

4-2012

MAJOR DIFFERENCE: AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENT WRITING PERFORMANCE BY MAJOR AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Lucia S. Sigmar

Geraldine E. Hynes

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/aij>

 Part of the [Health and Medical Administration Commons](#), [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), and the [Public Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sigmar, Lucia S. and Hynes, Geraldine E. (2012) "MAJOR DIFFERENCE: AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENT WRITING PERFORMANCE BY MAJOR AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION," *Administrative Issues Journal*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 13.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/aij/vol2/iss1/13>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Administrative Issues Journal by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

MAJOR DIFFERENCE: AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENT WRITING PERFORMANCE BY MAJOR AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Lucia S. Sigmar, Ph.D.

Geraldine E. Hynes, Ph.D.
Sam Houston State University

This study analyzes the writing performance levels of 352 students to determine the extent to which business students are achieving written communication competency and whether differences exist among the business majors. Although most students met or exceeded expectations in format and content on a common writing task, students were weakest in grammar and mechanics, with almost half scoring below expectations across all majors. The findings indicate no statistically significant differences in writing competency among majors. This study also suggests that business communicators can serve as “collegial consultants” in a cross-disciplinary effort to improve student writing.

Keywords: business writing, writing competency, academic major, assessment, assurance of learning, rubrics, writing pedagogy

As higher education costs increase, colleges and universities are coming under increasing scrutiny for “value added” in degree programs and accountability to state governments and accrediting agencies. The pressure is on higher education to provide students with the skills they need to be effective citizens and workers. One skill set that has gained increasing attention is communication. Across the business disciplines, communication skills—in particular, writing skills—are recognized as critical for academic and professional success (National Commission on Writing, 2003). In the workplace, employers consistently rate the organization and development of ideas in a clear, concise manner and the correct use of English (grammar, punctuation, and spelling) as the most preferred skills in written communication. While national initiatives have made it possible for more students to pursue higher education, only about one quarter of high school seniors has the ability to do college-level writing, and improvement at the secondary school level is unlikely for a number of reasons, among them cultural and social forces that inform literacy (Jameson, 2007). More than 50% of college freshmen are “unable to produce papers relatively free of language errors,” and “analyzing...arguments and synthesizing information are also beyond the scope of most first-year students” (Intersegmental Committee, 2002, p. 4).

Higher education cannot afford to ignore this downward trend in literacy. The cost of poor writing skills to business is staggering. The Industry Report (1999) found that organizations within the United States spent roughly \$62 billion on training budgets, and nearly 88% of those companies provided communication training to their employees. A survey of 120 American corporations concluded that a third of employees in the nation’s blue chip companies write poorly (National Commission on Writing, 2003). Sean Phillips, recruitment director at Applera, a Silicon Valley supplier of equipment for life science research, reflects this corporate perspective: “Considering how highly educated our people are, many can’t write clearly in their day-to-day work” (qtd. in Dillon, 2004, p. 1).

As educators, we must acknowledge the fact that our students are not performing to our expectations. We must resist the urge to lay blame elsewhere. And most importantly, we must teach students how to write.

Business schools, spurred to action by the accreditation requirements of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), are directly addressing the issue. In 2003 the AACSB approved and, two years later, implemented its Eligibility Procedures and Standards for Business Accreditation. The new accreditation standards shifted the primary focus from “what teachers taught to what students learned” (Martell, 2007, p. 189). The new Assurance of Learning (AoL) requirements reflected a major change in the area of assessment measures. Previously used



indirect measures (e.g. student or employer surveys) were supplanted by direct measures that required students to demonstrate their skills and knowledge (Martell & Calderon, 2005).

While the assessment process is a key component of AACSB's Assurance of Learning (AoL) Standards, making continuous improvements to the curriculum based on the assessment data (i.e., "closing the loop") is "the final step in AoL [and] the *raison d'être* for assessing student learning" (Martell, 2007, p. 192). The focus, then, is the actual knowledge, skills, and competencies that graduates of a particular degree program possess (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, 2006; Blood, 2006). Moreover, "[i]f, despite the faculty's best efforts, students have not learned certain information or a particular knowledge or skill they must be taught those things" (Martell, 2007, p. 192).

A REVIEW OF WRITING PEDAGOGY IN THE BUSINESS DISCIPLINES

Clearly, business schools are responding to the expectation that they provide students with the skills and competencies needed for successful careers. Although writing enhanced courses are an integral part of the business curriculum, assessing their effectiveness is problematic. With AACSB-sponsored assessment recommendations as our impetus, this paper presents an overview of the effectiveness and methodology of writing interventions across the business disciplines and investigates the level of our students' business writing skills. It further seeks to determine whether student major is a predictor of writing ability.

An investigation of discipline-specific literature reveals an awareness of the problem and how various business disciplines have attempted to improve their majors' writing competency. The following is a brief summary for accounting, economics, finance, marketing, and international business.

