

2 Sample Reports on Department Outcomes

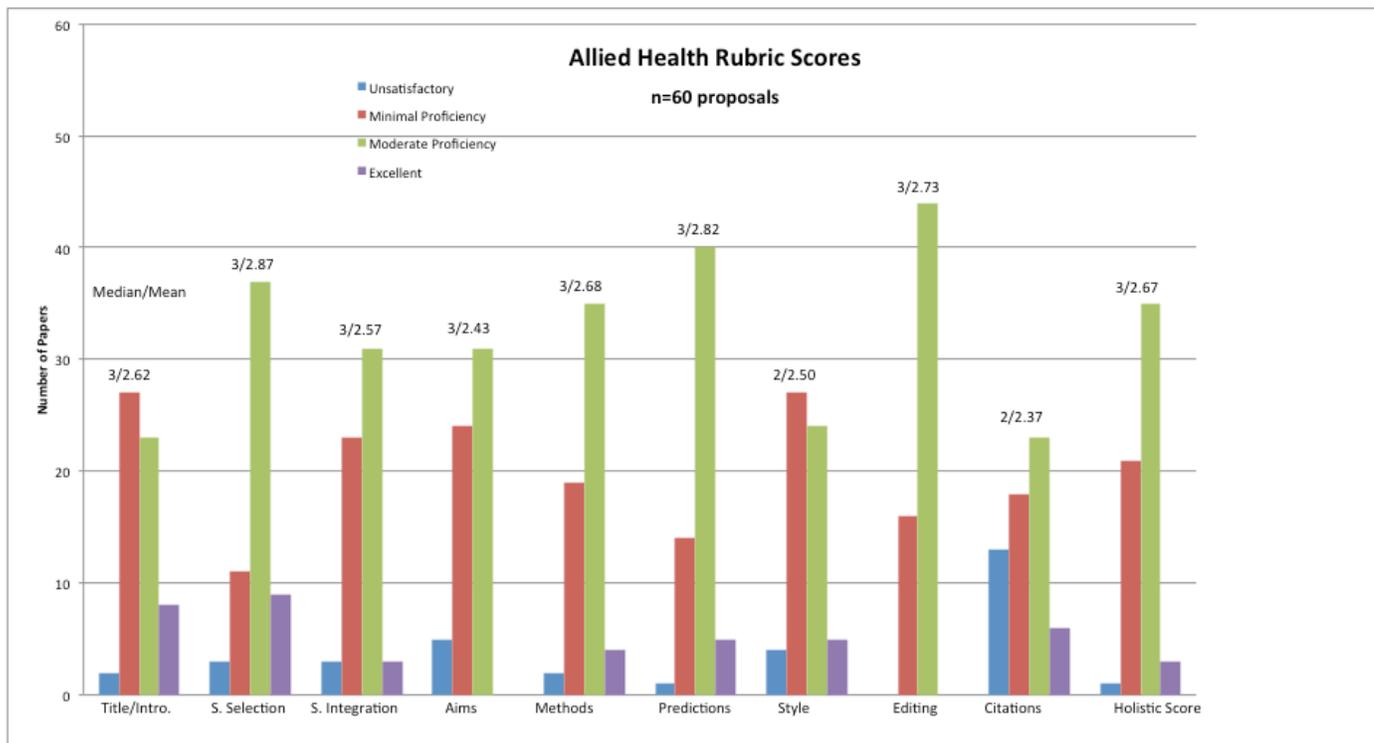
Allied Health

These W sections required students to undertake a particularly challenging writing task: compose a 15+ page research proposal that includes a literature review. Coordinated with a two-credit lecture course on research, the one-credit W sections are taught by advanced doctoral students who coach students through the literature review/proposal writing process, which involves a series of drafts and cycles of instructor feedback. As judged by their final submissions, students are performing well in meeting departmental writing expectations.

We collected all final papers from 2013-14 W sections and randomly selected 60 to include in this study. On eight of ten rubric items—including the holistic score—the median scores for literature reviews fell in the *moderate proficiency* range for advanced undergraduate writing in the major. In this study, scorers set a fairly high bar for *moderate proficiency*. When students did the major elements of the assignment competently, they were scored as achieving *minimal proficiency*; *moderate* and *excellent* were reserved for work that went beyond those basics. While Allied Health students scored well on nearly all rubric measures, very few papers were rated *excellent* overall, perhaps because the assignment is designed to prepare students for research but most majors will not be going into graduate-level research.

Each paper scored on a 4 point scale: (1) unsatisfactory; (2) minimal proficiency; (3) moderate proficiency; (4) excellent	Mean	Median
TITLE/ABSTRACT/INTRODUCTION: (a) All three of these sections are included and (b) clearly communicate the significance of the topic (i.e., why this topic is important/worthy of further research). (c) Logically prepares the reader for the specific topic being proposed.	2.62	3
LIT REVIEW/SOURCE SELECTION: (a) Identify and include at least 5 recent (past 5 years) primary peer-reviewed research articles (no review articles or secondary sources) that are (b) directly relevant to the topic. (c) Summarize them appropriately	2.87	3
LIT REVIEW/SOURCE INTEGRATION: a) Compares/contrasts studies with each other in an integrated manner that (b) clearly leads to/forms the basis for the proposed study.	2.57	3
SPECIFIC AIMS: a) Includes specific aims of the proposed study (or i.e., 'Objectives') that are (b) clearly stated, (c) logically stem from the literature review, (d) can be measured, and (e) are clearly linked with research hypotheses.	2.43	3
METHODS & PROCEDURE: a) Research Design, participants, instruments, and data analysis subsections are included, (b) are all compatible with the each other (e.g., correlational design > correlational analyses, etc., (c) will support the Specific Aims, and (a) is provided in sufficient detail to allow replication of the proposed study.	2.68	3
PREDICTIONS/DISCUSSION: (a) Predictions/expectations logically stem from Specific Aims, (b) are compatible with Methods/Procedures (e.g., inferential analyses > inferential conclusions), (c) adequately considers/addresses the strengths and limitations of the proposed study, and (d) comments on future directions/applications relevant to the proposed research.	2.82	3
STYLE: Appropriate nomenclature, syntax, formality, and technical style; helpful transitions; third-person perspective; mostly active voice; concise.	2.5	2
EDITING/MECHANICS: Grammar usage, sentence structure, punctuation, and spelling are consistent with departmental standards.	2.73	3
CITATIONS: Accurate and consistent use of references; appropriate use of in-text citations; and bibliography in keeping with departmental guidelines (all APA format).	2.37	2
HOLISTIC RATING: Overall sense of writing quality based on expectations for seniors in Allied Health.	2.67	3

Rubric scoring revealed that students were strongest in selecting sources (relevant, recent peer-reviewed articles), in composing "Predictions/Discussion," and in doing sentence-level editing. Through qualitative discussions we noted other patterns of strength as well: students understood the assignment well and dutifully adhered to the expected format (following the samples provided to them); most used more than the required five sources and many papers ran longer than twenty pages, which showed student investment (although papers with more sources and more pages were generally not better in quality than the shorter ones); most attempted some critique of the literature; and most attempted to integrate/synthesize their sources, using topic subheadings to prompt comparisons of two or three articles.



“Style” was among the minimally proficient subskills, and Allied Health scorers attributed this relative weakness to too many students coming across as too loose and opinion-like in their prose. This does not mean that instructors should focus more on grammar or mechanics—editing for correctness scores were fine at *moderately proficient*—but instead that TAs might devote a lesson or two to teaching novice writers to adopt an appropriate scientific voice. “Citations” was the lowest mean among rubric items, but this should not be interpreted as students not realizing the *need* to cite their sources—the Allied Health readers/scorers thought that they did. Instead, that 2.0 median signals that many students did not strictly follow APA documentation conventions.

