a particularly good fit for writing classes. In a study of student satisfaction with online and hybrid first-year composition classes at Arizona State University, Patricia Webb Boyd found that students valued online discussions. Specifically, “online interactions introduced them to multiple perspectives; online space allowed them to share opinions more freely without fear of reproach; and online experiences directly benefited their writing” (235).

However, the hybrid delivery of the redesigned course also raises some concerns for students. Research by David Alan Sapp and James Simon indicates that dropout rates for online classes are higher than for regular face-to-face classes, and that students tend to be less satisfied with online classes than with face-to-face classes. The authors blame a lack of personal connection with the instructor and other students (Sapp and Simon 475). Brunk-Chavez and Miller found a higher dropout rate in hybrid classes than traditional classes (22 percent versus 18 percent) at UTEP in a pilot semester, though they attributed the results to student uncertainty about the format in its first semester of adoption (“Hybrid” 32).

Boyd reports that a large majority of students in the online or hybrid first-year composition classes she studied tended to be dissatisfied with their interactions with their instructors, due to “a lack of opportunities to interact with their instructors, general confusion about the instructors’ expectations of them, and uncertainty about their evaluation of students’ work” (229). However, Brunk-Chavez and Miller and Boyd seem to agree that much of student satisfaction depends on instructors’ experience with the format of the course. As Boyd states, “in order to realize [the potentials of online learning], instructors must pay careful
attention to their assignment construction, their feedback to students, and the interactions between instructor/student and student/student” (227).

Online learning also raises potential concern about problems with software, though in recent years classroom management software has become much more reliable than in the past. Kemp reports many students complained about technological issues in the first semester of TOPIC’s use. Student complaints included slow turnaround time due to back-ups in the system, confusion about how to use the system, problems logging on to the system, and lack of access to computers (“TOPIC”).

STUDENT PERFORMANCE WITH EDA

An additional question is in how much student writing improves using EDA. Advocates of EDA would argue that an increased amount of writing under what is assumed to be more rigorous grading standards would result in better student writing compared with face-to-face classroom models. Kemp argues that students’ writing has improved since they are required to write more under the new system, with its faster turnaround time: “An average of 35 pieces of writing a semester, nearly three times as many as before” (Wasley). Students receive prompter feedback under the new system, with controlled standards of feedback. In addition, a standardized syllabus is meant to ensure that what is taught in the classroom is in line with goals of the composition department. However, no data is available on whether the revamped classes at Texas Tech improve student writing more or less than traditional face-to-face classes.

In particular, feedback on student papers is lacking in context under EDA, which many compositionists argue is essential in students’ growth as writers. Sommers describes how “the
key to successful commenting is to have what is said in the comments and what is done in the classroom mutually reinforce an enrich each other” (239). In a study of anonymous assessment, Carol Rutz describes how students wanted a dialogue with those who graded their writing, whether the feedback was negative or positive in tone (336). For Huot, context and knowledge of a student’s writing are key for instructors responding to student writing. He believes teachers should have a knowledge of the “assignment, of the student, of the student’s past texts, past drafts, comments in class, process work, work in peer groups and other contents of a portfolio, if there is one” (Huot, “(Re)Articulating” 122).

However, from an administrator perspective, it is important to take into consideration the difference between ideal modes of commenting and what actually takes place in composition classrooms. While ideally an instructor could respond to each student text with detailed comments, this often does not happen even under the traditional model of teaching. Some new instructors may not be well-trained in writing effective comments, and some instructors may simply not take the time to write detailed comments on every student text. Sommers, in her study of composition teachers’ commenting practices, found that “for the most part, teachers do not respond to student writing with the kind of thoughtful commentary which will help students to engage with the issues they are writing about or which will help them think about their purposes and goals in writing a specific text” (238). At Texas Tech, one large motivation for adopting EDA was to reduce the effect of individual instructors’ poor commenting. Rickly describes how before the adoption of TOPIC, some teaching assistants and instructors would write detailed comments and other instructors would write only a few words when assigning final grades to students. With TOPIC there is now a great deal of oversight over the commenting process. Commenting is now in line with criteria determined by the department. Now, “the criteria-based
feedback they received clarified what was wrong and right with their writing and gave them focused, specific direction to improve,” Rickly claims (194). In addition, students can also rate the quality of the feedback they received, allowing for continual improvement of responses for evaluators.

FAIRNESS OF EDA

Another issue to consider is fairness of evaluations under EDA. While Texas Tech WPAs do not claim to grade student compositions under the same levels of standardization as professionally developed tests, they do argue that the system is more objective than classroom grading. From the standpoint of reliability, Texas Tech’s composition department seems to have been able to standardize grading to a much greater degree than before. As mentioned earlier, standardized syllabi and rubrics developed by administrators ensure that instructors adhere more closely to programmatic goals. Kemp also mentions workshops, email list discussions, and face-to-face counseling as means of norming (“Colloquy”). Rickly states that in the first semester of use, only 14 percent of papers required a third reading, indicating an 86 percent interrater reliability rate (186).

In addition, administrators seem to have been successful in recalibrating grading criteria to curb grade inflation: in the first semester of use of TOPIC/ICON, only 13 percent of students received As; most students (51 percent) received a B in the course. Fifteen percent of students failed. In 2007, Rich Rice said the average grade in the course was an 87 percent, which he points to as a sign of progress in combating grade inflation (“Lecture”). The standardized grades allow for easy comparison of students across sections. Data on grades can more easily be mined
to make improvements to the program, which is already being done at Texas Tech, a potential benefit for students in the program as well as for composition research.

However, an important caveat to this discussion is that reliability and fairness are not necessarily equivalent. Huot states that “translating ‘reliability’ into ‘fairness’ is not only inaccurate, it is dangerous, because it equates the statistical consistency of the judgments being made with their value” (88). In other words, simply standardizing scoring does not automatically make the scoring fair. An additional point is that it is apparent that Texas Tech composition students do encounter inconsistencies in grading, particularly because they deal with a great number of raters throughout the semester. Rickly describes how many students disagreed with document instructors’ assessments and went to classroom instructors to “translate” (194). In Wasley’s article, a student was interviewed who was satisfied with the comments he received but reported inconsistencies in grading (an 85 or 90 on a draft and a 72 as a final grade) and appealing grades about “half a dozen times” each semester (Wasley). Kemp reports that to ensure fairness to students, a classroom instructor has the power to override any grade and is ultimately responsible for final grades (“Colloquy”).

PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS RAISED BY EDA

A major concern raised by some compositionists is that the program is a move back to current-traditional, product-based writing pedagogy after years of working under a process-based model focused on the student’s learning. As Berlin writes, “in teaching writing we are tacitly teaching a version of reality and the student’s place and mode of operation in it” (766). In particular, the emphasis on attaining “fairness” and “objectivity” in grading seems to align itself with a positivist worldview. While administrators at Texas Tech have built in practices
associated with the process model, such as peer review and drafts, they admit that more emphasis is put on product than was previously done. Kemp claims that under TOPIC “writing is evaluated solely, and necessarily, on the basis of the writing itself and no other factors” (“TOPIC”). Rickly views TOPIC as part of an “environmental model” of teaching, a “task-based combination of process and product models of teaching” (195). In Wasley’s article, Shirley K. Rose, president of the Council of Writing Program Administrators, states that the system goes too far in its anonymous assessment: “‘It raises the question of whether we care about the texts or the student writing the texts,’ Proponents of more-mainstream instruction models, she says, focus on ‘not what the papers of the student are, but what the writing is for the student,’ emphasizing context and process over product.”

IS EDA THE RIGHT FIT FOR UTEP’S STUDENT POPULATION?

A final issue to consider is whether EDA is the right fit for every institution. While the financial and labor situation at UTEP’s composition department is similar to Texas Tech’s, UTEP’s student population is quite different from the population at Texas Tech. Unlike Texas Tech, UTEP is an open admissions “commuter” university. A large majority of UTEP students (77 percent in 2006, as reported by Brunk-Chavez and Fredericksen) are Hispanic, and a sizeable minority know English as a second language. Otero, Rivas, and Rivera state that graduation rates for minority students are particularly high, and for Hispanics, most of the attrition occurs in the first year (164). Indeed, according to Mangelsdorf, the failure rate in English 1312 composition classes (those earning a D, F, or withdrawing from the class) was 33 percent in Fall 2006. So far no research has been done on language and culture issues with EDA, and no research has been published so far on ESL students’ experiences with EDA, both particularly relevant issues at UTEP.
In this chapter, I have examined some of the implications of EDA for administrators, instructors, and, especially students. Clearly, no model for teaching composition courses can completely satisfy all parties. However, as Huot emphasizes, it is very important to consider the effects of any assessment on the educational environment. While administrative concerns are important, the concerns of students and teachers should be given a higher priority. Through this study, I will gauge student performance with and attitudes toward EDA. In this way, I hope to help determine whether EDA is the right fit for UTEP’s composition department and if so, how it can be improved and adapted to UTEP’s needs as it is adopted more widely in composition classes.
3. PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to gauge the effect of electronic distributed assessment (EDA) on students in first-year composition classes. Two areas were examined in the study: student performance and student attitudes. To measure these, I decided that a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures would be the best approach. These included grade and enrollment data, surveys, and interviews.

