

# Not Again: The Humanities Assessment

Harold Washington College Assessment Committee, February 31, 2019

## Introduction

In the fall of 2016, Harold Washington College's Assessment Committee conducted a college wide General Education assessment of student attitudes and abilities in regard to learning outcomes associated with our Humanities appreciation objective. The use of the measure followed approximately four months of planning and revisions, integrating recommendations from the last Humanities assessment conducted in 2006 and committee procedural changes, resulting from committee learning about effective practices in the intervening ten years. A small sub-committee, led by Jeff Swigart and Erica McCormack, began the work in April by starting with the measurement model (*Hummmm*) originally developed in-house by faculty member Amanda Loos in concert with the committee in 2006. Revisions included the selection of a new set of artifacts, the reduction and integration of required essays, and the addition of a new philosophy option, as well as a new testing design and procedure.

The measure was piloted in July 2016 with summer school classes, and conducted as a full-scale assessment over 4 weeks in fall 2016 between weeks 12 and 16. Responses were rated through the spring (a process that was completed in fall 2017) by an interdisciplinary team of faculty members and the data was analyzed by Phil Vargas, with an additional contribution from Fernando Miranda-Mendoza, in accordance with questions posed, over the course of the following year. This report, a labor of love, tells the story of our efforts and our grand, spectacular failure. If it tells the story of a city boy born and raised in south Detroit, that is merely an accidental, but delightful, bonus of this glorious journey.

## Key Findings

1. We should not do this assessment again (see findings 2, 5, and 6, below).
2. The sample was NOT representative of the general education students at HWC, and so the findings are not generalizable.
3. Ratings showed poor differentiation in the application of the rubric (p. 14).
4. Indirectly: Humanities General Education requirements are difficult to source and, when sourced, poorly explained or difficult to understand (see note 17, p. 17)
5. Students who participated\* did not, generally, demonstrate mastery of the outcomes measured, even when the sample was restricted to students who had completed their A.A./A.S. Humanities General Education requirements; students scored best on "Clarity and Correctness," while doing the worst on Analysis and Development (p. 19).
6. Students who completed the survey\* are more likely to identify as "Writers" than any other category of artistic disciplines, and in significant numbers (43%), even while producing less than proficient quality writing (p. 19).

\*To reiterate, because of Finding 2, Findings 5 and 6 are NOT generalizable to the HWC student body for reasons explained in this report, and so of limited interpretive value for general education assessment and potentially misleading. Other findings from the survey regarding students' attitudes and experiences with the arts (generally highly positive), have been omitted from the report for the same reason.

## Primary Recommendations

1. We should not do this assessment again—never again;
2. It would be good to clearly explain Humanities General Education requirements and make the information readily available;
3. We should seek a different means of measuring student achievement, especially among Humanities requirement completers, to corroborate or refute the poor showing in this measurement.
4. We should radically rethink general education assessment.

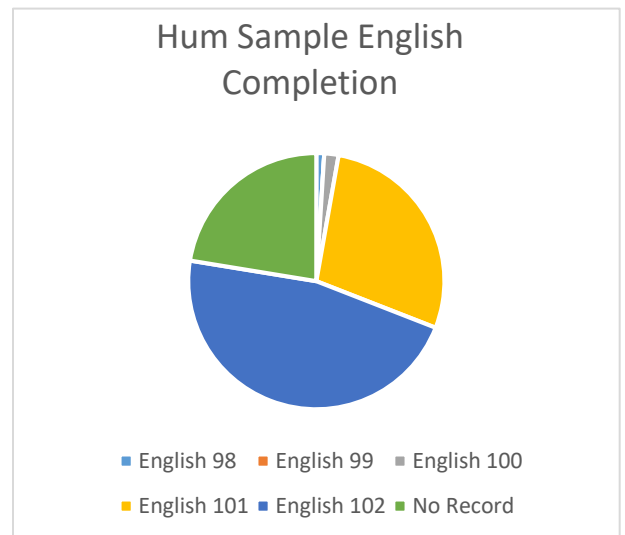
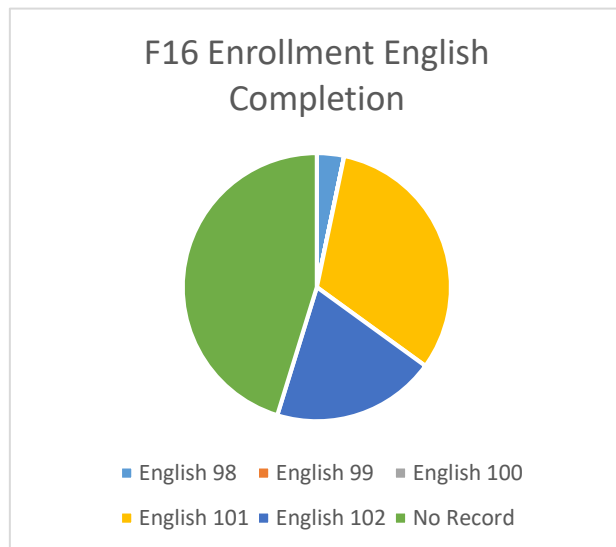
## Findings: MEASURE RELATED

### Sample Validity

Our method relied on self-selection, as described above in Methodology, and on initial review, our analyst found our sample to be in line with demographic expectations and of sufficient size to suggest sufficient representativeness to be generalizable. The specifics of the demographics are not available as of the writing of this report, but also not necessary on account of findings that only became apparent upon interpretation of the data.

It turns out that nearly half (46.6%) of the students who completed the assessment had, according to OpenBook data, successfully completed<sup>1</sup> English 102. That compares unfavorably to the general student body for the fall of 2016, of whom less than 20% had successfully completed English 101, and just under half had no record of English completion either because they had yet successfully completed an English course or had transferred credits from elsewhere.

	F16 Enrollm't	% of Total	Hum SAMPLE	% of Total
Total	8768	100.00%	605	100%
English 98	287	3.27%	6	.99%
English 99	2	0.02%	0	0.0%
English 100	n/a	0.0%	11	1.8%
English 101	2779	31.69%	170	28.1%
English 102	1733	19.77%	282	46.6%
No Comp/Record	3967	45.2%	136	22.4%



This disparity between the sample and the general population raises problems with generalizing from the abilities, attitudes, behaviors, and choices of the sample to the general HWC student body, and also highlights a significant data blind spot with respect to the general student body. In short, it seems that the self-selection built into the methodology led to a sample make-up that make any generalizations of interpretations of the data highly suspect. Thus, rather than report those suspect generalizations, and potentially mislead readers, in an act of noble and painful restraint after months of indulgence in “sunk-cost” and wishful thinking, they have been omitted from this report despite the pain of it.

<sup>1</sup> Defined as earning a grade of C or better in English 102 prior to the fall 2016 term.