



**Center for Teaching and Learning of Queensborough Community College  
Graduate NYC! College Readiness and Success Project**

## **Getting Ready for College Writing**

**Final Report**

**Academic Year 2013-2014**

## Getting Ready for College Writing

The **purpose** of this project was a collaboration between Department of Education writing instructors and Queensborough Community College writing instructors in articulating and applying their standards for student writing across the “college transition.”

The project **activities** involved several professional development sessions wherein the following activities occurred:

1. 5 Queensborough Community College faculty from the Academic Literacy and English Departments were educated by Greg Betheil about the history of and the standards set by the NY State Regents as well as the NY Common Core State Standards for college level writing
2. 5 community college and 5 NY DOE faculty each collected 5 samples of their own students’ writing to a common prompt thus creating a resources of 50 examples of student writing ranging from 9<sup>th</sup> grade to the community college English 101 levels
3. relying on 6 selected examples of those students’ essays written to a common prompt—examples representing various levels of proficiency with academic writing, the faculty drafted in their own language a rubric for holistically identifying and scoring “transitional writing”
4. in order to discuss issues related to their mutual challenges with changing student populations in their respective classrooms and with creating and teaching writing assignments, faculty meet to “compare notes” and suggest solutions
5. faculty revised their rubric draft until satisfied that its dimensions (i.e. categories) and its scores ( e.g. 1-4) adequately defined the salient details that distinguish college level writing.
6. faculty participated in a norming session in which they applied the rubric they’d created to another 5 samples from the original 50 examples of student writing they’d collected
7. within only an hour of their norming session, faculty used the rubric they’d created to score the remaining 40 student essays written to a common prompt. Each student essay was read by at least 3 different faculty readers; “split” scored essays or essays receiving scores more than 1 step apart were read at least 1 additional time by a different reader
8. several weeks after the norming/scoring session, faculty met to review the results of their scoring session, make any revisions to the rubric that seemed necessary, discuss their experiences applying their rubric, and make suggestions about future applications/uses

### NY DOE Participants

- Shari Marks and Starr Sackstein -- **World Journalism Preparatory School**
- Marguerite Bagarozzi -- **Queens Academy**
- Noreen Fitzgerald -- **Thomas Edison High School**
- Jacqueline Gervasi -- **Bayside High School**

### QCC Participants

- Mohammed Nikoui-Tehrani, Samira Fayazi, Kerri-Ann Smith -- **Academic Literacy Dept**

- Kathleen Varanese -- **CUNY Start**
- Ben Miller -- **English Department**

The primary **challenges** we faced in our project were related to **recruitment and retention** and scheduling changes resulting from weather. Because Queensborough Community College is involved in several initiatives involving DOE faculty (e.g. College Now and College Focus), we imagined that it would be relatively easy to identify DOE faculty who wanted to participate in our project. In addition and in order to conserve funds, we originally scheduled all our meeting dates to coincide with DOE PD dates for AY 13-14. However, when one of the PIs of the project, Mary Anne Meyer, reached out to DOE faculties participating in QCC's summer '13 activities who, we believed, were likely to be available for our first August 12<sup>th</sup> (2013) meeting, we found no takers. That first meeting, then, was attended only by QCC faculty. Fortunately however, DOE faculty is familiar with common core state standards, and so the August 12<sup>th</sup> briefing about those standards was not essential to their participation in the project.

With the assistance from Graduate NYC! staff, we eventually found the 5 DOE participants we needed, and the two faculty groups met for the first time on November 5, 2013. Unfortunately though, most if not all of the DOE faculty were under the impression that the group meetings would be largely conversational and informal; they believed they were attending a forum for the two faculty groups to discuss teaching writing in their respective settings. As a result, some of the DOE team members felt constricted by the planned work of the group. That plan was the following:

- to discuss only the 5 selected sample essays from the group of 50 submitted by all the team members
- to use evidence from those 5 essays to create a draft of a rubric independent of CAT-W or Regents standards that writing teachers could use to identify in their own language the criteria for college-level writing.

In order to assuage (and retain) those DOE faculty who were unprepared for the work necessary in the session and because both DOE and QCC faculty assured us that they were more than willing to commit to getting together during “school” hours, the project PIs decided to schedule an additional session so that the faculty could meet informally but stay on schedule for the work of the project. Nonetheless, we lost two of the DOE faculty—Starr Sackstein and Shari Marks—who were re-assigned by their principal to other PD activities; their attendance was limited to one PD day only, November 5, 2013.