The measures were designed and analyzed with the following research questions in mind:

**Student performance**

**Question 1:** How were student grades affected by EDA? In particular, how were failure rates affected?

**Question 2:** How were dropout rates affected by the grading system compared to a regular face-to-face class?

**Question 3:** How much do students believe they learned in the class?

**Question 4:** How did EDA help students improve their writing?

**Student Attitudes**

**Question 1:** How did EDA affect overall student satisfaction with composition classes?

**Question 2:** Did students generally accept the use of EDA in composition courses?

**Question 3:** How did EDA change interactions with instructors, tutors, and other students compared to traditional face-to-face classes?

**Question 4:** Were students satisfied with the evaluator comments they received on assignments and drafts of assignments?

**Question 5:** Were students satisfied that the grading system was fair?

**Question 6:** How did students respond to use of technology in the 1312 class?
This study was approved by UTEP's IRB under the title "Study on second semester composition course redesign" number 92352-2.

GRADE AND ENROLLMENT DATA

Instructor-reported grade and enrollment were used to compare the grade distribution and dropout rates in the redesigned 1312 sections with the sections taught as face-to-face courses.

Grade data was taken from instructor gradebooks submitted at the end of the semester. However, I knew conclusions to be drawn from the comparison were limited, since the syllabi and grading criteria in the courses varied greatly. One of the stated goals of UTEP’s implementation of EDA was to make grading more uniform and curb grade inflation. Therefore, from a programmatic perspective, a high percentage of As may not necessarily be a desirable result. However, a more important measure was of the number of students who received Ds and Fs in the classes, since a goal of the redesigned classes was to reduce the failure rate in English 1312 classes.

Dropout rates from the redesigned sections of 1312 were determined by comparing enrollment rates in the redesigned and traditional sections at Census Day and comparing them with how many students received grades from instructors in the course at the end of the semester.

SURVEYS

For the study I designed two surveys. For both surveys, students in all 10 sections of English 1312 were surveyed. The surveys were conducted online, with Dr. Beth-Brunk Chavez, the director of UTEP’s composition program (and advisor for this project), emailing students links to the surveys through their WebCT e-mail. The two surveys were implemented through SurveyMonkey, a software program that allows users to easily create online surveys. For their
participation, students received up to ten extra points on their final participation grade in the 1312 class. Both sets of survey questions can be viewed in Appendix A.

Survey 1 was completed by students in the redesigned sections of 1312 after receiving their grades on a major assignment, the literature review and research report, during the second week of November 2008. Students had about a week to respond to the survey. A total of 178 students answered Survey 1 out of an estimated possible 336 respondents enrolled at the beginning of the semester (while the survey was administered before the drop deadline, it is almost certain that many students had already dropped out by then). See a screen shot of Survey 1 below. The survey was designed to measure student learning and attitudes based on the assessment of this assignment.
In the survey I asked specific questions about the content and quality of the evaluator feedback students received. I also asked students about their satisfaction with the way the assignment had been graded. Students were asked about their experiences using the online software as well. Several open-ended questions were asked to determine student attitudes toward the assessment system and the class at that point in the semester.

The second survey was administered in the final week of classes in the Fall 2008 semester. Questions on Survey 2 were focused on student performance and satisfaction with the grading system over the whole semester. Students were also asked about their satisfaction and learning in the redesigned English 1312 course. A total of 132 students responded out of a
possible 249 still enrolled in the pilot sections of 1312. Students were given a four-day period of
time to respond to the survey.

Student identities were not tracked from one survey to the next, so the number of
participants and demographic make-up of the participants in the two surveys were not identical.
Some students who participated in the second survey may not have participated in the first, and
vice-versa.

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

A third source of data for the study was focus group interviews that were conducted at the
University Writing Center the last week of classes. The director of composition invited students
enrolled in the redesigned 1312 classes to participate in hour-long interview sessions through
WebCT email. For their participation, the students were entered in a drawing to receive a $25
gift certificate from the UTEP bookstore. Snacks were also served at the sessions.

Finding enough volunteers to participate in the sessions turned out to be unexpectedly
difficult. Initial attempts to randomly invite four students per class in order to get a greater cross-
section of student participants resulted in only two student responses. Dr. Brunk-Chavez then
extended the invitation to students in all ten sections of the redesigned 1312 classes. The second
set of email invitations were sent out about a week before the sessions were scheduled. Out of
249 students who were invited, 12 students said they would be able to attend the sessions. Of
those, five students actually attended the sessions. While the students did select themselves into
the groups, the students were taught by three different instructors (of the six who taught the
course) and varied in educational background, so I believe they represented a variety of student
perspectives on EDA and the redesigned course. See the results section for more details about the
focus group participants.
The focus groups were designed to find out more detailed information about student experiences in the redesigned 1312 class than could be collected with surveys. I prepared nine questions in which I asked students about their experiences with EDA and how it affected their experiences in the redesigned course, including their interactions with their instructor in the class and specific questions about how they approached assignments. I also asked general questions about student reactions to the course curriculum. A note-taker who was not involved in the redesign took written notes at each of the sessions. See Appendix A to view focus group questions.

Through these methods, I hoped to determine if EDA was an acceptable system to students, looked at from the perspective of both performance and attitudes. I also hoped to provide suggestions to enhance student performance in and satisfaction with future 1312 courses, if they continue to incorporate EDA. In Chapter 4, I will report the results of the study.
4. RESULTS

In this chapter I will report the results of the study on student performance in and satisfaction with electronic distributed assessment. The chapter includes results from the analysis of enrollment data, grade data, group interviews, and two surveys.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, for Survey 1, which was sent via email to English 1312 students after they received grades on the literature review and research report assignment near the middle of the semester, 178 students responded out of a possible 336 respondents (while the survey was administered before the drop deadline, it is almost certain that many students had already dropped out by then). For Survey 2, which was sent to students the final week of class, 132 students responded out of a possible 249 still enrolled in the class.

English 1312 is a freshman-level course; however, in Survey 1, 61 percent of students who responded said they were not freshman. Forty-two percent said they were sophomores, 39 percent said they were freshmen, and 19 percent said they were juniors or seniors. Most students (79 percent) said they took English 1311 prerequisite at UTEP. Ten percent said they took it at El Paso Community College; 8 percent said they transferred from another university and 3 percent said they tested out of the class.

In Survey 2, 37 percent of respondents said they were freshman, 42 percent sophomores, 14 percent juniors, and 7 percent seniors (63 percent non-freshmen). Sixty-four percent said they were bilingual and 36 percent said they spoke English only. Students were not asked in the first survey whether they were bilingual or not.

For the group interviews, three subjects participated in one session and two participated in another. The students were taught by three different instructors (out of six who taught the course). I will use pseudonyms to refer to the focus group participants. The following
information about the students was self-reported from information sheets they were asked to fill out before the sessions began and from comments made during the interviews. Of course, students also signed an informed consent form:

Mark is a sophomore who speaks English only. He took the English 1311 prerequisite at UTEP and expected an A in the course.

Jackie is a Spanish/English bilingual senior who took English 1311 at El Paso Community College. She expected a C in the course. Jackie has an infant daughter.

Chris is a senior who speaks English only. He took English 1311 at UTEP and expected a B in the course. Chris said this was his fourth time taking English 1312.

Michael is a Spanish/English bilingual sophomore who took English 1311 at UTEP and expected a B in the course. He mentioned during the interview that he was on the football team at UTEP.

Amanda is a Spanish/English bilingual freshman who tested out of English 1311. She expected an A in the course.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE WITH EDA

**Question 1**: How were student grades affected by EDA? In particular, how were failure rates affected?

Before I compare the final grade data for the redesigned and traditionally taught sections of 1312, it is very important to remember that some caution must be taken in interpreting the results, since the curriculums for the courses were extremely different. The required assignments were vastly different, as were the standards used to assess the assignments. Also, even among the traditionally taught sections of English 1312, required assignments varied across different class sections, as did grading standards. While some general trends can be observed, the conclusions
that can be drawn about EDA from the comparison are necessarily limited, since many other factors in addition to EDA may have influenced students’ grades on assignments.

A comparison of final grades in the redesigned and traditional sections of English 1312 shows that the percentages of students passing and failing the course were similar in the traditional and redesigned sections of English 1312. (Recall that a grade of C or better is required to pass the class, so both Ds and Fs are counted as failing grades.)

![Grade Distribution - Redesigned vs. Traditional 1312 Course](image)

**Figure 2:** Final grade distribution data from redesigned 1312 course compared to traditional course

At the end of the semester, 231 students received final grades in the ten redesigned sections of the course, compared to 239 students in the 13 traditional sections of the course. Eighty-one percent of students in the sections of the course that used EDA earned an A, B or C, compared to 84 percent of students in the traditional sections who earned an A, B or C. The failure rate was slightly higher in the redesigned course: 18 percent of students in the sections...
that used EDA earned Ds or Fs, compared to 15 percent of students in the traditional sections who earned Ds or Fs. (Percentages do not add up to 100 due to rounding.)