Deep audits of a subset of eight papers revealed that most students read journal articles all the way through and used them purposefully. Although there were a few cases of improper paraphrasing and absences or misplacements of appropriate in-text citations, there were no cases of gross/intentional plagiarism. On the whole, Allied Health students were found to use sources more effectively and ethically than majors in other departments assigning literature reviews that we studied. This suggests not only that instructors were careful to teach students sound research and writing practices but also that it was probably wise to have the assignment require five sources/articles (as compared to ten required in most other UConn one-credit Ws studied in this round).

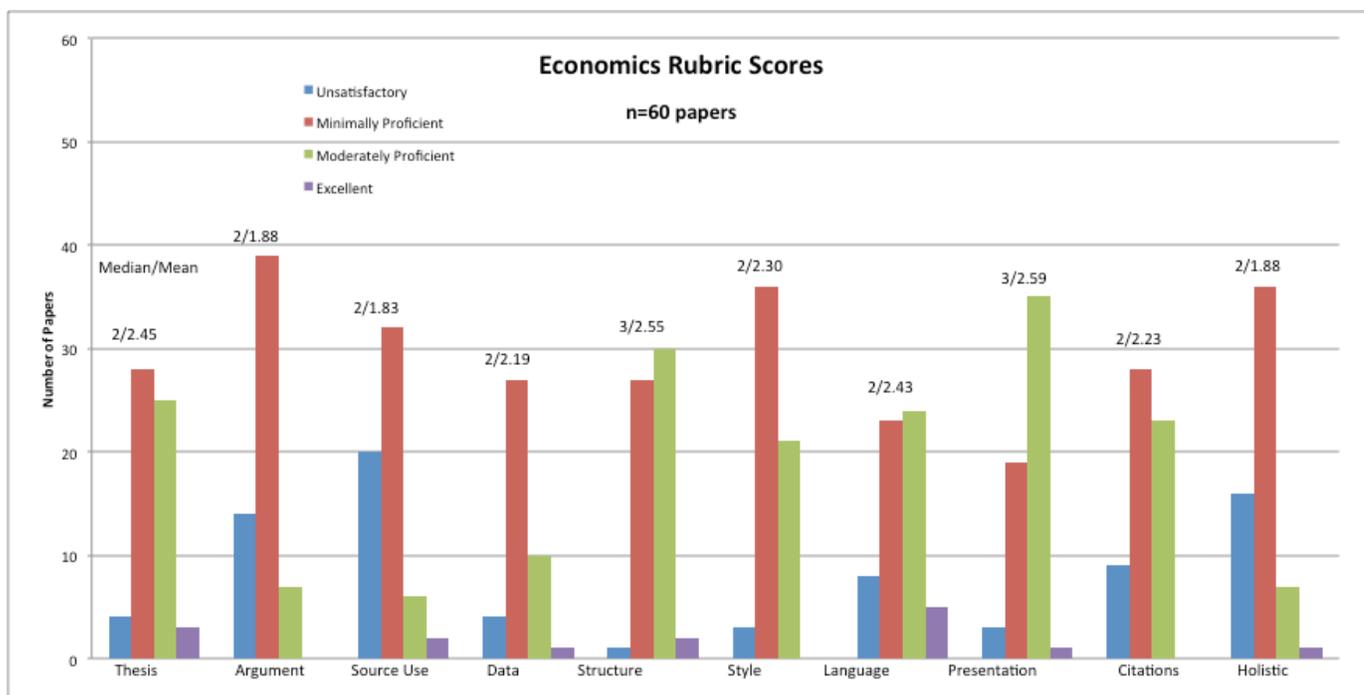
The main shortfall, which was captured in discussions rather than by the rubric scoring, was that students often did not link their literature reviews to their proposals closely enough—that is, they often did not draw on the articles from the literature review when formulating the objectives for the study design. They need to better understand how one aspect of the paper feeds the others and create a consistent thread that runs through the whole paper. This may be a symptom of how the assignment is taught section by section, and might be addressed by directing students to consider the alignment between the two parts of the project midway through the writing process and focus their final round of revisions on synthesis and making lit review/proposal synthesis part of the grading criteria.

