General Education Assessment Report – *Written Communication*

A Comprehensive Review of Four Assessment Cycles (Fall 2019 – Fall 2022)

March 2023 | Office of Instruction

KEY POINTS

- Student work (N = 403) demonstrating written communication skills was collected and assessed by trained instructors every fall between 2019 and 2022.
- In general, UGA students score at or above milestone level (2) across all rubric dimensions.
- Students in upper-level courses scored higher than those in lower-level courses across all rubric dimensions.
- Students consistently show strength in terms of their control for syntactic and technical aspects of writing as well as the ability to provide context and purpose for their work.
- Across cycles, students scored lowest on the *Sources & Evidence* dimension, indicating an opportunity to strengthen instruction regarding evidencing an argument using citations and various types of data.

ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

General Education Competencies

Definition

Through completion of general education at the University of Georgia, students are expected to demonstrate a set of competencies. The current general education competencies are written communication, oral communication, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and moral reasoning. According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), written communication is defined as "the development and expression of ideas in writing." Written communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles.

Assessment of General Education Competencies

UGA tracks student attainment of general education competencies through direct assessment every semester. The assessment results not only ensure students are gaining the skills as the general education curriculum is designed, but also provide instructional feedback to promote student learning.

Assessment Cycle

The assessment for written communication was conducted on a rotating cycle (see **Table 1**). The annual assessments alternate lower-level (1000-2000) and upper-level (3000-4000) courses to enable comparison between students at earlier and later stages of their educational experience.

Table 1. Written Communication Assessment Cycle

Semester	Assessment Round (Course Level)	Number of Courses (Signature Course)	Number of Artifacts
Fall 2019	Round 1 (Lower)	1 (POLS 1101)	96
Fall 2020	Round 2 (Upper)	5 (HIST 3361; INTL 4722; RUSS 4080; ANTH 4075; CMLT 3001; AFST 3020)	77
Fall 2021	Round 1 (Lower)	1 (ENGL 1101)	92
Fall 2022	Round 2 (Upper)	5 (HPRB5410W; WILD3000W; FANR3200W; WILD3700W; STAT5010W)	138
TOTAL		**12**	**403**

Assessment Procedure

Data Collection

- Artifacts that students produce as part of course completion are direct evidence of students' attainment of competency, particularly when the course and key artifacts require demonstration of the competency subject to assessment.
- For each assessment cycle, course section(s) tied to the measured competency were identified.
- Key assignments were solicited from the courses.

Rubric and Scoring

- Scorers received a 1-hour rubric calibration training.
- Collected artifacts were anonymized and distributed to a set of scorers consisting of faculty members, instructors, and graduate teaching assistants affiliated with the Center for Teaching and Learning.
- The scorers virtually evaluated artifacts based on the revised version of a VALUE rubric of AAC&U (see **Table 2**). Most of the artifacts were evaluated by two scorers, allowing for interrater reliability.

Understanding the Data (from AAC&U VALUE)

- The data are **descriptive** in nature.
- The data are categorical – meaning that scores put work into categories that are labeled both **numerically** (4, 3, 2, 1) **and linguistically** (Capstone, Milestone, and Benchmark).
- Scores from two scores were averaged to determine final scores. In cases where the average resulted in a "half score" (e.g., 2.5), **the scores were rounded up** to reflect the VALUE rubric's assumption and underlying philosophy of respecting students' likelihood of demonstrating the highest performance.
- The categories are purposefully arranged in a **developmental order**; in other words, there is an intentional progression from Benchmark (1) to Milestone (2), Milestone (3), and Capstone (4).
- However, while the data generated using a VALUE rubric are ordinal (i.e., there is a logical, progressive order to the categories presented on the rubric), the data are not reflective of a true scale with equal intervals between each score. Thus, mean scores might not fully represent students' general performance and need to be supplemented by score distributions.

Assessment Rubric

Table 2 VALUE Rubric for Written Communication

Dimensions	Capstone 4	Milestone 3	Milestone 2	Benchmark 1
Context and Purpose for Writing Includes considerations of audience, purpose, and the circumstances surrounding the writing task(s).	Exemplifies a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task/s across all elements of the work	Demonstrates consistent alignment of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task/s	Includes adequate consideration of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task/s	Displays minimal attention to context, audience, purpose, and assigned tasks.
Genre and Disciplinary Conventions Formal and informal rules inherent in the expectations for writing in particular forms and/or academic fields (please see glossary).	Exemplifies thorough and successful execution of a wide range of conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task/s including organization, arrangement, and formatting	Demonstrates consistent use of foundational conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task/s including organization, arrangement, and formatting	Includes some features of the task's specific disciplinary conventions for organization, arrangement, and formatting	Displays minimal adherence to genre and disciplinary conventions of writing task
Content Development	Exemplifies thorough use of compelling and relevant content to illustrate the subject, convey the writer's understanding, and shape the whole work	Demonstrates consistent, appropriate, and relevant content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work.	Includes some appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work	Displays minimally appropriate content to develop basic ideas in some parts of the work
Sources and Evidence	Exemplifies thorough use of credible, relevant sources to support ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing	Demonstrates consistent use of credible, relevant sources to support ideas that are situated within the discipline and genre of the writing	Includes some credible and/or relevant sources to support ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing	Displays minimal or minimally credible sources and evidence
Control of Syntax and Mechanics (Fall 2019, Fall 2020)	Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency, and is virtually error-free.	Uses straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to readers. The language in the portfolio has few errors.	Uses language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some errors.	Uses language that sometimes impedes meaning because of errors in usage.
Style (Fall 2021, Fall 2022)	Exemplifies written communication in a style appropriate to the genre, discipline, and/or writing task/s	Demonstrates consistent use of language and mechanics appropriate to the writing task/s, discipline, and/or genre of the writing	Includes language and mechanics mostly appropriate to the writing task/s but occasionally creates confusion for the reader	Deploys language and mechanics inappropriate to the writing task or that often impedes comprehension of the writing

RESULTS

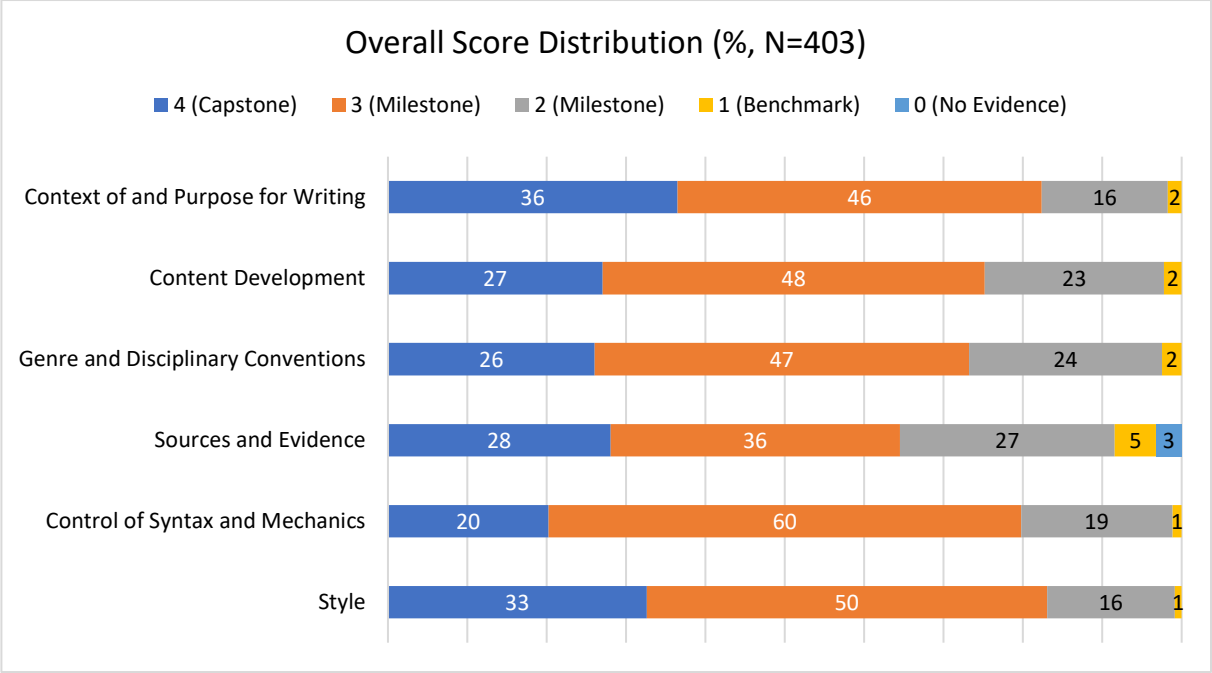
Written communication is assessed by five dimensions, as shown in **Table 2.** The rubric for the first and the second cycle consists of five dimensions: context of and purpose for writing; content development; genre and disciplinary conventions; source and evidence; control of syntax and mechanics. Based on scorer feedback, a new dimension that measures how a student demonstrates the proper writing style for the purpose and audiences is substituted for "control of syntax and mechanics" starting from the third cycle (Fall 2021).