Accounting

A predominance of literature in accounting suggests an awareness of the weaknesses in student writing. According to Steadman and Green (1995), accounting curricula do not prepare graduates for articulating goals and strategies in the corporate world. A range of initiatives has been tried with positive outcomes (Ashbaugh, Johnstone, & Warfield, 2002; Craig & McKinney, 2010; Reinstein & Houston, 2004; Riordan, Riordan, & Sullivan, 2000; Stout & Hoff, 1989/90; Wygal & Stout, 1989). One notable approach is to develop modules addressing specific aspects of student writing (Stout & Dacrema, 2004). Modules have a number of advantages: they are inexpensive, brief, substantial, informal, and practical as "stand-alone resources" for different instructors, different classes, and different writing issues. As an added benefit, weak writers are less intimidated by the informal shaping of this type of resource.

Although Stout and Dacrema used their intervention in the accounting classroom, such writing interventions could be adapted to other business disciplines in the form of "electronic-interventions," such as online podcasts or narrated slideshows, in which specific and recurring writing problems (such as paragraph development or apostrophe usage) are addressed by business communication or discipline-specific faculty.

Economics

Two notable attempts to improve economics majors' writing are the use of essay exams, which forces the students "to own" the course content by maximizing critical learning and retention for years to come (Jasso, 2009), and a team approach to maintaining standards for writing assessment (Plutsky & Wilson, 2001).

Finance

A recent survey indicates that 50% of finance faculty use writing assignments in their classes (Saunders, 2001). Two major student writing challenges in this discipline appear to be the inability to translate financial concepts into lay language and the inability to construct rhetorically useful graphics (Carrithers & Bean, 2008; Carrithers, Ling, & Bean, 2008). Short, frequent, informal writing assignments such as journaling seem to improve student understanding of financial concepts as well as their writing (Hall & Tiggeman, 1995; Harmon, 1990).

Marketing

A number of studies described initiatives in marketing departments such as establishing writing standards, requiring students to attend writing workshops, offering handouts, feedback, and periodic reassessment. Skills significantly

improved as a result of all such interventions (Bacon & Anderson, 2004; Bacon, Paul, Johnson, & Conley, 2008; Corbin & Glynn, 1992). Noting the effect of holding students accountable for their writing, researchers concluded that "... students may not need to be taught so much as motivated to learn" (Bacon & Anderson, 2004, p. 446).

International Business (IB)

Consistent with the research conducted in other business disciplines, Ranney and McNeilly (1996) found that when writing assignments were incorporated into an IB course, and a writing specialist explained the assignments and evaluated them, not only did students improve their writing, but their comprehension of IB issues improved, as well.

This brief literature review indicates various interventions and strategies that are being applied in the business disciplines in an attempt to improve students' writing skills. Clearly, all business faculty, not just business communication faculty, are addressing this goal. Although business communication courses may be the logical location for teaching and assessing writing competency for a business school, business communication courses alone do not produce competent business communicators (Flanegin & Rudd, 2000). Emphasis on writing competency needs to be consistent across the disciplines. In addition, assessment is a "curricular task" that all stakeholders share in and learn from (Yancey & Huot, 1997, p. 12).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study of business students' writing competency was inspired by two organizational catalysts. The first was the College Board's National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges (2003), which called on public and private leaders and assessment experts to ensure that

- assessment of writing competence is fair and authentic;
- standards, curriculum, and assessment are aligned, in writing and elsewhere in the curriculum, in reality as well as in rhetoric;
- assessments of student writing go beyond multiple-choice, machine-scorable items; and
- assessment provides students with adequate time to write and requires students to actually create a piece of prose (p. 24).

Our research design was an attempt to comply with these standards set by the College Board.

The AACSB assessment process recommendations were the second catalyst for our investigation of student writing competency by major. As we began to "close the loop," we questioned whether certain majors within the College of Business Administration demonstrated different levels of writing ability. According to Martell, "[u]ncovering these differences, if they exist, can identify groups of students that may need remediation or can reveal best practices in one major or delivery system that can be shared with others" and can help faculty "close the loop" (2007, p. 193).

Therefore, the two research questions for this study are:

RQ1: To what extent are business students achieving written communication competency?

RQ2: To what extent do students with different business majors differ in writing competency?

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Data for this study were gathered from 352 undergraduate students enrolled in 12 sections of a required, writing-enhanced, junior-level business communication course during one semester. Students were business majors at a mid-sized (17,000 total students) public (state-supported) university in the southwestern United States. The institution is classified as a Doctoral Research University by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. The College of Business Administration is AACSB-accredited.

Each section of the business communication course was comprised of 20 to 30 students. Since students decide in-



dependently in which particular section of the course to enroll, it is assumed that the distribution of business majors across the sections was random.

Data about student majors was gathered during the assessment of writing competency. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the study sample by student major.

Table 1
Student Sample by Major

Major	Number of Students
General Business (GBA)	138
Accounting (ACCT)	67
Marketing (MKT)	41
Finance (FIN)	30
Management (MGT)	27
International Business (INB)	16
Human Resources Management (HRM)	12
Economics (ECO)	8
Management Information Systems (MIS)	7
Banking & Financial Institutions (BFI)	6
TOTAL	352

Demographic data were not collected for factors such as ethnicity, gender, or age. However, the university's Institutional Research Board publishes an undergraduate student profile showing that students' mean age is 27. The proportion of females to males on campus is 40/60%. Campus-wide, 3.5% are international students. Of the U.S. students, about 25% are African-American, 15% are Hispanic/Latino-American, 53% are White (non-Hispanic), 0.8% are Asian-American, and 2.8% are Multiethnic/Multiracial ("Business Schools Ranking," 2011). The business communication course prerequisite is a course in electronic communication techniques, a skills-based course that is designed to develop student competency in MS Office Suite, including Word. Thus, the investigators assumed the student sample was computer literate and had at least some previous writing instruction and/or experience.