Economics

Economics changed its W curriculum more recently than the other departments involved in this study, offering its first one-credit Ws in 2012-13. The economics W differs from the others in this study in two other significant ways: (1) it is not attached to a companion two- or three-credit lecture course; and (2) the core assignment is a thesis-driven paper rather than a literature review. Students select a topic of interest, engage in research, and compose an argument/analysis grounded in sources. A professor from the department coordinates the course and oversees a cohort of graduate students who teach most of the sections, who in turn coach students through the researching, drafting, and revising processes in weekly sessions.

We collected all final papers from 2013-14 sections and randomly selected 60 to include in this study. The median for most rubric items was 2, or *minimally proficient* for advanced undergraduates in the major.

Each paper scored on a 4 point scale: (1) unsatisfactory; (2) minimal proficiency; (3) moderate proficiency; (4) excellent	Mean	Median
CLEAR THESIS: Identifies and addresses a clear central thesis, expressed early in the paper, either directly in a topic paragraph or indirectly through an appropriate rhetorical device (like an anecdote). Argument clearly expressed and sustained throughout paper.	2.45	2
DEPTH OF ARGUMENT: Conceptual sophistication and engagement with topic; recognition of limitations and counterarguments; thoughtfulness; originality of ideas; appropriate number of pages. Explicit use of economic theories, models, and data. Body of paper supports central thesis; brings to bear appropriate and persuasive evidence.	1.89	2
USE OF SCHOLARLY SOURCES: Marshals sources that are scholarly and reliable by the standards of the Economics profession (like journals, working papers, scholarly books, government and NGO websites); sources are adequate in number and appropriate for the paper's argument.	1.83	2
DATA: Where appropriate, presentation and analysis of data (including econometric results) in conformance with the style and norms of writing in Economics. Tables and graphs used effectively, plus clearly labeled and attributed.	2.20	2
STRUCTURE OF PAPER: Presentation is well organized: clear topic sentences; good transition between ideas; all sections of paper tie together.	2.55	3
STYLE: Style is direct, concise, and lively; avoids excessive and unexplained jargon and acronyms; refrains from clichés and bureaucratic formulations.	2.30	2
LANGUAGE: Awareness of audience. Tone, word/terminology/language choices, and other stylistic elements appropriate to professional economics, whether for journal publication or op-ed.	2.43	2
PRESENTATION: Grammar, mechanics (crisp pronoun and clause references; correct parallel structure), diction, spelling, punctuation, proofreading, and formatting.	2.59	3
CITATIONS: Appropriate, accurate, and consistent in-text citations and list of works cited. Command of name-date style of citation used in Economics.	2.23	2
HOLISTIC RATING: Assessment of the paper as a whole and its fit with the rhetoric of discourse in Economics.	1.88	2



Students scored well on “Structure” and “Presentation,” which were points of emphasis in the course. The relatively strong showing on structure is encouraging because students were not given a format to follow; instead each had to decide on a structure appropriate to his or her argument. The relatively high scores for “Presentation” are consistent with findings from earlier rounds of W assessment that show UConn students generally more proficient in mechanics than in higher order concerns such as argument and analysis.

Economics majors also proved relatively strong in selecting a topic, articulating a clear thesis, and setting the context for that thesis. Proficiency fell off, however, when it came to developing, supporting, and sustaining that thesis. Indeed, the lowest rubric scores were in “Depth of Argument” and “Use of Sources,” which both were good predictors of the holistic score.

As for “Depth of Argument,” most students showed *minimal proficiency* in sustaining an extended, research-driven thesis, with a quarter of papers rated as *unsatisfactory* in this area. An important contributing issue was identified through qualitative discussions:

when students argued for or against a particular public policy, not enough ground their analyses in *economic* theories that they should have learned or be learning in their economics courses. The original expectation for the one-credit W course was that students would transfer what they had learned in other economics courses to their W papers, but that generally did not happen. Most students did not seem to perceive this course as an extension of earlier courses. In future iterations of the W course, instructors might coach students more explicitly on how to bring specific theories learned in other economics courses to bear on their arguments; the assignment could even require that one subsection of the paper name and discuss which particular economic theory or theories will serve as the foundation for the paper's argument.