As seen in Figure 2, among the students who passed, fewer students received As in the sections that used EDA than those where instructors graded student assignments. In the redesigned sections, 24 percent of students received As in the course compared to 34 percent in the traditional sections. More students received mid-range grades of B, C, or D than in the traditional course (62 percent for redesigned sections vs. 51 percent for traditional sections). Seven percent more students earned Bs or Cs in the redesigned course than in the traditional course. In addition, five percent of students received Ds in the redesigned course, while only about one percent of students in the traditional course received Ds.

**Question 2**: How were dropout rates affected by the grading system compared to regular face-to-face classes?

As seen in Table 1, the dropout rate for the English 1312 sections taught as redesigned courses was 31 percent in the Fall 2008 semester, nearly double that of the 16 percent dropout rate for English 1312 sections taught as traditional face-to-face courses that did not use EDA. The rate was determined using data from enrollment at the beginning of the semester and data from how many students received grades at the end of the semester. It should be noted that the instructors of the redesigned course agreed to drop students who had excessive absences, were not submitting assignments or were otherwise at risk of failing the course, which instructors in traditional sections of the course were not obligated to do.
Table 1: Dropout rates for redesigned vs. traditional English 1312 courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total enrolled at start of semester</th>
<th>Total receiving grades at end of semester</th>
<th>Number of students dropped from class</th>
<th>Percentage of students dropped from class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Redesigned courses</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional courses</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Obviously it is not clear from the data the reasons for students dropping the class, including the amount of influence the use of EDA on the decisions of students to drop the class.

**Question 3**: How much do students believe they learned in the class?

Based on survey results, respondents who completed the course believed they learned a great deal in the class. Over 50 percent of students said they learned “quite a bit” or “a lot, more than I expected” about composing in the English 1312 class.

Table 2: How much do you believe you learned about composing in this class?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very little</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>A lot, more than I expected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9% (13)</td>
<td>14% (19)</td>
<td>24% (31)</td>
<td>39% (51)</td>
<td>14% (18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many students commented that they found the course challenging in a positive way. Fourteen students commented on the difficulty of the class in Survey 1. A student wrote, “It’s very challenging, but it’s good for us as students to know how to do this for the future.” Another wrote, “I'm happy with my grade and I felt like the draft made me work a lot harder to get the grade I received.” For the literature review and research report, Michael said that the assignment “helped him put thought and effort into the writing.”
Students also reported learning a variety of composing skills through the required assignments, many of which involved digital media. Students were required to complete a webpage assignment individually and a documentary film project in groups. One student wrote in Survey 2, “It helped me improve in other areas of communication which were beneficial to me in other classes such as Comm 1301.” Mark said the course “opens a broader base. It makes you focus on delivery and not content itself.” See the next section for more data on what specific skills students reported learning.

**Question 4**: How did EDA help students improve their skills in composing texts?

Students reported learning a variety of skills in composing texts in the English 1312 class. The emphasis on digital media was evident in the types of skills students indicated they learned. While 62 percent of respondents for Survey 2 said they learned written communication skills, 86 percent said they learned web design skills, and 77 percent said they gained experience using new software.

**Table 3: What specific skills did you learn in this class? (Check all that apply)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual communication</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forming arguments</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web design</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience using new software (i.e., I-Movie, GarageBand, MovieMaker, PhotoShop)</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research skills</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation skills</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis skills</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to use APA format</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving grammar/style</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments on drafts were helpful to students in their writing. Forty-four percent of Survey 2 respondents said they found evaluator comments “effective” or “very effective” in
helping them improve their writing. In Survey 1, 75 percent of students who turned in drafts for
the literature review and research report found the comments on the assignment helpful in
revising their writing. However, it is notable that 37 percent of students did not turn in drafts for
the literature review and research report, or were not sure if they did or not. The draft policy was
not clearly set across sections; some instructors made drafts optional. Clearly, students who did
not turn in drafts did not have the benefit of evaluator comments to improve their assignments.
Though numbers were not available, it can be assumed that the rate of turning in drafts was
similar to that of other assignments.

![Helpfulness of comments on literature review/research report](image)

**Figure 3: How helpful were the evaluator comments in your revision of the literature
review and research report?**

Of the students in the survey who turned in drafts, 60 percent said evaluator comments
were “Helpful” to their revision of the literature review and research report assignment, and 15
percent said they were “Very Helpful.” The other 25 percent, however, commented that they were not helpful at all.

Students reported most frequently that comments on focusing their topic, pointing out areas that needed to be expanded upon, and using correct APA citation were helpful. See the next section for a more complete description of what comments students found most helpful.

STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARD EDA

**Question 1**: How did EDA affect overall student satisfaction with composition classes?

Most Survey 2 respondents reported being satisfied with the redesigned English 1312 course overall at the end of the semester. It is important to keep in mind that many factors other than EDA were different in this class than in traditional sections of English 1312, which all contributed to student attitudes toward the class. As discussed in Chapter 1, these included a redesigned curriculum and a move to a hybrid format of delivery.

Over 56 percent of respondents said they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the course. Twenty-one percent said they were “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied,” with the rest saying they were “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied.” In addition, in Survey 2, 61 percent said they would recommend the class to other students.

**Table 4: How satisfied were you with the English 1312 class overall?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9% (12)</td>
<td>14% (18)</td>
<td>21% (28)</td>
<td>38% (51)</td>
<td>17% (23)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These satisfaction levels are consistent with student comments about the course. Students had many more positive comments than negative ones about the curriculum itself. In Survey 1, 24 students (16 percent of commenters) commented that they enjoyed the content of the class,
and so did 17 students (32 percent of commenters) in the second survey. One student wrote on
the first survey, “I really do like the new curriculum of English 1312, it is refreshing and it
incorporates technology in such a way that it hadn't been used before. I completely recommend
keeping this curriculum.” Even some students who were confused at times with the assignments
said they were pleased with the new curriculum. One student wrote, “Though very challenging
and at times frustrating, I am enjoying the class and the updated way that it is being taught.” In
comparison, on the first survey, five students (3 percent of commenters) said that they did not
like the redesigned curriculum: “The web page assignment I think is dumb... this is English, not a
web design class or a computer class.” Nine students (17 percent of commenters) had similar
negative comments about the curriculum in the second survey.

Student comments seemed to reflect that the grading system tended not to be the primary
factor in determining student satisfaction with the course. In general comments about the course,
the most common complaint of students was that they were confused about what was expected of
them in the course. In Survey 1, 32 students, out of 178 total respondents (18 percent of all
respondents) said this. In Survey 2, a lower but still fairly large percentage (13 of 137 all
respondents, 10 percent) also made comments indicating that there was confusion in the course.

Of those who said they were confused, most students said that the guidelines for some
assignments were unclear and that they wanted instructors to explain the assignments in more
detail: “I feel that the course is not really organized and needs a lot of improving. Also, the
teacher does not explain the assignments well enough.” In Survey 1, of the 32 students who
commented negatively, 12 said that the delivery of the course in hybrid format contributed to
confusion in the class. Many felt there was too much content in the class for it to meet face-to-
face once a week: “I think the class is too hard to have once week. The projects are too big for
only working a two week period. And we’re doing things not done in other classes so I think having this class once a week is hard.” An additional concern of several students (three on first survey and two on second survey, as well as Jackie in the focus groups) who commented negatively about the course was that they felt their instructors were not prepared to teach the new curriculum that was adopted in the pilot program this semester: Another student wrote, “As stated earlier, it feels like this is a test group…I am extremely displeased with this whole course.”

Though EDA could certainly be seen as a contributing factor in students’ confusion about the course (particularly in students being unclear on how to do assignments or being unsure of how to upload assignments to WebCT), 53 percent of respondents said that the grading system had no effect on their level of satisfaction with the course. Twenty-eight percent said they were less satisfied with the course due to EDA, and 19 percent said they were more satisfied with the course due to EDA.

Table 5: How do you think the grading system affected your overall satisfaction with the English 1312 course?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less satisfied</th>
<th>Neither more nor less satisfied</th>
<th>More satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28% (37)</td>
<td>53% (70)</td>
<td>19% (25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As far as student comments, only 11 students (21 percent of commenters) directly referenced the grading system in general comments about the course in Survey 2, and of those only four commenters made statements similar to what one commenter wrote: “They should do the grading and teaching the way they had been doing it in the past.” In the first survey, a somewhat lower percentage of students (12 of 117 students, about 10 percent of those who left
general comments about the course) directly referenced the grading system. A few of the comments from Surveys 1 and 2 included

- “Well, the feedback on the draft was very useful to improve my paper”
- “The graders were very inconsistent. As a writer never really knew what they were looking for.”
- “I had fun but the grading needs to be a little bit more organized. Also it needs to be made easier for the students to get their feedback from their papers.”
- “I think that if someone else is going to be grading our assignments then they need to be in the class.”
Survey 1: General comments about course and literature review and research report assignment

- No comment
- Confused about assignments
- Like content
- Too difficult
- Don't like hybrid format
- Don't like grading system
- Don't like content
- Technology problems
- Instructor problems
- Like grading
- Writing Center problems
- Other

Figure 4: Do you have any additional comments about this assignment or about the English 1312 course?
Figure 5: Please add any final comments about the English 1312 course content and/or the grading system here.