Instrumentation

A writing rubric (Appendix A), developed the previous year in response to the AACSB initiative, was used by the graders to evaluate students' writing competency for three performance elements (*format*, including document design; *content*, including organization and diction/tone; and *grammar/mechanics*) in a brief business message assignment.

Competency in format was determined by evaluating the extent to which students' documents included standard elements of a business letter or memo, in the appropriate location.

Competency in content was determined by evaluating the extent to which students' writing samples included information that was appropriate for the purpose and audience, clarity, diction, tone, organization of ideas, and paragraph development.

Competency in grammar and mechanics was determined by evaluating syntax and the number of surface errors in the documents, including spelling, punctuation, capitalization, run-on sentences and fragments, use of passive voice,

and usage errors.

The writing rubric used in this study allocates a certain number of points for each performance element, which allows for weighting. For example, content might be worth up to 30 points out of the maximum 100 points for the assignment (30% of the grade). Further, the total points possible for each performance element is divided into three categories on the rubric – “exceeds expectations,” “meets expectations,” and “below expectations,” roughly interpreted as A-B level, C-level, and D-F level. These terms are consistent with rubric guidelines for evaluating student writing assignments (Appendix A).

Procedure

For the writing sample evaluated in this study, students were asked to compose a persuasive letter or memo in response to a business case. The students keyed and printed their responses to the case during one class period, under the supervision of the instructor.

The writing assignment was the third of three, in-class, brief business writing tasks, performed during the last half of the semester. Because the assignment was required in all sections of the course, no extra credit was given for participation. According to the Chair of the university’s Protection of Human Subjects Committee, there was no need to acquire students’ informed consent because personal identifiers were not included in the data set.

Five business communication instructors who taught 12 sections of the course used the same rubric to evaluate their students’ persuasive messages. The instructors were equally familiar with the rubric, the assignment, and the course content. All used the same textbook and followed a Master Syllabus for the course. The instructors were all full-time business communication faculty in the College of Business Administration. They were seasoned veterans, having taught the undergraduate business communication course for at least five years, and for as many as 35 years, at the same institution.

Although all five instructors used the same rubric to evaluate their students’ writing sample, it is possible that researcher bias was inadvertently introduced. No formal attempt was made to standardize the instructors’ level of expectations. Some instructors may have judged the writing more leniently or harshly than others. Inter-rater reliability among the graders, therefore, was not ensured.

FINDINGS

RQ1: To what extent are business students achieving written communication competency?

Results are reported below for three performance elements: format, content, and grammar/mechanics. Table 2 summarizes the distribution of students who exceeded expectations, met expectations, and fell below expectations for the performance elements of the writing sample. As Table 2 shows, students’ writing samples were strongest in format, with 35.8% exceeding expectations. The writing samples were weakest in grammar and mechanics, with almost half (49.1%) scoring below expectations on this performance element.

Table 2
Distribution of Scores for Each Performance Element across Majors

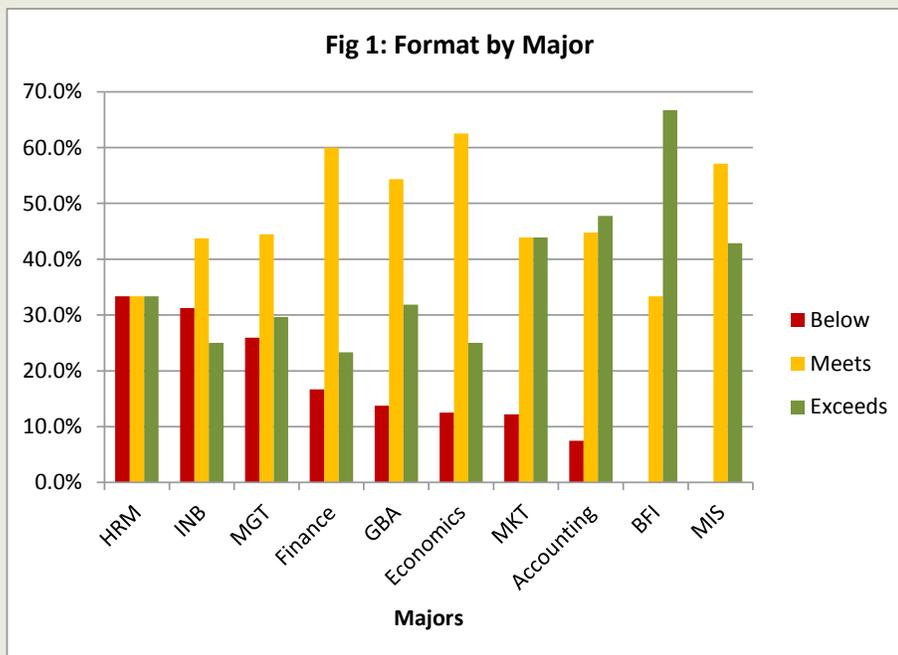
	Format		Content		Grammar/Mechanics	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Exceeded Expectations	126	35.8	55	15.6	45	12.8
Met Expectations	175	49.7	245	69.6	134	38.1
Below Expectations	51	14.5	52	14.8	173	49.1
Total	352	100.0	352	100.0	352	100.0



RQ2: To what extent do students with different business majors differ in writing competency?

