

Assessment Report for Academic Year 2019-2020
International Studies Program
Program Director: Nicholas Toloudis, toloudin@tcnj.edu
Assessment Liaison: Nicholas Toloudis, toloudin@tcnj.edu

According to the IS Assessment Plan, the Program was scheduled to conduct two learning outcome assessments in the 2019-2010 academic year. We were unable to complete the first part, pertaining to oral presentations. We completed our second assessment pertaining to learning objective 6: “Students will demonstrate strong written communication skills, drawing on data to develop persuasive arguments as related to international issues.”

1) Assessment

We used senior capstone papers to conduct the assessment. Each IS major completes an in-depth research project in INT 498, our capstone course, in which they apply the theories and concepts to a research project covered by the course theme, which varies between course sections. Students are expected to situate their arguments in a scholarly literature and use theory and evidence to construct and defend their arguments. For the 2019-2020 academic year, the IS program offered three sections of INT 498, one taught by Dr. Toloudis in the fall, on the theme of social movements and popular protest, and two by Dr. Lowi in the spring, each on the theme of inequality. The fall section combined IS and POL majors; the assessment was only administered for IS majors.

Two faculty members assessed these capstone papers to determine whether they show achievement in learning objective 6. The rubric we used is on the final page of this document. The five component skills—content, context, disciplinary conventions, sources and evidence, and syntax and mechanics—reflect the learning objective in question.

2) Findings

The assessment covered a total of 28 IS seniors; 7 in Dr. Toloudis’ section and 21 in Dr. Lowi’s two sections. Table 1, below, shows average scores for each of the five components assessed.

Of the five skills assessed, the students were most successful with “syntax and mechanics,” which is essentially a measurement of students’ clarity and care with the English language, and context, which asks students to explain historical background on the case or cases under examination in the paper. On average, students displayed strong writing proficiency.

The lowest averages of the assessed components were “disciplinary conventions” and “sources and evidence.” These two skills are central to the seminar paper, which is an opportunity for students to do independent research on a topic of their choosing and place their argument into a dialogue with scholarly literature. Although the IS program’s introductory course provides students with an introduction to learning these skills, we do not have a research methods sequence, in the way that, for example, political science does.

Table 2 displays a breakdown of the five skills clustered around the four groupings noted in the rubric: below 15 (apprentice), 15-17 (proficient), and 18-20 (expert). This data helps to explain some of the lower average scores from Table 1. When it comes to disciplinary

conventions, in particular, 10 of the 28 students scored under 15. Few students scored under 15 in “syntax and mechanics” than in any other category.

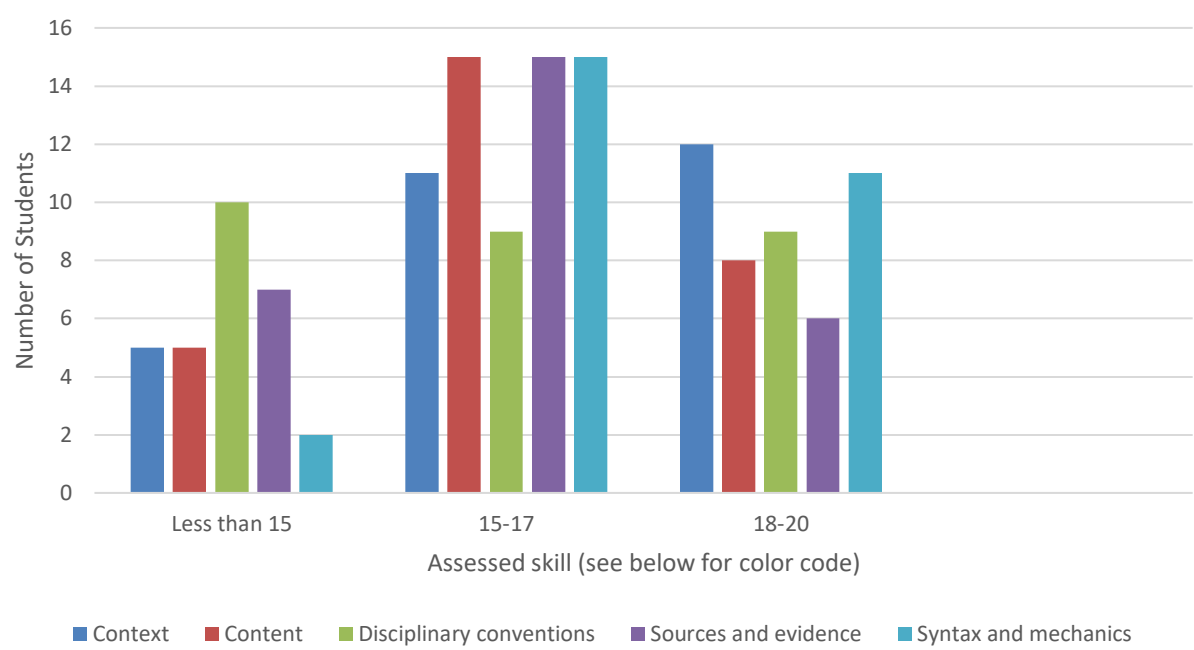
3) Conclusion

This assessment’s findings are in accordance with discussions that our faculty have had about our students’ work. The IS Program has routinely suggested creating a research methods course for our curriculum, or at least making research methods more central to our mandatory introductory course, INT 200. We believe that such a course would improve students’ skills in identifying scholarly literatures, finding core sources within them, and effectively situating their own claims the literature. So far, challenges in staffing an additional course for our curriculum have prevented us from adding another course to the major. We are currently working on the syllabus for INT 200 with an aim to give students better training in research methods.

The present assessment concludes our 2016-2020 assessment cycle. The IS program recently completed a self-study, we are welcoming an external reviewer to campus in the spring, and we hope to have a finished strategic plan by the fall of 2022. We will design our new assessment cycle alongside this work.

Table 1: Average Scores, by skill	
Assessed Skill	Average Score
Context	16.64
Content	16.14
Disciplinary conventions	15.93
Sources and evidence	15.82
Syntax and mechanics	16.71

Table 2: Assessment Scores



Rubric to measure “Written Communication Skills”
TCNJ International Studies Program

Student:

Evaluator:

Criteria	Expert (20-18)	Proficient (17-15)	Apprentice (<15)
Context of and purpose for writing	Demonstrates a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task(s) and focuses all elements of the work.	Demonstrates some awareness of context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s)	Demonstrates minimal attention to context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., expectation of instructor or self as audience).
Content development	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer's understanding, and shaping the whole work.	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work.	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop simple ideas in some parts of the work.
Disciplinary conventions	Demonstrates detailed attention to and successful execution of a wide range of conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task (s) including organization, content, presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices	Follows expectations appropriate to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s) for basic organization, content, and presentation	Attempts to use a consistent system for basic organization and presentation.
Sources and evidence	Demonstrates skillful use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources to develop ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing	Demonstrates an attempt to use credible and/or relevant sources to support ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing.	Demonstrates some attempt to use sources to support ideas in the writing.
Syntax and mechanics	Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency, and is virtually error-free.	Uses language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some errors.	Uses language that sometimes impedes meaning because of errors in usage.

Adopted by Nicholas Toloudis from Association of American Colleges and Universities:
<https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/critical-thinking>

Additional comments on this essay: