

**Use of EduMetry as an Evaluation Agency for the Bauer Writing Evaluation (BWE)
and Papers within GENB 4350 Business Law and Ethics**

Background on the writing program in the C.T. Bauer College of Business, University of Houston

In response to employer feedback and faculty concerns with the writing skills of students, the C.T. Bauer College of Business began to explore options to assess writing and to embed more writing within the curriculum several years ago. In 2003 the Bauer College partnered with the UH Writing Center to evaluate the writing skills of students in a junior-level marketing course. From those sample papers, a rubric was developed by the business faculty and the UH Writing Center to be used to evaluate every student's writing skills after they had completed two semesters of freshman English. This initiative evolved into one of the learning goals of written communication skills for AACSB International, the business accreditation agency of which UH Bauer College is a member.

These rubrics and writing prompts were provided by the faculty for a Business Writing Evaluation (BWE) that is administered outside of regular coursework and not factored into a student's GPA. The papers were evaluated by a third party (the UH Writing Center) to maintain professional objectivity on the evaluation. Students scoring below a 2 on a 4-point scale (using two raters) were assigned one-on-one tutoring with a UH Writing Center writing consultant. This tutoring assistance is called the Business Writing Tutorial (BWT), and requires students to prepare a cover letter and a business-related writing assignment. Students must clear either the BWE or BWT to progress within their academic career at Bauer. The rubric was refined over the next five years, with regular interaction and feedback from faculty on the process. Currently, about 18 percent of our students are required to participate in the BWT.

In Fall 2007, GENB 4350 "Business Law and Ethics" became a required course for all business majors, and was designated as a writing-in-the-disciplines (WID) course by the university. Designation as a WID course means that the course meets that CORE requirement, and at a minimum, must include:

....substantial writing (at least 3000 words, including at least one piece of work done outside of class and returned to the student prior to the end of the semester or term with the instructor's written evaluation of grammar, style, and content).¹

As a service to our students, GENB 4350 provides multiple opportunities for improvement of writing well beyond the minimum requirements in order to provide as much practice writing as possible. As improvement of writing skills is an obvious concern of employers who hire our graduates, students are required to complete five assignments that total between 4,000-5,000 words. Students receive detailed and individualized written feedback on all five assignments, not just one. With assistance from the UH Writing Center, we developed a rubric for the course and designed the assignments to best facilitate the process of writing improvement.

¹ http://www.uh.edu/academics/catalog/policies/degree-reqts/#core_wid.

Programmatic assessment of writing within the Bauer College

Beginning in Fall 2009, the college began using EduMetry to evaluate papers from the BWE and GENB 4350. Along with the BWE, GENB 4350 provides programmatic assessment of written communication skills, which is one of the four learning goals for our accreditation agency, AACSB International (<http://www.bauer.uh.edu/learning-goals.asp>).

GENB 4350 not only provides writing intensive assignments near the end of a student's academic career to better prepare them for entrance into the workforce or graduate school, but the course is also the culmination of a longitudinal programmatic assessment. The BWE and this course provide individual evaluation for each student at two points in their academic career using the same third-party professional assessment agency.

Currently, we are using funds from a private foundation for EduMetry's services in order to improve the quality of our writing program. This project receives ongoing evaluation from both the college faculty and the UH Writing Center to ensure quality control and meaningful results for our students.

Due diligence and concerns addressed prior to the decision to hire EduMetry

Q: Who is EduMetry: where are they located, who do they use for evaluations, can they handle large volumes, how long have they been in business?

EduMetry's websites (www.EduMetry.com and <http://www.virtual-ta.com>) read:

Established in 2005, EduMetry is a pioneer in offering end-to-end assessment services for universities and colleges. EduMetry is dedicated to Learning Outcomes Management, the emerging area of practice that helps institutions measure, monitor, and manage student learning outcomes. We work with faculty throughout the process to help align program and course objectives, assess learning outcomes, and support continuous, mission-driven improvement.

Two experienced university professors and a technology consultant founded EduMetry to bring to fruition their unique vision of how emerging technologies can help higher education. They saw the convergence of education and technology as an area full of innovation and potential for transforming the way academic institutions approach their mission and activities. New and imaginative ways could be developed to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching and learning.

The company is located at: Dulles Corner Office Center, 2325 Dulles Corner Blvd. Suite 500 Herndon, VA 20171, USA.

During the exploratory phase, the college contacted Dr. Chandru Rajam, CEO and one of the founders of the company. The company has both full-time and part-time staff with PhDs and Masters in a variety of disciplines. The part-time staff works off-site, as do some of the full-time staff. They handle a volume of 30,000-40,000 papers per semester, and work with an average of 15 clients each year on either their assessment projects or with evaluation of papers. The full-time PhD staff serves as "knowledge

managers” who oversee the part-time staff to calibrate and provide quality assurance and consistency. They provide quality control through statistically significant calibration. For papers that are concerned with mastery of content as well as writing (e.g., GENB 4350 in contrast to the BWE), EduMetry has a content specialist as well as a writing specialist evaluate the work. They try as much as possible to have the same client manager and evaluators remain with the same client and project over time.

Q: Are there any privacy (FERPA) issues?

UH General Counsel’s office has approved the contract with EduMetry and determined that it is compliant with the requirements set forth under FERPA.

Q: How is the quality of the service?

EduMetry has been thoroughly vetted by the UH Writing Center and the Bauer College. Additionally, GENB 4350 papers were sent to EduMetry to determine whether the company could effectively evaluate the papers. The evaluation was identical to the evaluation by both the course instructor and the assistant director of Writing in the Disciplines from the UH Writing Center. Additionally, the feedback provided on the papers was effective and appropriate to our goals within the course.

Feedback and scoring on the papers are calibrated and reviewed by the instructor, applying much the same process as with the use of teaching assistants. The quality is better, and we hope to receive even more consistency over time.

Q: Is there an accreditation issue and are other universities outsourcing?

At the time Bauer College was investigating EduMetry, their website said they also provided similar assessment services to Butler University and University of Northern Iowa.

Here are some examples of EduMetry assisting other business schools:

<http://EduMetry.com/success-stories.php>.

In addition, the Director of Assessment and Accreditation Services at the Bauer College solicited feedback from other universities through AACSB:

Email from the Director of Assessment and Accreditation services: The college is considering enlisting the services of EduMetry for the scoring of student artifacts. Has anyone had any experience with EduMetry? We have a well-established assignment and scoring rubric constructed. I'm just wondering if there any potential issues we need to consider with respect to accreditation. Any information would be greatly appreciated.

Douglas Eder, Ph.D. (Edwardsville, IL), who is highly regarded in the assessment area, and with whom the UH Associate Vice President for Research Operations has worked in delivering the AACSB assessment seminars, responded, in part:

I have experience and work with EduMetry. It's operated by a couple of people who have a faculty-oriented perspective. They work with Ph.D. and other appropriately educated

people all over the world ---essentially assembling a world faculty--- to solve assessment problems...

EduMetry can assist your institution produce assessment data in, say, student papers that are submitted electronically (paper can work, too). The papers can be shipped (electronically?) to EduMetry and within about a week; the consultants who work for EduMetry will have read and analyzed the papers for the objectives and standards that you have deemed important. If you wish, the analysis will be accompanied by recommendations for improvement based on your overall goals...

...If it helps, I can attest that EduMetry is a sponsor of Trudy Banta's annual National Assessment Institute at IUPUI, and she is not a person who puts her institute or her principles up for bid.

[Trudy Banta is an internationally-recognized leader in educational assessment.]

Q: Will students be told that their GENB 4350 papers will be evaluated by EduMetry, and what is the relationship between their evaluation and the grade on the paper, and the instructor's role in assigning the grade?

Students are given the following explanation at the beginning of each semester:

GENB 4350 has been designated by the University of Houston as a "Writing in the Discipline" course, and meets that CORE requirement. Along with the Business Writing Evaluation (BWE) administered through GENB 2301, this course provides programmatic assessment of written communication skills, which is one of the four learning goals for our accreditation agency, AACSB International.

To assist with that evaluation process, student papers will be sent to a recognized educational assessment service called EduMetry. Assessment of GENB 4350 papers will include scoring and calibration using assignments and a grading rubric designed and controlled by the GENB 4350 course administrator.

You will receive feedback on three learning objectives – (1) critical thinking, (2) written communication, and (3) knowledge application. Feedback will be tailored to your individual needs and designed to encourage improvement in writing. The course administrator will assign and calibrate all final grades on papers.

Questions about the feedback provided on the paper should be directed to the course administrator or the course TA. Disputes over grades will be handled by the course administrator who will provide a second review.²

In addition, EduMetry addresses the concern over delegating evaluation of written work in an FAQ on their website:

² Course syllabus, GENB 4350 Business Law and Ethics.

Question: *My faculty is wary of turning this over to someone else. What would you say to them about delegating this responsibility?*

Answer: *It is very common in skilled professions to delegate the tedious chores to an assistant. Doctors delegate tasks to assistants, lawyers have paralegals to research cases and prepare documents. Higher education faculty can rest assured that, like the physician and the lawyer, they will guide the process and have final say in the results. EduMetry is here to do the scoring, data crunching and other chores that would use faculty time in unfulfilling ways. We are here to support — not supplant — your faculty.*

GENB 4350 course structure and learning goals

GENB 4350 Business Law and Ethics is taught to approximately 1,000 students each year. The course is required for all business majors and is taught in the junior or senior year. The course has three primary learning objectives – understanding basic business laws, understanding ethical principles surrounding business organizations and ethical reasoning within these contexts, and improving written communications skills as it relates to business. Another course objective, although not one of the stated learning goals, is to improve critical thinking skills.

EduMetry’s evaluation of GENB 4350 papers includes suggested scoring using a rubric designed and controlled by the Bauer College faculty member in charge of the course. Additionally, EduMetry provides feedback on three learning objectives – (1) critical thinking, (2) written communication, and, to a lesser extent, (3) knowledge application. Feedback is designed to encourage students to improve writing in these areas and is tailored to each student’s individual needs on the assignment. **Grades on student papers are assigned by the Bauer College faculty member in charge of the course, and if students have questions on their papers, they go through the instructor and teaching assistant for the course. Any disputes over the evaluation and grade are decided by the instructor.**

To ensure quality of feedback and consistency in evaluation, the GENB 4350 course instructor monitors EduMetry’s assessment on each assignment. EduMetry assesses several samples and obtains approval by the course instructor before assessing the rest of the assignments. This process continues throughout the semester as students complete subsequent assignments.

Design of the writing assignments

The design of the assignments throughout the semester takes into account that students in the course are business majors and should be trained to write within a business context. Students complete five assignments and use the feedback and evaluation provided from earlier assignments to improve their writing skills. Evaluation of learning with respect to business law is performed via exams. Evaluation of learning related to ethical principles is completed via exams and, in part, through the writing assignments.

The transition from TAs to EduMetry

Prior to Fall 2009, GENB 4350 used teaching assistants (TAs) to help with the initial feedback and assessment process. The TAs came from various backgrounds including the college of business, the English department, the social sciences department, and the law school. Each TA was responsible for

attending an intensive training and norming session for each assignment, grading between 55-65 papers each week, and responding via email to student's questions about the feedback.

The course instructor, in partnership with the UH Writing Center, developed intensive training sessions for the TAs for each assignment. A training manual called ***Grading and Responding to Student Writing: A Handbook for Graders of GENB 4350, a Writing in the Disciplines Course***, was created by the course instructor and the assistant director, Writing in the Disciplines, UH Writing Center. The manual consisted of approximately 100 pages of training materials – materials written by the Writing Center on feedback and grading; examples of assessed assignments; sample feedback; examples of common writing and critical thinking errors within the GENB 4350 course; a code of ethics to which the TAs were required to attest; and practice papers for the TAs to assess prior to coming to the training sessions. TAs spent approximately 30 hours each semester in face-to-face and/or online training sessions to help ensure quality and consistency in grading and feedback. Over time we discovered that more time was spent managing this process than spending time with the GENB 4350 students.

Ultimately, our goal is continuous improvement of our students' writing skills. We work very closely with the UH Writing Center to help achieve this goal. With the availability of private funds, and upon suggestion by the UH Writing Center to consider this approach, we decided to try the professional services of EduMetry. Our hope is to continue to improve the quality of our undergraduate writing program with more consistency in evaluation across the program and by providing more timely feedback to our students within GENB 4350.

Assessment and feedback process used within GENB 4350

Before EduMetry begins the assessment process, the course instructor sends EduMetry a sample set of papers to provide an initial assessment and feedback. Those papers are returned to the course instructor and reviewed for accuracy of assessment, and appropriateness of feedback. Changes to the evaluation and/or feedback are sent back to EduMetry for training and norming purposes.

As EduMetry completes initial assessment and feedback on the papers, they are returned to the course instructor who reviews the papers and makes any necessary changes to feedback and/or the evaluation. This process continues until all of the papers are returned to UH. After the course instructor evaluates the papers to determine the appropriate grades, papers are returned to students.

Throughout the evaluation process, if the course instructor feels that feedback or evaluation is inconsistent or in need of other adjustment, an email is sent to EduMetry to convey these concerns and make any adjustments. The course instructor is in constant contact with EduMetry's team throughout the evaluation process.

It is important to note that EduMetry's evaluation provides a "suggested" scoring. The instructor assigns each grade in the course, using EduMetry's evaluation only as a tool to help determine the appropriate grade on the assignment.

Benefits of employing EduMetry to provide assessment of GENB 4350 papers

The benefits of using EduMetry to provide initial assessment of writing and provide written feedback on all five assignments are as follows:

Ability to maintain intensity of our writing program

Ultimately, our goal is to improve the writing skills of our business students. We believe that offering our students as many opportunities as possible to write and receive feedback best serves this goal. Using EduMetry has allowed us to maintain the intensity of our writing program within the course, while improving the quality of feedback given to students and efficiency in the grading process.

Improved efficiencies in the feedback and initial scoring process

We have improved efficiencies in the feedback and initial scoring process. Students now receive feedback within a week after the due date of the paper. All students receive feedback and evaluation at the same time, after the instructor has reviewed the papers and made any necessary changes. EduMetry staff work evenings and weekends to help us achieve our goal of fast and effective feedback.

EduMetry evaluators are experts at providing feedback on written work

EduMetry is more experienced and better trained to provide written feedback on our papers. Feedback is individualized to address each student's writing improvement needs on the particular paper submitted. Additionally, EduMetry is able to provide feedback on writing style issues (*i.e.*, grammar, punctuation, tone, clarity, *etc.*), as well as critical thinking. End-of-semester student surveys indicate that over 82% of the students believe that "*The feedback on my papers was helpful.*"

Conclusion

Our goal is for students of the UH Bauer College to be known for their professional writing skills as well as their business acumen and hence be the employees of choice in the business community. With the use of EduMetry we are able to provide a 'value-added' component to our curriculum that meets this goal.