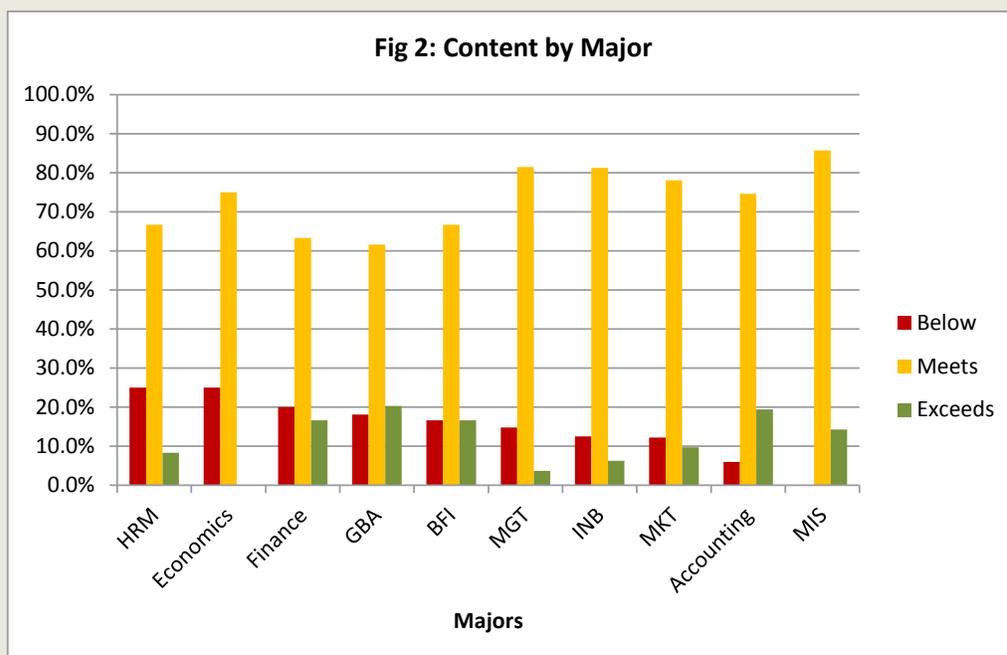
Results are reported below for three performance elements (format, content, and grammar/mechanics) that were evaluated in the writing samples. The distribution of students' scores is reported by student major.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of scores for letter and memo format by student major.



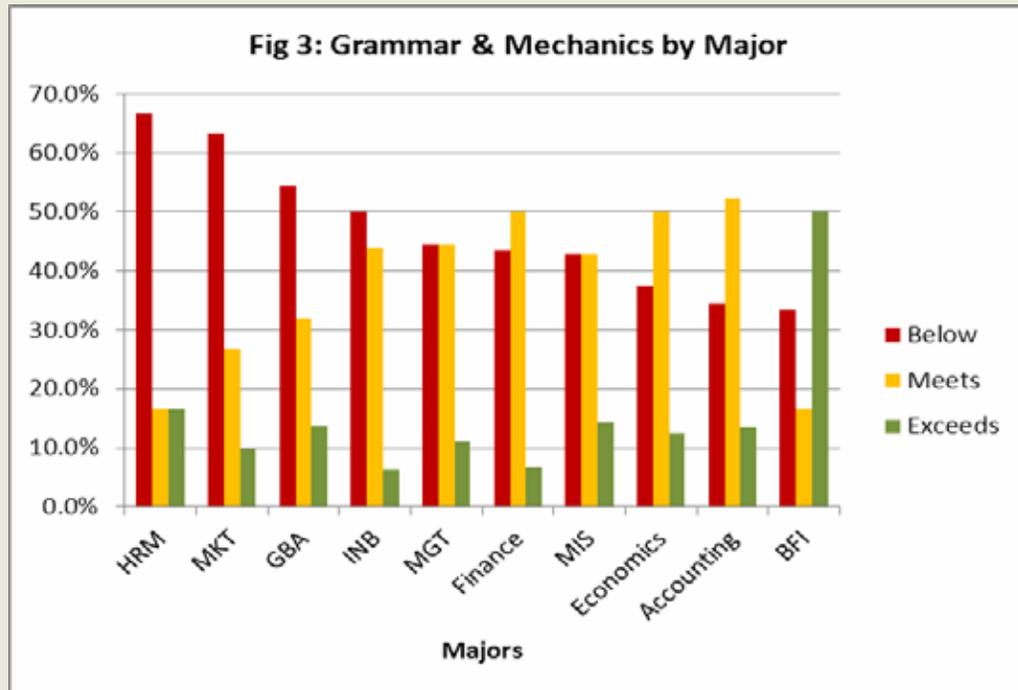
As Figure 1 shows, Banking and Financial Institutions majors scored the best in format of their business letters and memos, with 67% exceeding expectations. Accounting (48%), Marketing (43%), and Management Information Systems (42%) majors also scored well in the format performance element. On the other hand, Human Resources Management majors scored lowest in format, with 32% below expectations.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of scores for letter and memo content by student major.