**Question 2:** Did students generally accept the use of EDA in composition courses?

While students did not praise the changes to the grading system nearly as highly as the changes to the course curriculum, most students seemed to accept the use of EDA in English 1312. Forty-four percent of survey respondents reported being “satisfied” (33 percent) or “very satisfied” (11 percent) with EDA overall at the end of the semester. Twenty-six percent said they were “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” with the grading system.
Table 6: How satisfied were you with the grading system used in the English 1312 course?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14% (18)</td>
<td>15% (20)</td>
<td>26% (35)</td>
<td>33% (44)</td>
<td>11% (15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In interview sessions, four of the five students who participated said that the system was a good idea because it reduced instructor bias in grading based on personality. Amanda said, “I thought it was good because it prevented instructor bias because sometimes when the instructor doesn’t like you they don’t grade accordingly.” Students said the system was something they had to get used to as the semester progressed. “I didn’t like it at the beginning but the comments helped a lot,” said Michael.

Students in the focus groups also said that they found it very helpful to have the grading rubrics available to follow. “My professor knew me, but that other person didn’t so I just followed the guidelines of the assignment,” Amanda said. “I went off the rubric the whole course and everything turned out fine,” Chris said.

A surprise in this study was, given the drastic change in grading from a traditional composition classroom, how few students commented that they did not like the grading system and wanted to go back to a traditional system of the instructor grading system.

In Survey 1, when asked for comments about how to improve the grading system, 127 students had no suggestions on how to improve the system. Fifty-seven students (49 percent of students who commented on the question) wrote comments such as “no” or “N/A” when asked for suggestions to improve it. An additional 70 students (39 percent of total survey respondents) skipped the question. About 10 students commented that EDA was “fine” or that it was “a fair grading system.” Only 12 students (11 percent of commenters for the open-ended question)
indicated that students wanted their instructors to grade their papers as in a traditional classroom. Thirteen students (20 percent of commenters) had the same sentiment in the second survey when the same question was asked, and again, many students (66, half of total respondents) skipped the question and offered no suggestions on how to improve the grading system. See Figures 5 and 6 for the most common comments about the system.

**Survey 1: Suggestions to improve grading system**

Figure 6: Do you have any other suggestions on how the grading system could be improved?
Figure 7: Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the grading system?

While most students seemed to accept the concept of EDA, students seemed to have some reservations about the fairness of EDA. At the end of the semester, 51 percent of survey respondents said they thought the grading system was fair. Twenty-three percent said it was not fair, and 26 percent of respondents were not sure if it was fair. These numbers are consistent with what students reported about the fairness of the grades they received on the literature review and
research report near the middle of the semester. Forty-seven percent of respondents said they thought their grade on the assignment was fair. Twenty-seven percent thought it was not fair and 26 percent were not sure if it was fair. I will elaborate on some of students’ stated reasons for this further on in this chapter.

Figure 8: In general, do you think the grading system used this semester was fair?

**Question 3**: How did EDA change interactions with instructors, tutors, and other students compared to traditional face-to-face classes?

I found it surprising that during the focus groups, three of the five students said that EDA did not change their interactions with their instructor very much. “(It) didn’t change my interaction with the teacher…I was in the Writing Center a lot and so was the professor. He really helped shape drafts,” said Mark.
Students also mentioned e-mailing their instructors frequently. “Even if your instructor didn’t know about something, she would get back to you within the day. She would get the resources and get back to you,” Amanda said. “Our instructor said in order to ask a question, we had to base it off something. You couldn’t just say, ‘I don’t know how to write an opinion piece.’ You had to say this is what I have but this is what I don’t understand.”

In Survey 1, students did report using the Writing Center frequently. Seventy percent of respondents on the first survey said they would seek extra help on their writing after receiving feedback on the literature review and research report, and an overwhelming 87 percent of those students said they would go to the Writing Center for help. Fifty-seven percent said they would go to their instructor for help on their assignment.

While this study did not capture student opinions on the Writing Center, student opinions in the survey comments and interviews seemed to be mixed. One student wrote in Survey 2: “It is good because help is available through the Writing Center.” However another student wrote in Survey 1, “I know we are supposed to go to the Writing Center but sometimes it's hit or miss in there.” Amanda and Michael said they did not use the Writing Center at all.

Students in the focus groups generally felt they were more “on their own” than in other courses as far as keeping track of assignments and grades. You have to “(be) more responsible because you have to look at your comments and be more independent,” said Michael.

**Question 4**: Were students satisfied with the evaluator comments they received on assignments and drafts of assignments?

Eighty-five percent of Survey 2 respondents said that they received feedback on their drafts during the semester through online comments on WebCT. Of these, 44 percent said they found the evaluator comments either “effective” or “very effective” in helping them improve
their writing. Thirty-six percent said they found comments “somewhat effective” and 20 percent said they found comments either “ineffective” or “very ineffective.”

Table 7: If you checked online comments above, how effective was the feedback you received in helping you to improve your writing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very ineffective</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Somewhat effective</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10% (13)</td>
<td>10% (13)</td>
<td>36% (47)</td>
<td>33% (44)</td>
<td>11% (15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Survey 1, students reported most frequently that evaluator comments on focusing their topic, pointing out areas that needed to be expanded upon, and using correct APA citation were helpful. Other comments they reported to be helpful were comments on style and grammar, structure and organization, and comments explaining the assignment itself. See Figure 8 for a graph of the results.
Figure 9: What types of comments did you find most helpful?

However, 1 in 4 students who responded to Survey 1 said that evaluator comments on their draft of the literature review and research report were not helpful at all. Twenty-seven students remarked that none of the comments were helpful to them. Of those, the most common complaint of students was that they did not receive enough feedback: “It said it was a good paper and it made minimal remarks.” Another student said, “They just made comments about the format, I did not receive other feedback at all.” Students reported that vague and unclear comments were the least helpful types of comments they received.
Focus group students who turned in drafts said the amount of comments varied from one evaluator to another. Mark said, “Comments from evaluators (were) inconsistent. One draft I had three comments. Another draft was all red with comments.” Mark, Jackie, and Chris reported not turning in drafts on a regular basis, but Michael and Amanda, who turned in drafts regularly, and Mark, who turned in drafts sporadically, were satisfied with the amount of comments. “I got enough comments. It varied from paper to paper,” said Amanda.

Not surprisingly, when asked how best to improve the comments on drafts in Survey 1, the most common suggestion was for comments to be more specific. Twenty-seven out of 101 comments suggested that evaluator comments on drafts should be more specific. Many students also wanted comments on final drafts to be more specific. For final drafts, evaluators used preset rubrics to assign grades and wrote minimal comments in a comment box at the end of the rubric. About 32 percent of commenters suggested more specific comments on final drafts. One student remarked, “I understand the rubric and I like it... but the comments are lacking. I want to know why I got what I got on each section not a cursory overview of the whole thing. I do not do ‘vague’ when it comes to my grade I want to know exactly why. How else am I supposed to improve?”

**Question 5**: Were students satisfied that the grading system was fair?

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, in Survey 2, 51 percent of respondents said they thought the grading system was fair. Twenty-three percent said it was not fair, and 26 percent said they were not sure whether it was fair or not.

Of those on Survey 2 who said the grading system was not fair, Figure 9 shows the comments on why they felt it was not fair. The most common complaint among these students was that the instructor should grade their assignments in order for grades to be fair: “The
instructor should have more power in the grading system. The people who try hard and better themselves throughout the course should receive higher grades as well as those who already do good.” Another student said that teachers would be more familiar with students’ work throughout the semester: “Over the course of the semester the teacher gets to know you and your writing so he or she can grade you based to their knowledge.”

The second most common complaint was that students perceived that different standards were used to evaluate their rough drafts and final grades: “The problem I had was I believe that different TAs had read my rough draft and then read my final paper. The TA said my rough draft was great and mentioned one or two things to change, which I did. When the final paper was due, I got a lot of negative comments on it and a low grade.” However, the policy used this semester was that the same evaluator did, in fact, grade the rough draft and the final drafts of the assignment. However, this was a common misperception, since five other students had the same comments. On the literature review and research report, an even greater number of students (21) wrote comments indicating that their scores for their final drafts of their assignments were lower than what they expected based on comments received on their drafts. Some typical comments included, “Well I went to the Writing Center for tips, and worked on all their suggestions. My grade was a B, though and not an A like I had anticipated.” The next most commonly mentioned reason students thought the grading was unfair was inconsistency in grading. One commenter wrote: “Because all the TA's are different, some are tough graders and some are not. This makes it not fair because the student who does better on their paper might get a lower grade because they had a harder grader, while another person who doesn't do the work right gets the easy grader.” Four other students had similar complaints. See Figure 12 for a graph of reasons students thought they had been graded unfairly on the literature review and research report.
Figure 10: If you answered no above, why did you think the grading system was not fair?

About half of respondents (47 percent) found their score on the literature review and research report to be fair. Twenty-seven percent thought it was not fair and 26 percent were not sure if it was fair. One thing to keep in mind in interpreting these results is that, for reasons that are unclear, 23 percent of survey respondents said that they were not sure of the grade they received on the assignment. Among those who did report their grades, the most commonly
reported grade was a B, with 23 percent of respondents reporting they received that grade, followed closely by 22 percent of respondents who said they received a C.