For the remaining group of 3 DOE faculty and 5 QCC faculty, further **scheduling difficulties** occurred because of snow storms in early February; thus, the re-scheduled time wherein faculty revised the rubric occurred in two shorter sessions (February 20, 2014 and March 10, 2014) rather than the originally scheduled one. A longer 4 hour norming session took place on April 12, 2014 during both faculty's Spring Break. (Evidence of faculty's continued engagement in the project is clear from their willingness to continue their work during their vacation!) Not all faculty could attend all of these sessions, but those who did attend were dedicated to the process of revising and applying the rubric they'd created. All original 10 faculty members contributed to drafting the original rubric; all remaining 8 faculty attended at least two of the three revising sessions. Two DOE and all five QCC faculty members were present for the April 12<sup>th</sup> norming and scoring session; all remaining 8 faculty were present for our reflection and wrap up session on June 5, 2014. The additional stipends accumulated as a result of these additional meetings were absorbed because of the following:

- the project incurred no supplies costs
- not all faculty could attend all the sessions

- the PIs' respective departments each covered some food costs.

The **overall success of the project** can be seen not just in the shareable resources created but also in the reflections that the team shared in the last session. Those reflections were quite positive regarding the significance of the following characteristics of our project:

- collaborating across the college/high school divide
- creating a rubric that holistically scores transitional writing (rather than one like the CAT-W that assigns separate scores for individual dimensions of the writing) and thus focuses on global issues
- creating a rubric based on specific qualities scorers identify in specific examples of student writing (rather than on generic qualities not associated with any particular example of student writing)
- norming as a group (rather than norming to an identified “anchor” that a facilitator identifies as a “3” or “passing” etc)
- using the language of the rubric and the evidence of student text(s) to explain/justify a specific score

Several team members also commented on what they see as the problematic distinction between a student author's task/reading comprehension ability and his or her language ability, a distinction that largely determines what is considered “college level” writing. The faculty were pleased that because the rubric they created assigns a holistic score it is inclusive of all characteristics of writing and therefore does not isolate/exclude ESL or ELL students. Some commented on the ways that the CAT-W scoring process allows for a bias by insisting that ELL's cannot pass: if a writer earns “2” in the last two language domains of the CAT-W, then s/he cannot earn high than “3” in any of the first three categories and thus cannot pass.

The **shareable resources** of our project are 1) a packet of essays written by students from varying in levels of writing courses and all in response to the same prompt (already provided to Graduate NYC staff) and 2) a rubric for scoring transitional writing created by the collaboration between DOE and QCC faculty (attached here).

The **results** of the holistic scoring session were very persuasive with respect to the effectiveness of the team's norming session. The sample is quite small (only 40 student essays were scored, each of which was scored by at least three different readers) and thus not a sample that can give statistically significant results. However, the Learning Outcomes Assessment Manager at QCC, Ian Beckford, performed a calculation of inter rater agreement on a subset of the data; according to Dr. Beckford, “the result of the inter rater analysis was that  $\alpha=.830$  which means there was substantial agreement among the raters.”

**All faculty agreed that sharing the rubric on their campuses and having other DOE and QCC writing faculty participate in norming/scoring sessions similar to the one we had on April 12, 2014 would be a highly effective way to create community and agreement about standards among those faculty who teach and/or evaluate transitional writing.**

Dr. Jane E Hindman, Director  
Center for Excellent in Teaching and Learning  
Queensborough Community College

Mary Anne Meyer, Program Director

## FINAL BUDGET

### Stipends (\$50/hr)

August 12, 2013	5 QCC faculty @ 4hr/ea	\$1000
Nov 5, 2013	PD day DOE faculty, 5 QCC faculty @ 3hr/ea	\$ 750
Dec 11, 2013	2 DOE faculty, 5 QCC faculty @ 2 hr/ea	\$ 700
Feb 20, 2014	2 DOE faculty, 3 QCC faculty @ 3.5 hr/ea	\$ 875
March 10, 2014	2 DOE faculty, 5 QCC faculty @ 2 hr/ea	\$ 700
April 12, 2014	2 DOE faculty, 5 QCC faculty @ 5 hr/ea	\$1750
June 5	PD day DOE faculty, 5 QCC faculty @ 4 hrs/ea	\$1000
		<u>\$6775 stipends</u>

### Food

Lunches	8/12 /13	\$116.25
	11/5 no charge (Metro catering mistake in order)	
	12/11/13 covered by College Now	
	4/12/14	\$287.57
	6/5/14 (\$115.32 covered by CETL)	<u>\$ 21.18</u>
		\$425 food

### Office supplies

QCC print office – No charge for photocopying student writing		=	\$ 0 supplies
			<b>\$7200</b>