As Figure 2 shows, the content of students' writing samples overwhelmingly met expectations across all business majors. General Business Administration and Accounting majors had the highest percentage of scores that exceeded expectations (20%). On the other hand, the Human Resource Management and Economics majors had the greatest percentage of scores at the below expectations level (24%), while none of the MIS majors scored below expectations on content.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of scores on the writing sample for the performance element of grammar and mechanics by major.



As Figure 3 shows, performance on grammar and mechanics was the weakest for the students across all majors. At least 33% of every major scored below expectations on this element of the writing sample. The Human Resources Management and Marketing majors performed the most poorly, with about two-thirds scoring below expectations. The students who scored the best on grammar and mechanics were the Banking and Financial Institutions majors, with 50% exceeding expectations on grammar and mechanics.

In an attempt to determine whether any of the differences in writing competency among different majors were significant, statistical analyses were conducted. We focused on the results for grammar and mechanics because overall performance was the poorest among the three elements in this study (format, content, and grammar/mechanics). The ordinal nature of the rubric outcomes dictated our choice of analytical techniques. Thus, the ordinal logistic regression model seemed appropriate. In this model, the dependent variable was competency, which took on the value of 1 if the student was below expectations, 2 if the student met expectations, and 3 if the student exceeded expectations. This is an ordinal scale in that a 3 is better than a 2 and a 2 is better than a 1, but the amount of increased competency ("how much better") is unknown.

Table 3 depicts the results of the ordinal logistic regression of competency against the students' major. General Business (GBA) majors were excluded and used as the base case because they were the largest group (n=138) (Table 1). The estimated coefficients of the ordinal logistic regression model represent the natural log of the odds ratio for a student with the corresponding major. For example, the estimated coefficient for accounting majors is 0.61. Raising the number e to the power of 0.61 gives us the odds ratio for accounting majors. The odds ratio is the ratio of the probability of exceeding expectations to the probability of not exceeding expectations. Thus, for accounting majors the odds ratio is 1.84.



Table 3
Regression Statistics

Major	B/Se	Odds Ratio	Probability Of Exceeding Expectations
BFI	1.64 -0.87	5.16	0.84
HRM	-0.42 -0.64	0.66	0.40
MIS	0.38 -0.73	1.46	0.59
ACCT	0.61* -0.28	1.84	0.65
ECO	0.5 -0.67	1.65	0.62
MGT	0.27 -0.4	1.31	0.57
MKT	-0.4 -0.36	0.67	0.40
FIN	0.22 -0.37	1.25	0.55
INB	0.01 -0.5	1.01	0.50
_cut1	0.11 -0.17	1.12	0.53
_cut2	2.12*** -0.21	8.33	0.89

Note: log_likelihood -338.63; LR_chi_square 12.47; Prob > chi_square 0.188; r2_p-value 0.02

The probability of exceeding expectations can be computed from the odds ratio. As shown in Table 3, the only significant coefficient is for Accounting majors ($p < .05$). According to the model, an Accounting major would have a 65% probability of exceeding expectations on grammar and mechanics.

Unfortunately, the p-value of the likelihood ratio test for significance of the model (0.188) indicates that the fit of the model overall is not significant. Because some majors have few observations in the data set, the estimation is unstable and is sensitive to which variable is left out. Future research will attempt to overcome this obstacle by increasing the size of the dataset and incorporating a wider variety of demographic information.

In summary, the statistical analyses that were conducted on the data reported above were not significant, and any differences in performance on the various writing elements are simply due to chance. The wide variation in sample sizes for each major precludes further analysis (Table 1). After all, only six of the 352 students in the study were Banking and Financial Institutions (BFI) majors, so their relatively strong performance on content, grammar and mechanics does not imply anything about BFI majors. Rather, despite the variations by major, the data imply that all business majors have strengths and weaknesses in writing competency, and the greatest weakness for all business majors appears to be grammar and mechanics.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that our business students are achieving higher levels of competency in some areas of business writing than in others (Research Question 1). The students' writing samples were stronger in format and content than in grammar/mechanics, with almost half scoring below expectations on the latter performance element.

Second, the results of this study indicate that, although interesting differences emerged, our students' writing competency does not vary significantly by business major (Research Question 2). Banking and Financial Institutions majors, for instance, scored the strongest in format of their business messages. Accounting majors scored the best on grammar/mechanics. General Business Administration and Accounting majors scored the best on content of their messages. However, the widely varying sample sizes of each major precluded measures of statistical significance. In addition, college major may not be a good predictor of writing competency. Future research will attempt to identify other predictors that faculty could use to help differentiate students so that interventions can be designed to address these differences in prior experiences or knowledge.