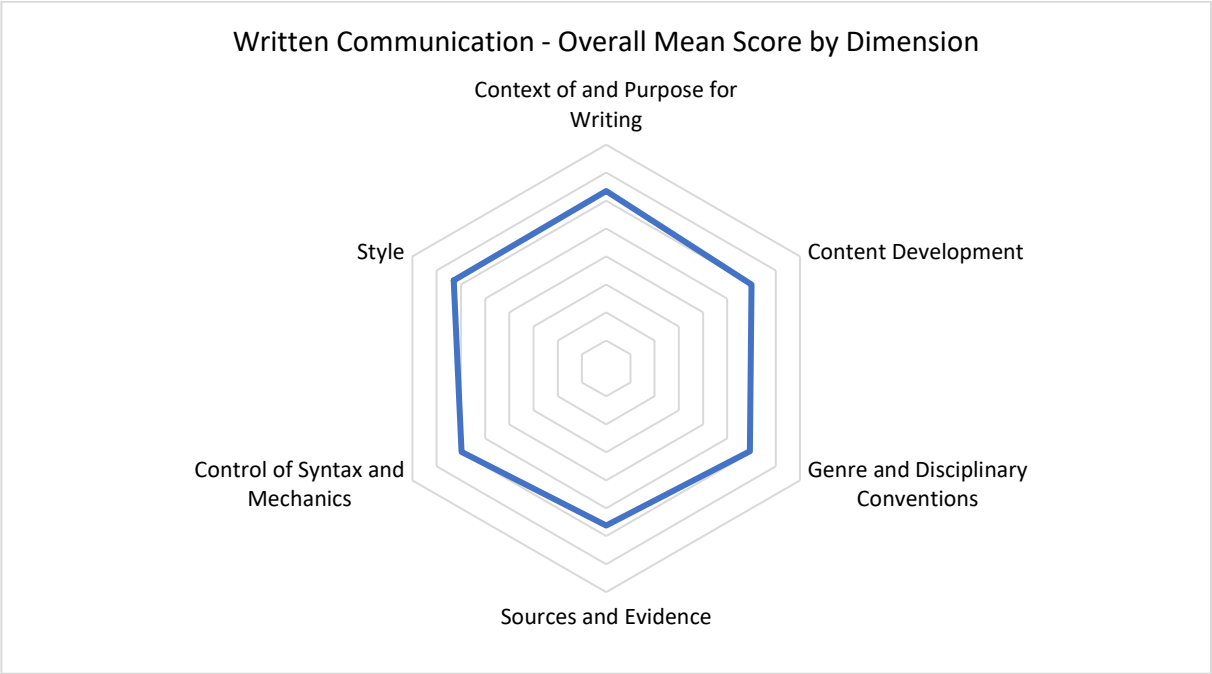
The score distribution is illustrated in the following sections in aggregate and in a breakdown by a) cycle, b) course level (round), c) gender, and d) race/ethnicity. Mean scores were used when inter-group comparison is needed. However, note that the mean scores should be considered a supplement to actual score distributions that provide more precise information about student performance. Where mean scores are illustrated in a radar chart, a large, regular shape indicates high levels of written communication skills across all dimensions.

Overall Score Distribution

Figure 1 displays the overall assessment result of written communication, first in score distribution by dimension and in a radar chart. **Figure 1** answers the question, "how student scores are distributed in the pooled sample across four cycles?"

Figure 1. Overall Score Distribution

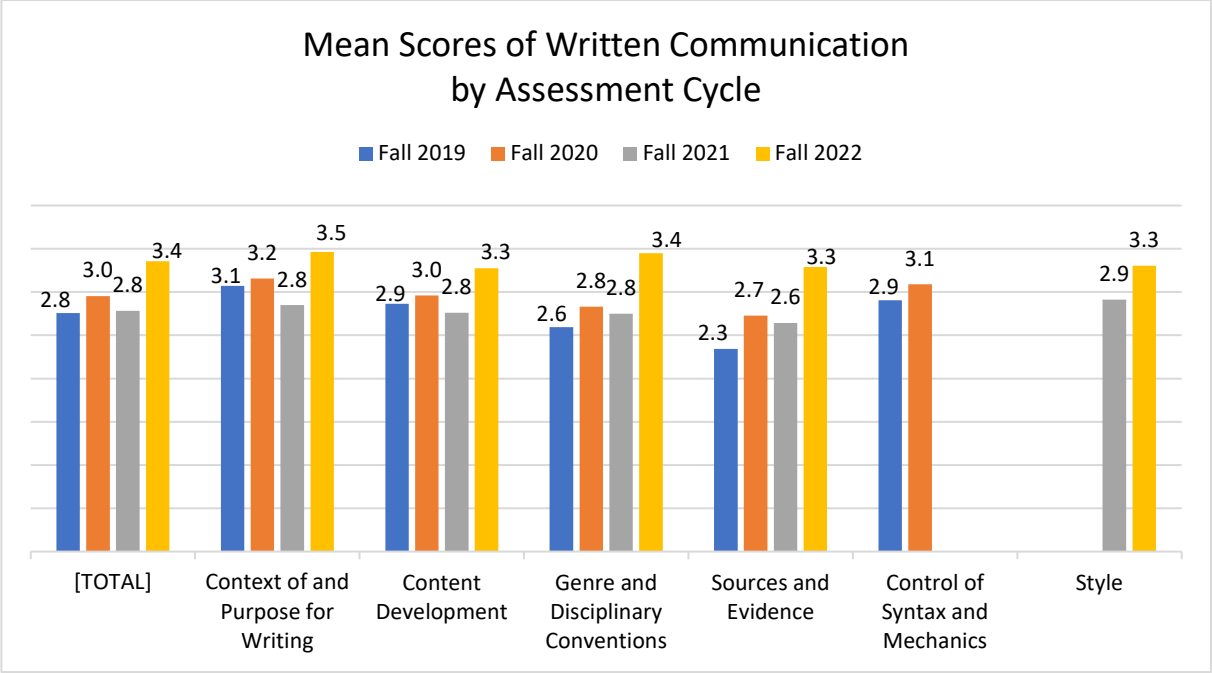




Score Distribution by Assessment Cycle

Figure 2 provides student scores across dimensions by assessment cycle. It provides an answer to the question, "how did students score on average by assessment cycle? **Figure 3** answers to the question, "how are student scores distributed in each assessment cycle?"