Figure 11: What grade did you receive on the literature review and research report?
Figure 12: Did you think the grade you received was fair?

However, even with many respondents unsure of their grades, the finding that so many students were not satisfied with the fairness of the system seems somewhat odd, since 79 percent of Survey 1 respondents said they found the rubric and comments on their final grades to be helpful or very helpful in explaining the grades they received. In addition, 77 percent of respondents said they referred to the rubric at some point in the writing process.

Few students mentioned problems with the rubric on the literature review and research report. Only five total commenters on Survey 1 mentioned problems with the rubric. One student wrote that “it was well organized and explained what was needed.” Several other students wrote similar comments.
It seems that while few students blamed the rubric for the perceived unfairness of their grades, many students still found the evaluators’ grading of their assignment to be unfair. The most common complaint among the students who felt they had been graded unfairly on the literature review and research report was that the evaluators graded too harshly. Close to 50 percent of commenters said that their final grade was lower than expected or that the evaluators graded too harshly.

Survey 1: Reasons students thought grades were unfair

Figure 13: If you thought the grade you received was unfair, why?
Twenty percent of those who felt they received unfair grades said they thought the evaluators did not grade their assignments properly. These commenters typically said the evaluators did not follow the grading rubric or that they did not read their assignment as they should have, for example, “The people that grade the assignments are not grading by the guidelines that were given to me.” One student said in an interview that the literature review and research report in particular was “taught one way and graded another way.”

About 16 percent of commenters said that the class did not prepare them for the assignment. This set of students said they were confused about the assignment guidelines and/or did not receive the instruction they needed to do well. As one student wrote, “Most of the students I spoke to about the assignment felt as if we were not prepared to do the work. Most of us had not written in APA nor ever even heard of the APA format. The explanation in class and what the assignment guidelines quoted did not exactly mesh and the Writing Center help wasn't exactly positive on how to assist with the assignment either.”

It seems that there were many fewer specific student complaints about the evaluators’ grading in the final survey than in the first survey. Three students said the evaluators graded unfairly and four said the evaluators graded too strictly. This may have been due to more training procedures for the evaluators. It also may have been a reflection of the particular assignment students were asked about in Survey 1.

**Question 6**: How did students respond to use of technology in the English 1312 class?

As discussed in Question 1 of this section, many students responded positively to the use of technology in the curriculum of the English 1312 class. When asked which skills they found most useful in the course, web design skills and experience using new software were the most common answers of students; 57 percent said web design was one of the most useful skills they
learned and 54 percent said using new software was, over 20 percent more than said other skills such as written communication, how to use APA format, and research skills were most useful.

Of course, not all students responded positively to the extensive use of technology. Some students found the hybrid format contributed to confusion on assignments, and a few students reported that it was difficult keeping track of due dates for assignments on WebCT. However, in general students reported few problems with the software used for EDA or for assignments. In Survey 1, 81 percent of respondents reported that it was “easy” or “very easy” to access their grades and comments in WebCT. In addition, in Survey 1, few students mentioned problems with software in open-ended questions about the course. Six students reported that they had trouble accessing grades and/or comments in WebCT, and two said they had problems submitting assignments. Two students mentioned technical difficulties with WebCT in Survey 2, one with uploading assignments and one with accessing comments.

### Table 8: Describe accessing your grades and comments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very difficult</th>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Very easy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9% (16)</td>
<td>59% (102)</td>
<td>32% (57)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several students in both surveys complained about being required to use Macintosh computers. “Asking students to only be able to so an assignment on a Mac is also ridiculous. I don’t have the money and school costs way too much to have to purchase a Mac, which means I am spending up to 10 hours here at school working on an assignment,” one student wrote. Another complaint, from three students in Survey 2, was that students had too little time to learn software they were required to use, such as iMovie and GarageBand. Chris said, “(I didn’t like) learning to use iMovie so quickly. I know how to make movies, but others struggled because they only had a one-day crash course…Some were not technologically equipped.”
5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I believe the results of this study show that electronic distributed assessment can be used successfully as part of a first-year composition courses at UTEP. Students generally found the system to be satisfactory and helpful to their learning, and student grade data indicates that students passed the sections of English 1312 that used EDA at similar rates compared to traditionally taught sections of the course. While measures can certainly be taken to improve the system of assessment, particularly to improve the student dropout rate, and not all students were pleased with the system this semester, in general EDA was a part of a course that most students were satisfied with and that taught students the composing skills that administrators intended with an innovative curriculum.

STUDENT LEARNING WITH EDA

Students in the course sections that used EDA seemed to perform similarly as far as final course grades to students in the course sections that did not. Rates of passing and failing differed by only three percentage points, though slightly more students earned Ds or Fs in the sections that used EDA than those that did not. Of course, it must again be noted that EDA was not the only factor that may have influenced the distribution of student grades. The required assignments were extremely different in the traditional and redesigned courses, so a direct comparison is difficult to make. However, it seems that the grading standards implemented in EDA were not overly harsh, since evidently the vast majority of students were able to pass the course, and at a rate similar to those in traditional sections.

One notable result I reported in Chapter 4 was that fewer students earned As in the sections that used EDA. Though it cannot be conclusively determined why students earned fewer As in the course sections that used EDA, it is likely that the reduction of the practice of
instructors rewarding students with grades based on factors other than the grading criteria, such as perceived effort and in-class participation, was a factor.

The reduction of grade inflation was expected by the committee members who made the switch to EDA. While clearly beneficial to administrators, who may now more easily compare data across class sections and from year-to-year, I believe this is also beneficial to students, who can more easily understand the criteria their grade was based on.

The different standards of EDA compared to those used in traditionally taught sections may have also contributed to the perception of the course as challenging by many students in the redesigned course. It was indeed more difficult to earn an A in the redesigned course than in a typical section of a traditionally taught course. However, some students seem to have welcomed the challenge. One student wrote on Survey 1, “I am enjoying this course of English 1312 because it pushes students to do their best.”

Perhaps the perception of the course as challenging also contributed to students reporting that they learned a great deal, in the course. Over 50 percent of student survey respondents said they learned “quite a bit” or “a lot, more than expected” in the course. As evidenced by the skills students reported they learned, the instructors who designed the new curriculum were generally successful in creating a class where students learned new means of composing texts through digital media.

While it is impossible to know exactly what role EDA played in students’ performance in the class, it seems that EDA was a help rather than a hindrance to student performance in the class.

One indicator to look at is students’ reaction to evaluator comments. Forty-four percent of survey respondents said they found evaluator comments “effective” or “very effective” in
helping them improve their writing throughout the semester. In addition, three-fourths of respondents who turned in drafts of their literature review and research report said they found draft comments helpful. One student wrote, “All comments were relevant and helped me better my research.” The manner of commenting was done according to standards that emphasized “big issues” of rather than details such as grammar and punctuation, and students seemed to respond well to this in interviews and surveys, with many reporting that the most helpful comments focused on missing elements or topic or focus of the assignments. A student wrote, “The comments on every draft I submitted helped to guide me in the right path. I was usually good with the content of my paper, but the literary focus of the assignment is where I seemed to have trouble. The graders really did a great job in pointing me in the right direction.” See Appendix E for an example of commenting guidelines. A common suggestion from students in the first survey was to make comments more specific, which was addressed in evaluator training and sessions in Fall 2008 and will be kept in mind in future training of evaluators.

In addition, evaluator comments were just one avenue of feedback on students’ drafts of assignments, with students also reporting getting feedback from their instructors and from the Writing Center.

STUDENT SATISFACTION WITH EDA

EDA did not seem to be a primary focus of students’ satisfaction with this course; a majority of survey respondents said they were neither more nor less satisfied with the course because of EDA. Furthermore, a majority of survey respondents (55 percent) reported being either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the course. It is apparent that EDA by itself did not have a drastic positive or negative effect on student satisfaction levels. I will speculate that EDA may have been less of a focus for students in the Fall 2008 semester because they were more
focused on other changes in the composition course, such as the new curriculum and the hybrid format of the class. In comments on the course, students tended to comment more frequently on the course content and organization than on the grading system.

Students generally found EDA to be a satisfactory grading system, with many students remarking that it was fair and that it was easy to follow based on the rubrics. Seventy percent of survey respondents reported either a neutral or positive level of satisfaction with the system -- 44 percent said they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the system, and 26 percent said they were “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with it.” On the first survey about 10 students commented on the fairness of EDA. One student wrote, “I think the grading system is very clear and effective.” Another said, “It is a fair grading system and it is fine the way it is.” As I mentioned in Chapter 4, students in focus group interviews liked that the system eliminated instructors’ perceptions of students from influencing their grades. Four out of five focus group participants said they were able to perform successfully in the class based on the rubrics they were given, the comments they received from evaluators, and help from instructors and/or the Writing Center.

While not as many students made positive comments about EDA as on course content (which may have been due to the way questions were phrased, asking for suggestions rather than general comments about the system) another indication that students found the grading system acceptable was how few students commented on surveys that the course should revert to the traditional way of grading. Most comments suggested ways to improve the fairness of the system or ways to improve evaluator feedback.