Implications

The study has strong implications for business instructors. If students at the university level lack the skills to write an effective business message, then educators must provide them additional writing instruction, practice, motivation, and feedback until they can produce an acceptable document. As a brief review of the literature in Accounting, Economics, Finance, Marketing, and International Business has demonstrated, expanding writing skills training throughout the business school curriculum positively impacts writing competency. Research also indicates that collaboration among departments of business and their external stakeholders improves students' perception of the importance of writing (Ashbaugh, Johnstone, & Warfield, 2002; Gabriel & Hirsch, 1992; Hirsch & Collins, 1988; McIssac & Sepe, 1996). To produce competent graduates then, the business disciplines must "close the loop" with effective teaching methodologies at the degree program level, in various courses and across majors.

Business communication faculty can lead the way by offering to collaborate on writing improvement with their colleagues in other disciplines. One important opportunity for collaboration between business communication faculty and faculty in other business disciplines is in the development of rubrics. While not an "intervention" *per se*, rubrics are a first step in assessing student learning goals because they systematically and objectively measure the level of student competency. Faculty can use that assessment data to continuously reinforce student writing competency through effective pedagogical strategies.

While common in education, rubric development in the business disciplines—with perhaps the exception of business communication—is still relatively new. Critics complain that rubrics are too standard and overlook differences in learning styles and experiences (Kilpatrick, Duean, & Kilpatrick, 2008). Rubrics also may not accommodate different mission statements and operational environments (Varner & Pomerence, 1998). To avoid these issues, writing rubrics for the business disciplines should be tailored to specific assignments, specific performance criteria, and specific levels of competency. More importantly, each rubric should be aligned with achievement of learning outcomes (Manino & Shoaf, 2007).

Business communication faculty can consult with colleagues in other business disciplines to sidestep the potential hazards of evaluating writing. Moreover, it is well established in the literature that many professors outside the writing disciplines are uncomfortable with the idea of teaching writing (Munter, 1999; Plutsky & Wilson, 2001; Riordan, Riordan, & Sullivan, 2000). While many of these professionals generally recognize good writing when they see it, some may find it difficult to articulate a series of writing performance goals tailored to a specific assignment. However, a team of "reasonably qualified readers and writers of English can, when guided by a rubric, make legitimate subjective decisions about a given piece of writing" (Warnock, 2009, p. 98).

Business communicators engaged in collegial consultancy can assist faculty in other disciplines in developing course-specific writing assignments with rubrics that evaluate student writing. Such assignments and rubrics need not be uniform. As Warnock (2009) points out, synchronizing the opinions of assessors is not the goal here; meaningful results can be achieved "without ignoring the effects of context and by respecting the natural subjectivity of the task"



(p. 98). For example, a rubric designed by the authors for a business presentations course is being used in other business courses, and a marketing faculty member has consulted with the authors to develop rubrics for course-specific writing assignments.

CONCLUSIONS

In consideration of learning outcomes of business students for assessment purposes, Warnock (2009) notes that large numbers gain “statistical power” and reduce individual subjectivity in the assessment process. With greater saturation of writing practice across the business disciplines, business schools and their faculty can predict, with greater accuracy, the learning outcomes of their students in writing competency. Assessment is not done for assessment’s sake; rather it endeavors to improve student writing competency. Collegial consulting on simple assessment tools such as rubrics is a good first step toward that goal.

Authors’ Note: The authors are grateful to Dr. M. Douglas Berg, Associate Professor of Business Analysis at Sam Houston State University, for his assistance in the statistical analysis of the data reported in this paper.

REFERENCES

- Ashbaugh, H., Johnstone, K., & Warfield, T. (2002). Outcome assessment of writing-skill improvement initiative: Results and methodological implications. *Issues in Accounting Education*, 17(2), 123-148.
- Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). (2006). *Eligibility procedures and accreditation standards for business accreditation*. Retrieved September 29, 2010, from <http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/business/STANDARDS.pdf>
- Bacon, D., & Anderson, E. (2004). Assessing and enhancing the basic writing skills of marketing students. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 67(4), 443-454.
- Bacon, D., Paul, P., Johnson, C., & Conley, T. (2008). Improving writing through the marketing curriculum. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 30(3), 217-225.
- Blood, M. (2006). Only you can create actionable knowledge. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 5, 209-212.
- Business schools rankings. (2011, August 9). *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*. Retrieved from http://www.businessweek.com/bschools/rankings/undergraduate_mba_profiles/samhouston.html
- Carrithers, D., & Bean, J. (2008). Using a client memo to assess critical thinking of finance majors. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 71(1), 10-26.
- Carrithers, D., Ling, T., & Bean, J. (2008). Messy problems and lay audiences: Teaching critical thinking within the finance curriculum. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 71(2), 152-170.
- Corbin, S., & Glynn, K. (1992). Writing in the marketing curriculum. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 14(2), 46-52.
- Craig, R., & McKinney, C. (2010). A successful competency-based writing skills development programme: Results of an experiment. *Accounting Education*, 19(3), 257-278.
- Dillon, S. (2004, December 7). What corporate America can’t build: A sentence. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/07/business/07write.html?oref=login>
- Flanagin, F. R., & Rudd, D. (2000). Integrating communication skills and business education: Teaching for tomorrow. *Journal of Business Education Proceedings*, 2000. In McEwen, B. (2003). Improving the writing skills of business majors: The collective responsibility of all courses and professors. *Proceedings of the 2003 Association for Business Communication Annual Convention* (pp. 1-12).
- Gabriel, S.L., & Hirsch, M.L., Jr. (1992). Critical thinking and communication skills: Integration and implementation issues. *Journal of Accounting Education*, 10, 243-270.