Where students seemed to use sources best was at the front end of the paper to set up the background for the thesis, but overall source use was a relative weakness, and one third of the cohort scored *unsatisfactory* in this area. The low scores on this subskill were due both to the kinds of sources students selected and to how they brought them to bear on their arguments. While students in the other three one-credit W departments relied almost exclusively on peer reviewed journal articles, economics majors drew more popular press sources, as well as on journal articles outside economics (healthcare, human rights, political science). This habit contributed to the phenomenon discussed in the "Depth of Argument" paragraph above: too often the sources, while trafficking in economic issues, were outside the mainstream of the discipline. A related issue was that students often failed to consider the essential economic thinkers on their respective topics. These patterns in source use were largely confirmed when doctoral students did deep audits of seven randomly selected papers. Of those, one was found to have used sources impressively and one showed evidence of serious plagiarism, but the other five hovered in the low-middle range, achieving minimal proficiency in source use.

The full 1-Credit W Assessment Report 2014, which includes an explanation of methods as well as scoring rubrics and detailed findings for all 4 participating departments, is available for download:
<http://writingcenter.uconn.edu/assessment-of-writing-across-the-curriculum/>

Sample Deep Audit

Deep Audit of Source Use
 Reader/scorer: Diana

Paper Code: NS16
 Paper page length: 11 pgs

First read the paper and mark those places where the writer is using sources: Note with a "+" where sources are being used effectively and a "-" where ineffectively; also put a question mark aside spots where you suspect the writer might be drawing on a source but not citing it or where the passage seems questionably or incompletely documented.

1. SOURCE SELECTION: Do the *number* and *kinds* of sources used seem appropriate to the purpose and genre of the paper?

Poor Too few sources and/or inappropriate kinds	Satisfactory Adequate number and kinds of source material	Excellent Comprehensive and strategic selection of sources
		X

2. GAPS IN SELECTION: Are there authors, journals or other sources that an undergraduate in this major, approaching this topic, should clearly have used but did not? If so, name specific sources and/or the kind of source: **No**

3. READER ORIENTATION: How readily can readers discern between the writer's ideas and those borrowed from sources? Often this pivots on how well a writer introduces sourced material with strategic signal phrases or other orienting moves to build smooth transitions between the writer's own ideas and borrowed text, to announce or imply the purpose for inserting the source, to clarify the authority and/or relevance of the source, to include qualifications or hedges, etc.

Poor Most sources "dropped in"; little done to orient readers to purpose, authority, bias, or context of sourced material	Satisfactory Writer adequately and ethically orients the reader to sourced material most of the time	Excellent Writer effectively, strategically, and consistently orients readers to source material
	X	

4. PURPOSE OF SOURCES IN PAPER: How/for what purpose does the student tend to use sources in this paper?

To offer background or contextual information	Never	Sometimes	<u>Often</u>
To supply evidence in support of his or her thesis	Never	Sometimes	<u>Often</u>
To introduce or support dissenting point(s) of view	<u>Never</u>	Sometimes	Often
To create template/stand in for his or her own argument	<u>Never</u>	Sometimes	Often
To fulfill requirement for sources/no clear purpose	<u>Never</u>	Sometimes	Often

Other purposes for which the writer uses sources? There is one source on the works cited page that is not included in the text anywhere.

NOTES: Regarding reader orientation, very little of the paper appears to be the student's own ideas. Most is simply a recapitulation of various studies and their outcomes. For the most part, citations are present to alert the reader to the original source. However, it is difficult to rate on the basis of clarifying the student's ideas from ideas from the sources due to a lack of the student's ideas.