Figure 2. Mean Scores of Written Communication by Assessment Cycle



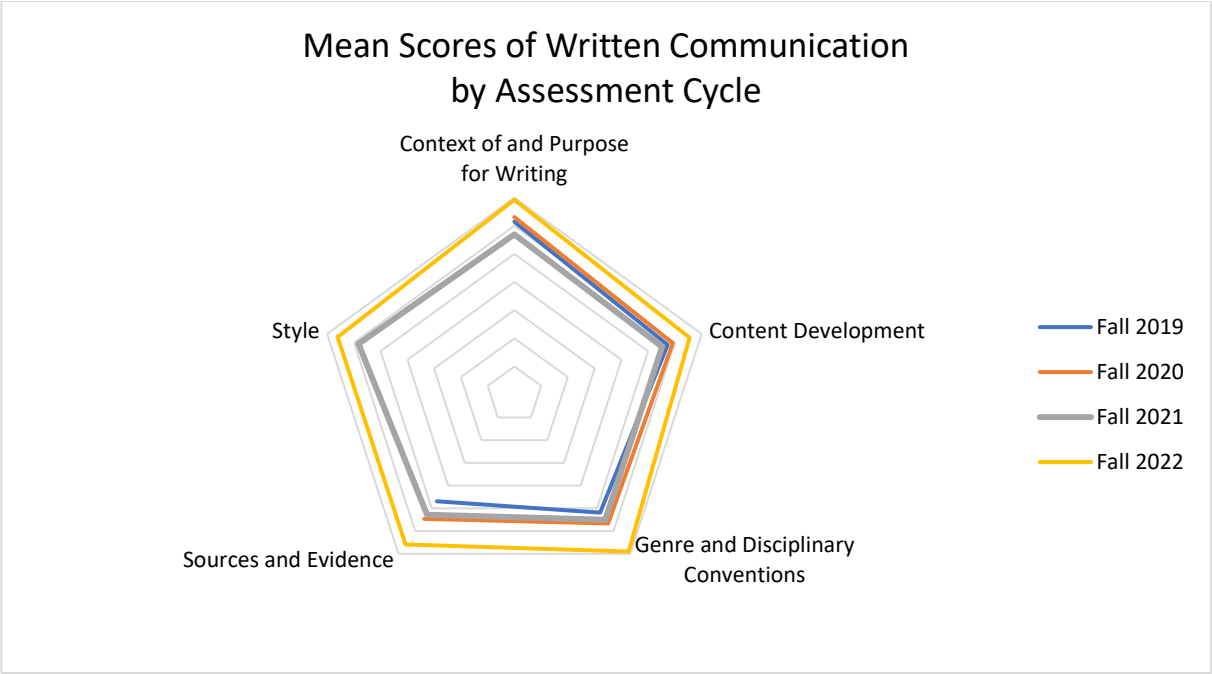
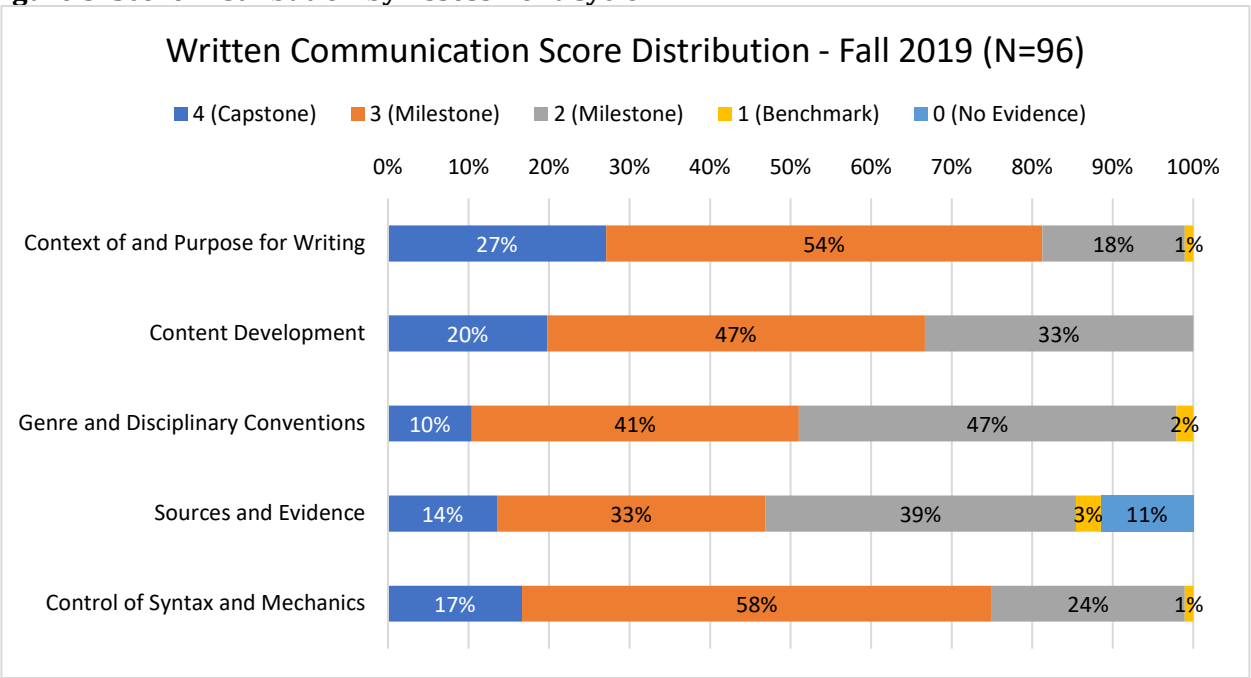