- Hall, S., & Tiggeman, T. (1995). Getting the big picture: Writing to learn in a finance class. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 58(1), 12-15.
- Harmon, G. (1990). Personal finance and communication: A natural duo. *Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication*, 53(4), 19-20.
- Hirsch, Jr., M., & Collins, J.D. (1988). An integrated approach to communication skills in an accounting curriculum. *Journal of Accounting Education*, 6, 15-31.
- Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates (ICAS). (2002). *Academic literacy: A statement of competencies expected of students entering California's public colleges and universities*. Sacramento, CA: ICAS.
- The Industry Report. (1999). The latest data on expenditures, types of training, and more. *Training*, 36(10), 37-81.
- Jasso, S. (2009). The essay and its virtue: Achieving better results in teaching economics using student composition. *Review of Business Research*, 9(3), 43-54.
- Jameson, D. (2007). Literacy in decline: Untangling the evidence. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 70(1), 16-33.
- Kilpatrick, J., Duean, K., & Kilpatrick, P. (2008). Philosophical concerns about interpreting AACSB assurance of learning standards. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 17(3), 200-12. DOI: 10.1177/1056492607312024
- Mannino, L., & Shoaf, V. (2007). Writing assessment: The use of rubrics. In Proceedings of the Northeast Business and Economics Association. New Britain, CT: NBEA.
- Martell, K. (2007). Assessing student learning: Are business schools making the grade? *Journal of Education for Business*, 82(4), 189-195.
- Martell, K., & Calderon, T. (Eds.). (2005). *Assessment of student learning in business schools: Best practice each step of the way*. Tallahassee, FL: Association of Institutional Research.
- McIssac, C.M., & Sepe, J.F. (1996). Improving the writing of accounting students: A cooperative venture. *Journal of Accounting Education*, 13, 515-535.
- Munter, M. (1999). Whacking WAC. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 62(1), 108-111.
- National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges. (2003). *The neglected "R": The need for a writing revolution*. New York: College Entrance Examination Board.
- Plutsky, S., & Wilson, B. (2001). Writing across the curriculum in a college of business and economics. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 64(4), 26-41.
- Ranney, F. J. & McNeilly, K. M. (1996). International business writing projects: Learning content through process. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 59(1), 9-21.
- Reinstein, A., & Houston, M. (2004). Using the Securities Exchange Commission's "plain English" guidelines to improve accounting students' writing skills. *Journal of Accounting Education*, 22, 53-67.
- Riordan, D., Riordan, M., & Sullivan, C. (2000). Writing across the accounting curriculum: An experiment. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 63(3), 49-59.
- Saunders, K. (2001). Teaching methods and assessment techniques for the undergraduate introductory finance course: A national survey. *Journal of Applied Finance*, 11(1), 110-113.
- Steadman, M. F., & Green, R. F. (1995). Implementing accounting education changes: Bringing accounting graduates into the management mainstream. *Managerial Auditing Journal*, 10(3), 3-7.
- Stout, D., & DaCrema, J. (2004). A writing intervention for the accounting classroom: Dealing with the problem of faulty modifiers. *Journal of Accounting Education*, 22(4), 289-323.
- Stout, D., & Hoff, K. (1989/90). Practical accounting/English collaboration to improve student writing skills: The use of informal journals and the diagnostic reading technique. *The Accounting Educator's Journal*, 2, 83-96.



Varner, I., & Pomerence, P. (1998, December). Assessing competency in business writing. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 61(4), 83-91.

Warnock, S. (2009, January). Methods and results of an accreditation-driven writing assessment in a business college. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 23(1), 83-107.

Wygall, D., & Stout, D. (1989). Incorporating writing techniques in the accounting classroom: Experience in financial, managerial, and cost courses. *Journal of Accounting Education*, 7, 245-252.

Yancey, K. B., & Huot, B. (Eds.) (1997). *Assessing writing across the curriculum: Diverse approaches and practices*. Greenwich, CT: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Lucia S. Sigmar, Ph.D. (sigmar@shsu.edu) is Assistant Professor in the Department of General Business and Finance at Sam Houston State University, where she teaches courses in business communication and business speaking. She is the 2012 President of the Association for Business Communication-Southwestern U.S. Region.

Geraldine E. Hynes, Ph.D. (hynes@shsu.edu) is a Professor in the Department of General Business and Finance at Sam Houston State University, where she teaches courses in managerial communication, business communication, and business speaking. She is the 2011 President of the Association for Business Communication. The 5th edition of her book, *Managerial Communication: Strategies and Applications*, was recently published by McGraw-Hill.