5. **TOTAL NUMBER** of sources listed on the References or Works Cited page? 13

6. **KINDS OF SOURCES USED:** Please indicate the number of each:

13 Scholarly journal articles

___ Scholarly books

___ Chapters in edited collections

___ Other authoritative academic sources

___ Newspaper articles

___ Newsletter articles

___ Magazine/popular press pieces

___ Gov't documents

___ General reference works (dictionaries, etc.)

___ Discipline-specific reference works

___ Course texts

___ Artists statements

___ Museum/exhibit materials

___ Government website

___ Reputable organization website

___ Strongly partisan or questionable website

___ Personal website

___ Wikipedia

___ Other: _____

___ Other: _____

___ Other: _____

*******Now you need to seek out and read the sources cited in this paper.*******

7. How many of those sources were you able to gain direct access to? 12

8. How many (if any) of the sources seem bogus/invented by the student? 0

9. How many (if any) were not accessible online or through web-based databases? 1

10. **READING COMPREHENSION:** How accurately and critically does the writer seem able to read and understand the source material (its content, relevance, context, bias, intended purpose, etc)?

Poor	Satisfactory	Excellent
	X	

NOTES: The student did a moderate job of reading and understanding source material. There were a few errors in the student's comprehension and reporting of the data and information included in the sources. It also appears that large parts of the sources were skipped over. Very little regarding methods was included in the student's paper, and there was little to no explanations or analyses of results of each study.

11. **USE OF MATERIAL:** How accurately, critically and responsibly does the writer use the source material in the paper?

Poor	Satisfactory	Excellent
	X	

NOTES: Three or four segments of the text were not cited but clearly should have been. A couple portions of text were attributed to the wrong source. Some pieces of text were very close to the original source material. Regarding use of the sources themselves, most were used to develop background knowledge or to list study outcomes, but little was done to analyze, integrate, or critically evaluate each of the sources either alone or in concert. However, unlike in other papers I've read, this student did a decent job of finding primary sources.

12. **GROSS PLAGIARISM:** Did you find any instances of outright plagiarism? Deliberately manipulative misuse of sources and/or omissions of citations? Describe.

A handful of sentences of the student's paper are very close to the source text (i.e. just one or two words were changed). It was clear that the student was changing those words to try to avoid plagiarism but changes were very minimal. I don't know what the University would say about this but I would probably consider this plagiarism.

13. **UNINTENTIONAL/UNKNOWING MISUSE:** Did you find instances of questionable and/or seemingly unintentional misuse of sources? Describe.

It's possible that the above (question 12) was unintentional and that the student doesn't entirely understand what constitutes plagiarism.

14. **PATTERNS OF LOCATION:** What patterns do you notice with respect to where in sources that the writer culls direct quotations or paraphrases? For example, quotes/paraphrases drawn only from the abstract and/or first 3 paragraphs? Judicious selections from various parts of the sources?

Primarily from early in the source. Methods, results, and discussion sections were largely skipped over. Some of the longer review papers were used for only a sentence or two of text, and while this text was relevant and necessary, much more information could have been obtained from these sources to better flesh out the student's argument.

15. **HOLISTIC score on quality of source selection and use:** In general, how well does the writer use sources to carry out the purpose of the paper?

Poor	Satisfactory	Excellent
X		

16. **GEN ED INFORMATION LITERACY ITEMS:** What follows are 6 of the 12 Learning Outcomes for the Information Literacy part of UConn's General Education Guidelines. Please rate this paper on each:

	<i>Unsatisfactory</i>	<i>Satisfactory</i>	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>No basis for judgment</i>
Compare and contrast information resources across a variety of formats (e.g., journal, book, website, database)				X
Identify and use primary sources of information.			X	
Evaluate information for consistency, accuracy, credibility, objectivity, innovation, timeliness, and cultural sensitivity	X			
Synthesize main ideas to construct new concepts	X			
Ethically and legally acknowledge information sources, following discipline guidelines		X		
Incorporate the information in the planning and creation of a product or performance				X