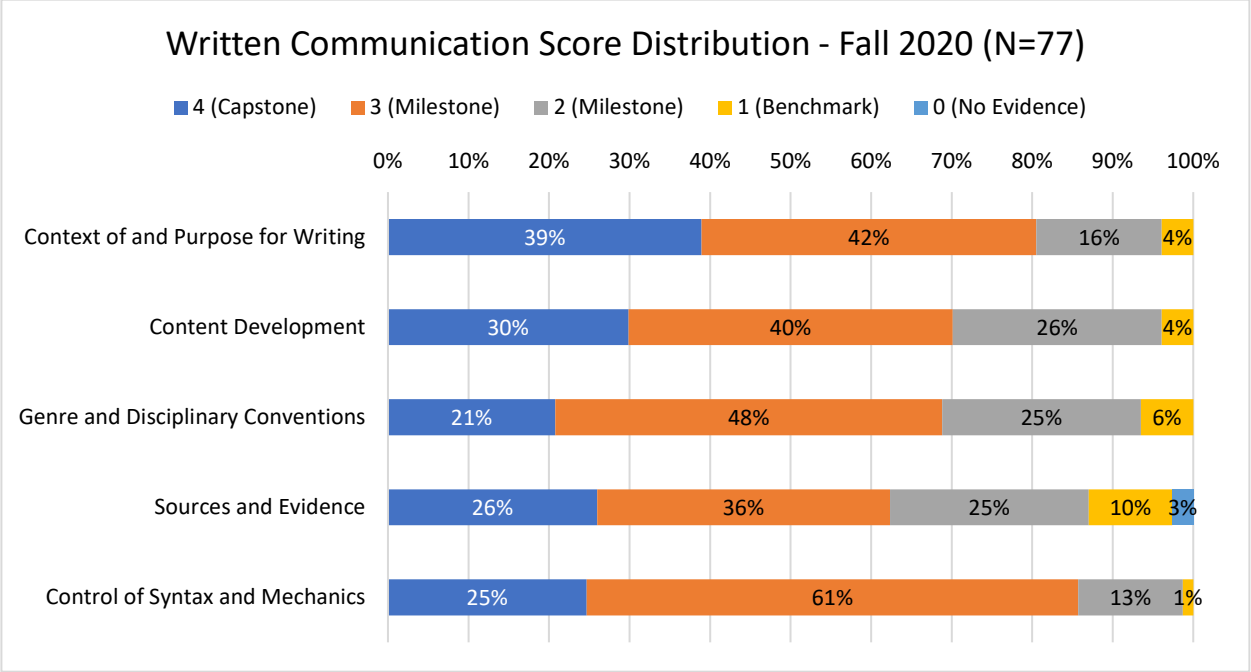
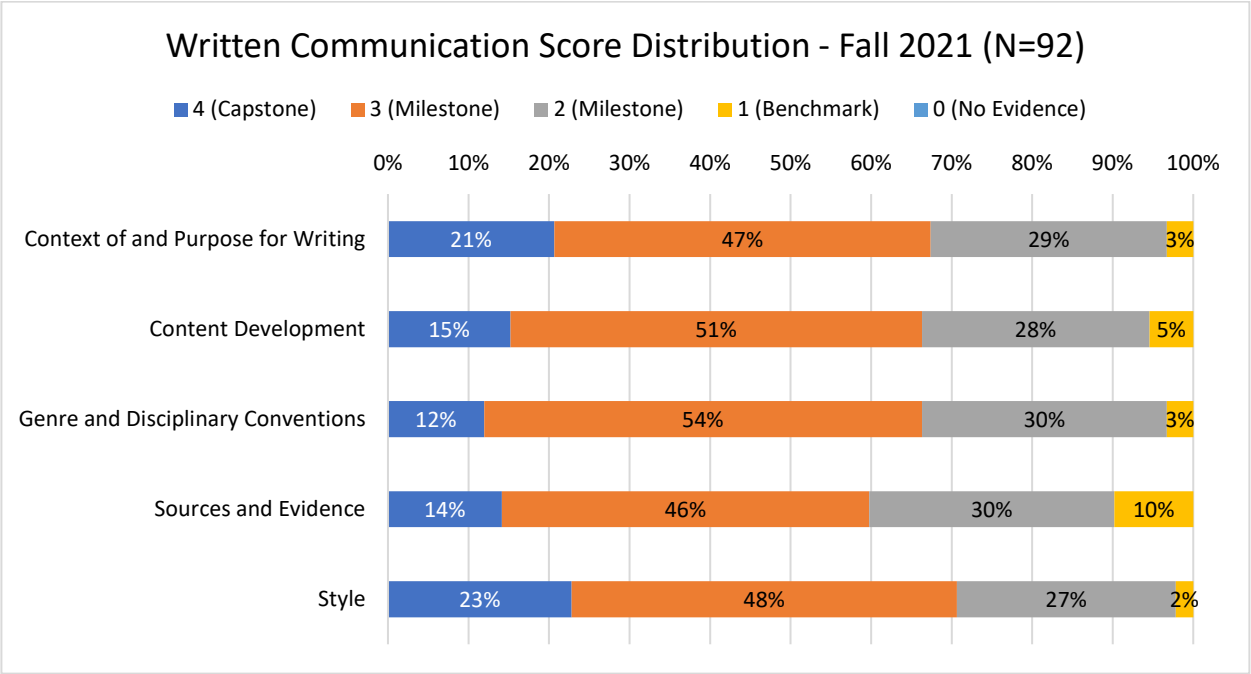
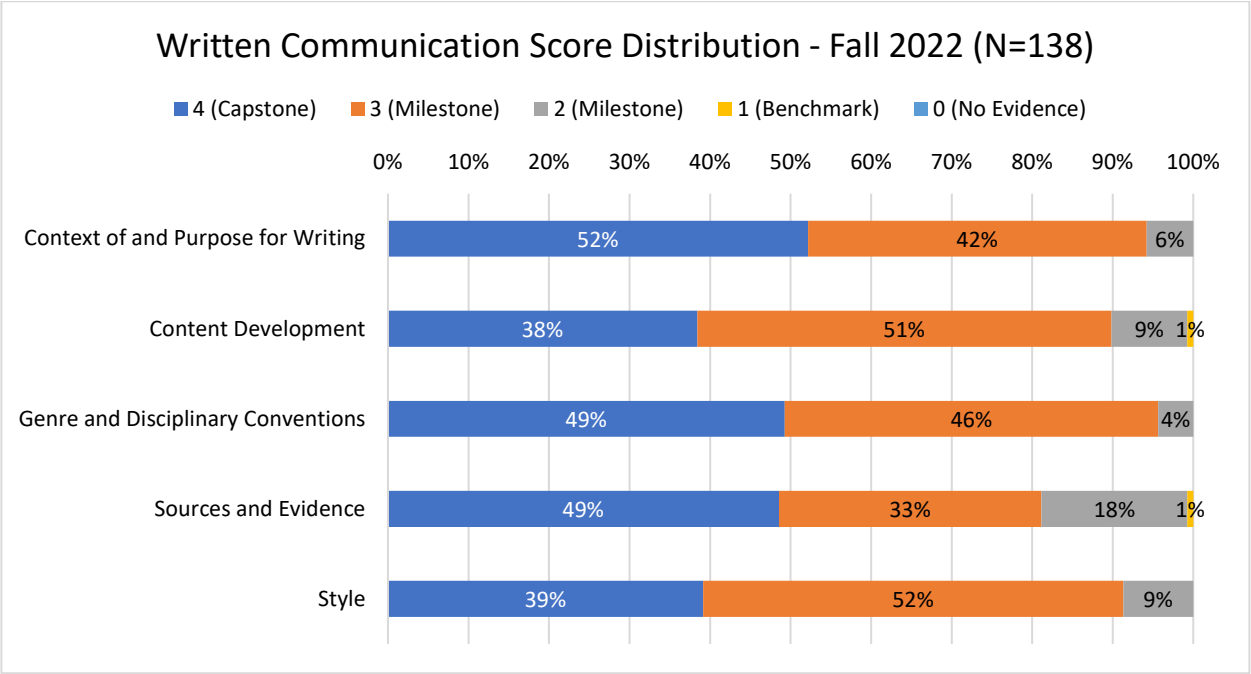