APPENDIX A

GBA 389 - Persuasive Business Message Rubric

Name _____ Date _____ Instructor: _____
 MAJOR: _____ FORMAT: _____ CONTENT: _____ G/M: _____

Competency	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations
Letter / Memo Format ____/15	<input type="checkbox"/> Letterhead is complete <input type="checkbox"/> (Memo) "From" line is complete & accurate <input type="checkbox"/> Date is complete & correct <input type="checkbox"/> Inside address ("To") is complete & accurate <input type="checkbox"/> Salutation is appropriate & complete. <input type="checkbox"/> "Subject" line tells purpose & topic <input type="checkbox"/> (Letter) Complimentary close/signature is correct & complete	<input type="checkbox"/> Letterhead is incomplete <input type="checkbox"/> (Memo) "From" line is wrong or incomplete; initials are missing <input type="checkbox"/> Date is complete but wrong format <input type="checkbox"/> Inside address ("To") is wrong or incomplete <input type="checkbox"/> Salutation is wrong or incomplete. <input type="checkbox"/> "Subject" line is incomplete <input type="checkbox"/> (Letter) Complimentary close/signature is wrong or incomplete	<input type="checkbox"/> Letterhead is missing <input type="checkbox"/> (Memo) "From" line is missing <input type="checkbox"/> Date is incorrect or missing <input type="checkbox"/> Inside address ("To") is missing <input type="checkbox"/> Salutation is inappropriate or missing <input type="checkbox"/> "Subject" line is misleading or missing <input type="checkbox"/> (Letter) No complimentary close/signature
Document Design ____/10	<input type="checkbox"/> Font is attractive and readable <input type="checkbox"/> Margins are balanced <input type="checkbox"/> Bullets/numbers are used effectively <input type="checkbox"/> Headings are used effectively <input type="checkbox"/> Spacing between elements is correct	<input type="checkbox"/> Font is readable <input type="checkbox"/> Margins are mostly balanced <input type="checkbox"/> Bullets /numbers are used, but incorrectly <input type="checkbox"/> Minimal headings <input type="checkbox"/> Spacing between elements is mostly effective	<input type="checkbox"/> Font style changes within the doc <input type="checkbox"/> Margins are unbalanced <input type="checkbox"/> No bullets / numbers <input type="checkbox"/> No headings or inappropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Spacing between elements is wrong
Organization ____/15	<input type="checkbox"/> Opening gets attention <input type="checkbox"/> Body information maintains interest and raises desires <input type="checkbox"/> Paragraphs are short, limited to a single topic <input type="checkbox"/> Closing includes a clear, concrete action item <input type="checkbox"/> Final thought (PS) is effective	<input type="checkbox"/> Weak attention getter in opening <input type="checkbox"/> Weak attempt to maintain interest and desires in body of message <input type="checkbox"/> Some paragraphs are too long <input type="checkbox"/> Closing action item is generic or vague <input type="checkbox"/> Weak final thought (PS)	<input type="checkbox"/> No attention getter in opening <input type="checkbox"/> Interest and desires are missing or repeated in body of message <input type="checkbox"/> More than one topic per paragraph or no topic sentence <input type="checkbox"/> No action item in closing <input type="checkbox"/> No final thought (PS)
Diction & Tone ____/15	<input type="checkbox"/> Language suits the audience <input type="checkbox"/> Action verbs and concrete words are used throughout <input type="checkbox"/> You-viewpoint is used throughout <input type="checkbox"/> Positive tone is used throughout <input type="checkbox"/> No clichés or trite expressions	<input type="checkbox"/> Language level varies <input type="checkbox"/> Some action verbs and concrete words are used <input type="checkbox"/> Some you-viewpoint is used <input type="checkbox"/> Some negative language <input type="checkbox"/> Some clichés or trite expressions	<input type="checkbox"/> Word choice is too formal or casual <input type="checkbox"/> No action verbs or concrete words <input type="checkbox"/> No you-viewpoint; no rapport <input type="checkbox"/> Tone is negative throughout <input type="checkbox"/> Too many clichés or trite expressions

<p>Content ____/30</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Information is complete <input type="checkbox"/> Information is clear <input type="checkbox"/> Only relevant info is included <input type="checkbox"/> Strong reader benefits <input type="checkbox"/> All information is correct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Information is incomplete <input type="checkbox"/> Some information is unclear <input type="checkbox"/> Some information is irrelevant <input type="checkbox"/> Weak reader benefits <input type="checkbox"/> Some information is incorrect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Too much missing information <input type="checkbox"/> Message is unclear <input type="checkbox"/> Too much irrelevant Information <input type="checkbox"/> No reader benefits <input type="checkbox"/> Too much inaccurate Information
<p>Grammar, Usage, Mechanics ____/15</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Sentence syntax is correct <input type="checkbox"/> Sentences are concise <input type="checkbox"/> No passive voice sentences <input type="checkbox"/> No spelling errors <input type="checkbox"/> No mechanics errors <input type="checkbox"/> No grammar errors <input type="checkbox"/> No word choice errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 1 fragment or run-on sentence <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 wordy expressions <input type="checkbox"/> Some passive voice <input type="checkbox"/> 1 spelling error <input type="checkbox"/> 1 mechanics error <input type="checkbox"/> 1 grammar error <input type="checkbox"/> 1 word choice error 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or more fragments or run-on sentences <input type="checkbox"/> Sentences lack conciseness <input type="checkbox"/> Too much passive voice <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or more spelling errors <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or more mechanics errors <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or more grammar errors <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or more word choice errors

Total Points: _____/100