However, some students did miss the benefits of the instructor grading their assignments. On both surveys students wrote comments like the following:
I don't feel that having a panel of TA's grading my papers is very fair. Over the course of the semester the teacher gets to know you and your writing so he or she can grade you based to their knowledge. You could've put hours and hours of work into your paper and visited the professor making very effort to get an A but then you turn it in online and end up with a B or C because the TA didn't care to much for the paper, whereas if the teacher would've graded it they would be able to take into consideration your time and effort.

Clearly, some students felt that they should be rewarded on their grades based on the effort they put into the assignment. This created frustration similar to what Rickly reported students at Texas Tech felt. Behaviors that teachers had rewarded students for in the past were not rewarded in this environment, and some students found this unfair.

Students also missed the instructor knowing their work. While Michael was pleased that EDA eliminated instructor bias, he also said, “The teacher sees your first writing and your flaws and knew how to help you, but the other people didn’t know.”

Based on student satisfaction and performance as indicated by the above measures, EDA is clearly a system that is viable for UTEP composition courses; however, there are certainly areas for improvement in the system for future semesters.

STUDENT CONFUSION IN 1312 COURSE

One area of concern was the dropout rate for the course, which was 31 percent, nearly double the dropout rate of 16 percent in the traditionally taught sections of English 1312 in the Fall 2008 semester. The dropout rate is also higher than the dropout rate Brunk-Chavez and Miller reported for pilot sections of hybrid composition courses at UTEP, 22 percent. The rate of those earning Ds, Fs, and those who withdrew from the redesigned courses was 43 percent, compared to 30 percent who earned Ds, Fs, and Ws in the traditional sections. In Chapter 1, I
mentioned Mangelsdorf’s citing 33 percent as a typical rate of students earning Ds, Fs, and Ws in a typical semester. No data is available on why students dropped or failed the redesigned English 1312 course, so it is impossible to tell how the use of EDA influenced the dropout/failure rate. However, I will speculate that some students were likely influenced to drop out by the new course curriculum and/or the hybrid format of the course, as well as EDA. Certainly, EDA could have contributed to an “intimidation factor” for some students.

Some students who remained in the class mid-semester commented that they did not like the new curriculum that was put in place, which required heavy use of technology. It is quite possible that students dropped the class after seeing the assignments that would be required.

It is also possible that some students dropped out or struggled with the course due to the feeling confused with the course and/or disconnected from their instructor in the course, which I discussed in Chapter 4. Sapp and Simon describe how a feeling of disconnect with the instructor and other students may contribute to high dropout rates in hybrid classes. With the instructor removed from grading their assignments, it was likely that some students felt even more of a disconnect from their instructor than in a typical hybrid class. Chris said that the instructor did not keep track of student progress in the class, and was therefore less likely to reach out to students who may have needed help: “I didn’t know my grade all semester. Teachers didn’t know progress of students. Not knowing, having to figure it out is hard.”

However, the lack of connection was certainly not seen in all class sections, particularly with those taught by experienced hybrid instructors. Several students in focus groups said they formed a strong connection with their instructors, and many students praised their instructors in survey comments. Michael said, “If I had a question, my professor stayed in constant contact
with you and would never leave you hanging out there for a couple of days. He responds to you quickly.”

Boyd reports that students are often confused about the expectations of them in hybrid courses, and this was definitely a concern seen in the pilot sections of English 1312, which may have contributed to the dropout/failure rate. Many student comments about the course reflected an uncertainty about how to do assignments and an uncertainty about the evaluation criteria. With instructors teaching a new curriculum for the first time and using EDA for the first time, students were likely much more uncertain about what was expected of them than they would be in a hybrid course that used a traditional curriculum. In particular, as mentioned in Chapter 1 two instructors with no previous experience or training teaching hybrid courses stepped in to teach two sections of the course just before the semester started, which may have contributed to some students’ frustrations with the format.

Instructors did make efforts throughout the semester to improve the organization of the course. They stayed in contact through email, shared materials through a course wiki, and held periodic meetings. After the first round of surveys, the director shared students’ comments and they then created clearer course calendars on WebCT and adjustments made to assignment descriptions. While there was some inevitable confusion during the semester, instructors dealt with it as best they could. Mark said, “My teacher tried to stay on top of things.”

As is evident through a large number of student comments, the expectations for assignments need to be clarified for the course in the future. Boyd advises that clearly articulated expectations for assignments are very important for developing effective hybrid courses, and I believe clear expectations are even more important with the use of EDA along with the hybrid format. If assignment descriptions and rubrics are to be the primary connections among
instructors, students, and evaluators, then they should be very clear and specific. Assignment
guidelines were clarified throughout the Fall 2008 semester, and more specific guidelines for
assignments are already being prepared for the next semester the redesigned 1312 course class is
taught.

FAIRNESS OF EDA

Based on survey data, another issue that should be addressed in future semesters is the
fairness of the grading system. While about half of survey respondents said EDA was fair at the
end of the semester, 26 percent of respondents said they were not sure if the system was fair and
23 percent said the system was not fair.

With many students unsure of the fairness of the system, I will suggest that students
easily be able to view their grades for assignments and overall grade in the course in course
management software in future semesters. As mentioned earlier, some focus group participants
said that they were not able to keep track of their grades throughout the semester. Students
should be more aware of their grades for the course and be able to judge whether those grades
are fair. Students should also be aware of their right to appeal a grade they think is unfair.

While many students complained about evaluators being too harsh in the first survey, by
the second, only a few students complained about grading being too harsh; rather, the most
common complaints about the fairness of EDA at the end of the semester concerned issues of
consistency, similar to the inconsistency issues at Texas Tech discussed in Chapter 2. There were
several areas of perceived inconsistency.

One was between the standards used to evaluate drafts and final assignments. Particularly
on the literature review and research report, many students who said they had been graded
unfairly reported expecting a higher grade on their assignment based on the feedback they
received on drafts. (As I mentioned in Chapter 2, a student at Texas Tech reported the same problem – drafts are graded in TOPIC/ICON, and the student reported receiving higher grades on drafts than final papers.) Many students even perceived that different evaluators were grading their drafts and final assignments, which was not the case. Students were understandably frustrated by this. This problem was addressed in evaluator training sessions later in the semester; evaluators agreed to give more of a balance of positive and negative comments on drafts after receiving feedback from the first student survey. However, this issue should be kept in mind in future semesters as new evaluators are trained.

Another area of inconsistency students reported was in the grades received on particular assignments. On the final survey, several students reported that some graders were “harder” than others, so their grades depended more on which grader they got for a particular assignment than on the assignment criteria. One student wrote: “The idea of the writing tutors grading the papers is quite awkward because since it is not the same person then in one paper you can do really good but in others the tutors make you feel like you don't know what you are doing. They are there to help, not to push down.” Of course, this is a difficult issue to manage, since differences in grading style will always exist among different individuals. One suggestion is to implement Texas Tech’s policy of having two graders look at every final assignment. This would provide some balance between stricter and more lenient graders.

A final inconsistency, reported less often than the previous two mentioned, was between what was taught in class and how the assignment was actually graded. While many students reported that they followed the rubrics and had no problems, other students said that what was taught in class was not consistent with the comments and/or grades they received. While I would not suggest having evaluators sit in the classes they evaluate, as some students suggested, I
would suggest greater communication between evaluators and instructors. Particularly if evaluators continue to grade one class per assignment, perhaps instructors could keep the group of evaluators informed of the resources being used to teach a particular assignment. Also, as I suggested earlier, assignment guidelines and rubrics should be made as clear and specific as possible.

AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

A limitation of this study on student performance was that a direct comparison of work between the redesigned and traditional sections of English 1312 was not made. It would be useful to compare the sections on an “objective” performance measure.

It was also unfortunate that I was not able to collect data specifically on ESL students, who pilot instructors hoped to help with tutoring in the redesigned curriculum. While it is almost certain that some survey respondents were ESL students, due to limitations of the study I was unable to address their specific concerns with EDA. I hope this will be a high priority for future research on EDA at UTEP.