Figure 3. Score Distribution by Assessment Cycle





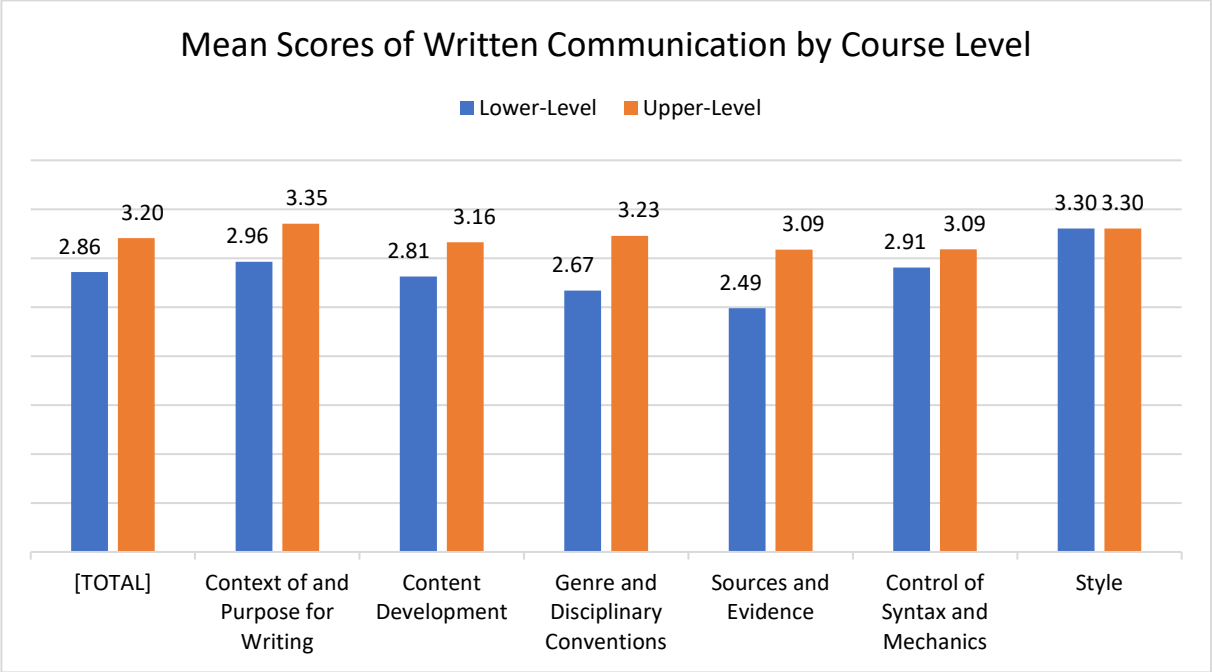

Written Communication Score Distribution - Fall 2021 (N=92)
4 (Capstone)
3 (Milestone)
2 (Milestone)
1 (Benchmark)
0 (No Evidence)
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Context of and Purpose for Writing
21%
47%
29%
3%
Content Development
15%
51%
28%
5%
Genre and Disciplinary Conventions
12%
54%
30%
3%
Sources and Evidence
14%
46%
30%
10%
Style
23%
48%
27%
2%


Written Communication Score Distribution - Fall 2022 (N=138)
4 (Capstone)
3 (Milestone)
2 (Milestone)
1 (Benchmark)
0 (No Evidence)
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Context of and Purpose for Writing
52%
42%
6%
Content Development
38%
51%
9%
1%
Genre and Disciplinary Conventions
49%
46%
4%
Sources and Evidence
49%
33%
18%
1%
Style
39%
52%
9%

Score Distribution by Course Level

The four cycles can be aggregated by course level. Cycles 1 and 3 collected student artifacts from lower-division courses, whereas Cycles 2 and 4 assessed used upper-level course assignments. **Figure 4** answers the question, "how did students score on average by course level? **Figure 5**answers the question, "how is student score distribution different by course level?"