Some other questions I would like to see addressed in future research at UTEP include

- Were low-performing students able to keep up with assignments and receive the help they needed?
- How did students with limited Internet access fare in the class?
- Would satisfaction and performance vary if EDA were used in a face-to-face rather than a hybrid class?
- Does EDA make students more likely to plagiarize?
- Do students who turn in drafts earn higher final grades than students who do not?
- Should EDA and the hybrid format be used in English 1311 classes?
Overall, it is clear that electronic distributed assessment can be used successfully as part of a first-year composition courses at UTEP. As far as student satisfaction, the effect of EDA on course satisfaction seems to be more neutral or positive than negative. In this case, students generally reported being satisfied with an innovative curriculum. In considering student performance, while the modes of delivery and assessment in this course were very different from that of a traditional classroom, students were able to learn a great deal in this course from their instructors and the feedback they received from evaluators on assignments. Students passed the English 1312 course that used EDA at virtually the same rates as students in traditional sections of 1312. Some measures should be taken to improve the system and the course overall, particularly to increase the student retention rate. However, due to benefits to administrators, instructors, and students, the UTEP composition program should retain EDA in its English 1312 course.
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76


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APPENDIX A: SURVEYS 1 AND 2 AND FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

SURVEY 1

1. What is your classification?
   Freshman    Sophomore    Junior    Senior

2. Where did you take English 1311?
   UTEP    EPCC    Transfer from another university    AP/CLEP test

3. What did you see as the purpose of the literature review and research report assignment?

4. What grade did you receive on your assignment?
   A (20-18 points)    B (17-16 points)    C (15-14 points)    D (13-12 points)
   F (11 or fewer points)    Not sure

5. The evaluation rubric is included at the end of the assignment. Did you refer to it at any point in the writing process?
   Yes    No    Not sure

6. If you said yes to question 5, that you referred to the rubric, at what point or points did you do so? Check all that apply.
   As you started the assignment    As you started writing the assignment    After you received comments on your draft    Other

7. Were evaluator comments consistent with the instruction you received in class for this assignment?
   Yes    No    Not sure

8. Did you submit a draft of the literature review and research report on WebCT?
   Yes    No    Not sure

9. If you answered yes to question 8, please answer questions 9-12. If not, please skip to 13.
   How helpful were the evaluator comments in your revision of the literature review and research report?
   Not helpful at all    Helpful    Very helpful

10. What types of comments did you find most helpful?

11. What types of comments did you find least helpful?

12. Do you have any suggestions as to how the draft comments could be more helpful?

13. Do you think the grade you received was fair?
   Yes    No    Not sure
14. If you answered "no" to question 13, why not?

15. How helpful did you find the rubric and comments in understanding why you received the grade you did?
   Not helpful at all     Helpful     Very helpful

16. Do you have any suggestions on how the rubric and/or comments could be more helpful in explaining the grade you received?

17. Describe accessing your grades and comments:
   Very easy     Easy     Very difficult

18. Are you planning to get extra help based on the feedback you received on your assignment?
   Yes     No     Not sure

19. If you answered "yes" to question 18, which are you planning to go to? Check all that apply.
   1312 Instructor     Writing Center     Other (please specify)

20. Do you have any other suggestions on how the grading system could be improved?

21. Do you have any additional comments about this assignment or about the English 1312 course?
SURVEY 2

1. What is your classification?
   Freshman   Sophomore   Junior   Senior

2. How would you describe your language experiences?
   English-only   Bilingual (speak English and another language)

3. How satisfied were you with the English 1312 class overall?
   Very dissatisfied   Dissatisfied   Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied   Satisfied   Very satisfied

4. What grade do you expect to receive for this course?
   A    B    C    D    F

5. How satisfied were you with the grading system used in the English 1312 course?
   Very dissatisfied   Dissatisfied   Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied   Satisfied   Very satisfied

6. How do you think the grading system affected your overall satisfaction with the English 1312 course?
   Less satisfied   Neither more nor less satisfied   More satisfied

7. In general, do you think the grading system used this semester was fair?
   Yes   No   Not sure

8. If you answered "no" to question 7, why did you think the grading system was not fair?

9. Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the grading system?

10. In what ways did you receive feedback on your drafts? (Check all that apply)
    Online comments through WebCT   Writing Center   Instructor   Peer reviews in class   Other (please specify)

11. If you checked online comments above, how effective was the feedback you received in helping you to improve your writing?
    Very ineffective   Ineffective   Somewhat effective   Effective   Very effective

12. Do you have any suggestions on how the feedback on drafts could be improved?

13. How much do you believe you learned about composing in this class?
    Very little   A little   Some   Quite a bit   A lot, more than I expected

14. What specific skills did you learn in this class? (Check all that apply)
    Written communication   Visual communication   Forming arguments   Web design   Experience using new software (i.e., I-Movie, GarageBand, MovieMaker, PhotoShop)   Research skills   Presentation skills   Analysis skills   How to use APA format   Improving grammar/style   Other (please specify)
15. Of these, which skills did you find most useful? (Check all that apply)
   Written communication     Visual communication     Forming arguments     Web design
   Experience using new software (i.e., I-Movie, GarageBand, MovieMaker, PhotoShop)
   Research skills     Presentation skills     Analysis skills     How to use APA format     Improving
grammar/style     Other (please specify)

16. Would you recommend this course to other students?
   Yes     No     Not sure

17. Please add any final comments about the English 1312 course content and/or the grading
    system here.
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. At the beginning of the semester, how did you feel about having your assignments graded by people other than your instructor? How do you feel about it now?

2. Do you think having your assignment graded by the evaluators changed the way you approached assignments?

3. Do you think the grading system changed how you interacted with your instructor and with classmates? How?

3. What types of feedback did you receive on your writing this semester? What did you find most helpful? What did you find least helpful? What do you suggest improving?

4. Did you think the grading system used was fair? Why or why not? How would you suggest improving the system?

5. Were you able to upload your assignments and view comments and grades on your assignments through WebCT without any problems?

6. What did you think about the assignments you were required to do this semester?

7. How much do you think you learned in the course? What specific skills did you learn?

8. What did you think about the hybrid format of the class?

9. What do you think should be continued in this course next semester? What would you suggest changing?
APPENDIX B: INTRODUCTION TO REDESIGNED ENGLISH 1312 COURSE
The 1312 course you are enrolled in is part of a new and exciting composition curriculum at UTEP. Several aspects of the course might seem new to you as a student. Your instructor will take some time to explain these to you, but here is some information to get you started.

First, this course is taught as a hybrid class—with one face-to-face meeting for group work, lecture, and discussion—and the rest of the course will use WebCT for your online work. Taking a course as a hybrid incorporates several ideas we find important in composition studies: It helps you develop your technological literacies, and it fosters a collaborative environment between you, your classmates, and your instructor.

Second, the evaluation you receive on your assignments is part of what scholars call “distributed assessment.” This helps us to ensure fairness and objectivity. Therefore, many assignments will be evaluated by a team of qualified First-Year Writing instructors who are not your instructor. You will also receive comments on drafts. Please use these comments to help you revise.

Third, the University Writing Center (UWC) is an important part of English 1312. During the first two weeks of the semester, you’ll attend an orientation at the new UWC. Thereafter, your grades on individual projects will determine your level of involvement with the UWC. The tutoring experience provided at the UWC enables you to get beneficial individual feedback as you are working on improving your writing. Of course, all students are invited to receive free tutoring at the UWC whenever needed or desired.

Finally, we have thoughtfully created a curriculum that empowers you to determine the most effective strategies, arrangements, and media to use in different rhetorical contexts. We have carefully aligned the goals of the course with the assignments and the assessments of your work. We hope you find this connection helpful.

The First-Year Composition Program is very excited about the courses you are about to experience. Periodically, we’d like to check in with you to see how things are going—particularly regarding the feedback you receive on your writing. We hope you’ll be willing to participate in these surveys. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to talk with your instructor or to contact me at blbrunk@utep.edu.

Have a wonderful semester and learn to write well!

Dr. Beth Brunk-Chavez
Director of First-Year Composition
**APPENDIX C: EVALUATOR TRAINING SCHEDULE**

**Norming and Evaluating**—all meetings on Monday at 1:30 in the Writing Center Conference Room

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 27</td>
<td>With Kate for UWC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 29</td>
<td>Genre Analysis</td>
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<td>Oct 6</td>
<td>Genre Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 20</td>
<td>Lit review</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 27</td>
<td>Lit review</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov 5</td>
<td>Opinion piece</td>
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<td>Nov 10</td>
<td>Opinion piece</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov 17</td>
<td>Documentaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 8</td>
<td>Documentary and E-portfolio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D: ENGL 1312 COURSE ASSIGNMENTS OVERVIEW

FROM ENGL 1312 SYLLABUS:
1. Website E-Portfolio (ongoing all semester): Students will create, design, and maintain a webpage that will serve as a semester portfolio. All assignments, essays, and writing will be stored and linked. As assignments are completed, they will be uploaded. Students can add additional links and design the E-portfolio any way they want—with the stipulation that all of the semester’s work be able accessible through this webpage. 10 pts.

2. Homepage for Website E-Portfolio (ongoing all semester): Students will create a homepage for their website E-Portfolio that reflects the subject matter of their research project and provides the interface to access completed semester’s assignments. 10 pts.

3. Discourse Community Map: Using the definition and discussion of a “Discourse Community” provided in class, students will construct a discourse community map that outlines the various discourse communities they belong to and the different literacies needed to be a member. Students will need to consider the goals of each discourse community and how those goals shape communication (oral, visual, written). A written response essay will accompany the visual construction. 5 pts.

4. Genre Analysis: Students will find and compare two texts on the same subject but in different genres to write a genre analysis essay. Students can choose their genre/subject examples from the CDA textbook and outside of the textbook. 10 pts.

5. Literature Review & Research Report: Students will conduct primary and secondary research on a social, political, or ethical issue to become well-informed experts on the issue. Students will then write a literature review of these sources to summarize and synthesize the arguments and ideas of the research sources. 20 pts.

6. Online Opinion Piece: Students will write an online opinion piece on some aspect of the topic of their literature review/research report in order to advocate for a policy change. 10 pts.

7. Documentary Film Project: Using either Macintosh software (I-Movie, Garage Band and Motion) or Windows software (MovieMaker or PhotoStory), students will plan, write, film and edit a documentary film advocating a position on a current issue. Students will be provided with opportunities to become more familiar with this software throughout the semester. 20 pts.

8. Class Presentation: Students will present their documentaries to the class. 5 pts.

9. Participation in Class: In-class and online. 10 pts.
APPENDIX E: EXAMPLE EVALUATOR COMMENTING GUIDELINES

You’ll find that commenting on student writing is much like your experiences tutoring. Draw on those experiences as you comment. You may add comments in the margins, at the end, or both. It’s up to you, and not every paper will look the same.

The purposes of your comments are several:

1. To be sure the student is on-track. Is the student meeting the requirements of the assignment? The writing should:
   a. Not respond to the topic/author, but analyze the rhetoric (not argue about the topic/analysis)
   b. Understand genre
   c. Be a comparison of two genres on the same topic
   d. Have a thesis statement that presents an argument and not be all summary
   e. Use appropriate citations

2. To add constructive feedback. Don’t try to play the role of a picky editor. Comment on the big issues of the writing.

3. Provide the students with incentives to do well. Wish them luck. Make it somewhat personable.

Here are some useful tips for commenting effectively (and quickly):

- Using the evaluation rubric, focus on 3-5 major issues that the student should address.
- Don’t comment on everything you see. It will overwhelm the student.
- Don’t focus on grammar, style, usage, etc. The majority of your writing should appear in the margins as comments. But, make global comments about consistent errors.
- Offer suggestions for improvement.
- Compliment things that the student does well.
- Be specific—don’t just say: “this doesn’t work.” Also explain why.
- Address the writing, not the writer.
- If you think appropriate, recommend that the student visit the Writing Center. But, don’t suggest that each and every student go for a tutoring session.

If the paper is incomplete or shows a lack of effort, you are welcome to say, “I am unable to comment on your draft because of …” You can put this in the comment box so you don’t have to upload that particular paper. And in this case, the score should be 0.
APPENDIX F: LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH REPORT
Literature Review & Research Report

As a way to learn and understand how research professionals work, you will conduct primary and secondary research on a social, political, or ethical issue to become well-informed experts on the issue. You will then summarize and synthesize the arguments and ideas of the research sources. In order to accomplish this, you will need to form a research question, design, and engage in the research process to produce a 5-7 page literature review and report from the collected data.

A literature review and research report is more than just a simple summary of the sources. It has an organizational pattern and combines both summary and synthesis. A summary is a recap of the important information of the source, but a synthesis is a re-organization, or a reshuffling, of that information. It might give a new interpretation of old material or combine new with old interpretations. Or it might trace the intellectual progression of the field, including major debates. And depending on the situation, it may evaluate the sources and advise the reader on the most pertinent or relevant.

Compose: There are hundreds or even thousands of articles and books on most areas of study. The narrower your topic, the easier it will be to limit the number of sources you need to read in order to get a good survey of the material. Your instructor will probably not expect you to read everything that’s out there on the topic, but you’ll make your job easier if you first limit your scope with a research question (see pages 147-149 in CDA textbook).

As you read widely but selectively in your topic area, consider instead what themes or issues connect your sources together:

- Is there a raging debate on your issue? This might provide you with the focus you need.
- How is the subject discussed? How do different genres discuss the issue differently?
- Do they present one or different solutions?
- Is there an aspect of the issue that is missing or not discussed?

The research portion of the assignment can be done in groups (ask your instructor), but the literature review and report portion will be done individually.

Design: As you begin, you should read Chapters 5 and 6, pages 109-143 in your Compose, 
Design, Advocate textbook. You should do some preliminary library searching to see what other researchers have to say about this question. Good databases to check are ASC, JSTOR, Science Direct, Psychinfo, LexisNexis, Newspaper Source. Also check The Statistical Abstract of the United States and US Almanac for statistics. (see pgs. 151-155 & 159 in CDA). Avoid sources that you search randomly through the Web.

You will also need to conduct primary research. You can design and test a survey, interview questions, or categories of data and statistics that will focus on a target audience and will answer your research question. The more data points (answers) you have, the more robust are your findings. The easier it is for respondents to answer, the better your results will be. You can enrich survey and statistical research by including some longer interview-type questions (see pages 150-154 and 161 in CDA textbook).
You might have to compile results in Excel if data warrants. You can also use "Table" to compile survey answers. It is also possible for Excel to merge tables from different groups if your instructor wishes to compile whole class results.

**Design Plan:** The final report will be completed using APA manuscript formatting. Sections of the essay may be separated with headings. All headings are centered with all important words in capitals. The sections of the report include:

- Standard APA title page requirements.
- NO abstract is necessary
- Introduction
- Review of literature
- A discussion of your research question and thesis (Research Question)
- A discussion of your respondents, sample, and data collection (Methodology)
- A discussion of your results and conclusions (Results and Conclusions)
- Two graphic images embedded in the text, including but not limited to, one table showing tabulated results, one graph, chart (any type). Every graphic should be labeled as a Figure or a Table and given a consecutive number: Table 1, Table 2, Figure 1, Figure 2...
- References in alpha order, strict APA format.
- Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, one inch margins all around.
- Write in 3rd person, present and past tense.

**Product Testing:** You will peer review in class, through the Writing Center, or with your instructor. If necessary, plan enough time to organize and test the survey, and you might even practice surveying/interviewing each other. Coordinate interview times and locations with other class members as appropriate.

**Advocate:** Submit your Literature Review & Research Report on 1-Peer. Rough Draft due on Final Draft due on [ ] Your instructor will need any product test results, survey or questions (1 copy), abstract/citation pages from the articles cited in your literature review, and a copy of your spread sheet if applicable.
**Assessment Rubric for Literature Review & Research Report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>A (17-20)</th>
<th>B (13-16)</th>
<th>C (9-12)</th>
<th>D (5-8)</th>
<th>E (0-4)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Information</td>
<td>Information clearly relates to the main topic. It includes several supporting details and/or examples.</td>
<td>Information clearly relates to the main topic. It provides 1-2 supporting details and/or examples.</td>
<td>Information clearly relates to the main topic. No details and/or examples are given.</td>
<td>Information has little or nothing to do with the main topic.</td>
<td>Information has nothing to do with the main topic.</td>
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</table>

5 pts.

| Use of sources: good quality, fair use, total number cited, woven | Quotes used support writer’s points. Quotes are skillfully woven in the writer’s own words. Excellent quality sources, amount required or exceeded, used fairly and correctly. Entries on Reference list and in text match exactly. | Quotes generally support text. Most are woven. Good quality, fairly used, required number present. All cited correctly in text and on Reference list. | Quality fair. Sometimes don’t support writer’s text. One or more floating quotes. Some cites missing from text or incorrectly entered on Reference list. | Minimally reflects understanding of APA citation format. Missing in-text citations or missing components in Reference list. | Does not reflect understanding of APA citation format. Missing in-text citations or missing components in Reference list. |

5 pts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incorporation of primary research data</th>
<th>Primary research is accurate and adds to the reader’s understanding of the topic.</th>
<th>Primary research is accurate and adds to the reader’s understanding of the topic, but contains some minor errors.</th>
<th>Primary research is minimally accurate and does not add to the reader’s understanding of the topic.</th>
<th>Primary research is not accurate and/or does not add to the reader’s understanding of the topic.</th>
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<tr>
<td>(Diagrams, illustrations, graphs, interviews, survey information)</td>
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4 pts.

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<th>Writing Fluency: Academic voice, 3rd person, present/past tense</th>
<th>Academic voice, 3rd person, present/past tense</th>
<th>Academic voice, 3rd person, present/past tense mostly</th>
<th>Academic voice, 3rd person, present/past tense</th>
<th>Lacking academic voice, 3rd person, present/past tense</th>
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<tr>
<td>3rd person, present/past tense</td>
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92
<table>
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<tr>
<th>&quot;bumps&quot;</th>
<th>consistent.</th>
<th>consistent. Few grammar or mechanical errors.</th>
<th>somewhat consistent.</th>
<th>consistent.</th>
<th>tense.</th>
<th>Many grammar or mechanical errors.</th>
<th>Several grammar or mechanical errors.</th>
<th>Many major guideline or major format errors.</th>
<th>Format is completely incorrect.</th>
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<tr>
<td>4 pts.</td>
<td>Almost no grammar or mechanical errors.</td>
<td>Assignment guidelines met, a few minor format errors.</td>
<td>One or more of guidelines or major format criteria not met.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall APA format, font, and citation format</td>
<td>Meets all length, page format, font, and citation format criteria from guidelines and APA manual</td>
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CURRICULUM VITA

Annette Arrigucci graduated from the University of Texas at El Paso with a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science in 2003. She earned her Master of Science in Computer Science in 2005 and is projected to complete her Master of Arts in English-Rhetoric and Writing Studies in December 2008. She worked as a teaching assistant at UTEP in the 2007-08 school year and is currently employed as a web producer at KVIA, a television station in El Paso, Texas. E-mail her at annette.arrigucci@gmail.com.