Figure 4. Mean Scores of Written Communication by Course Level



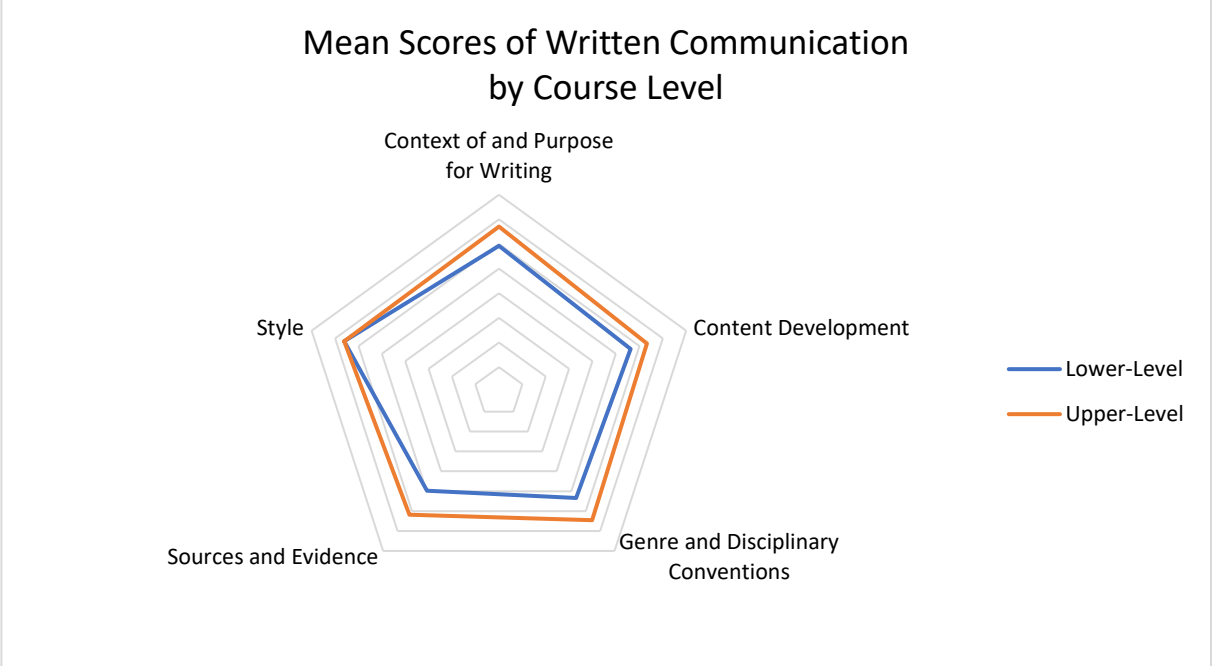
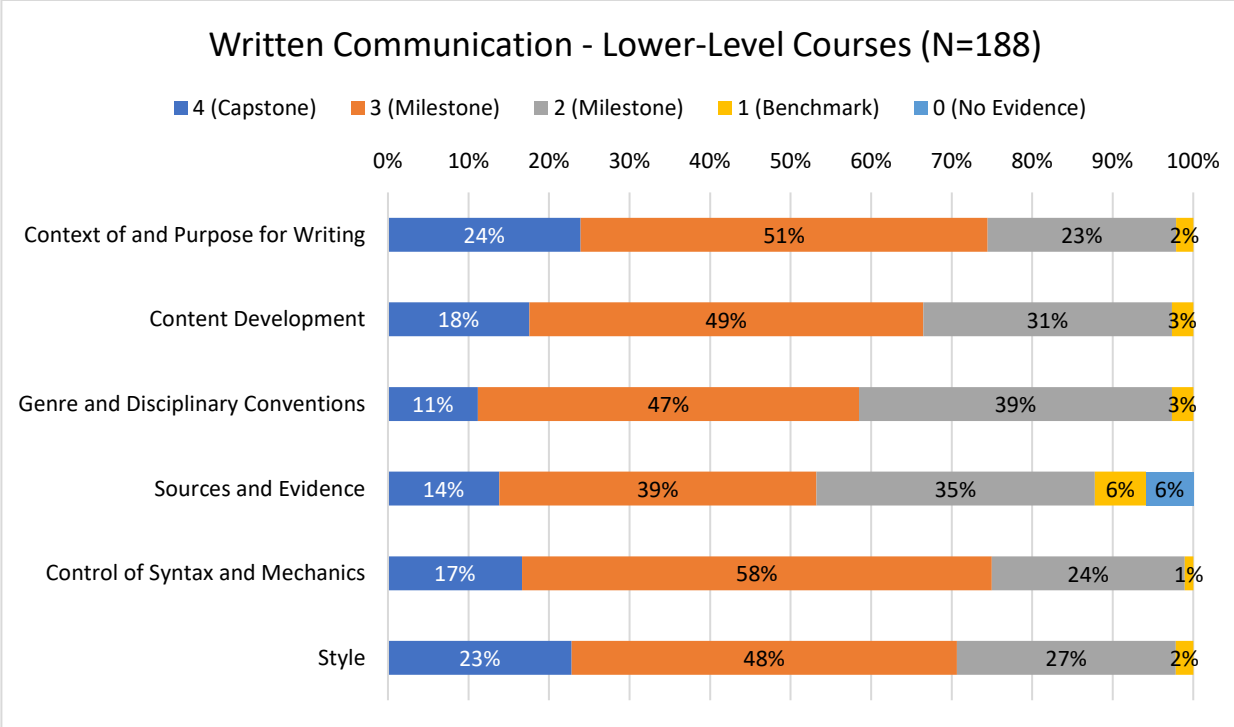
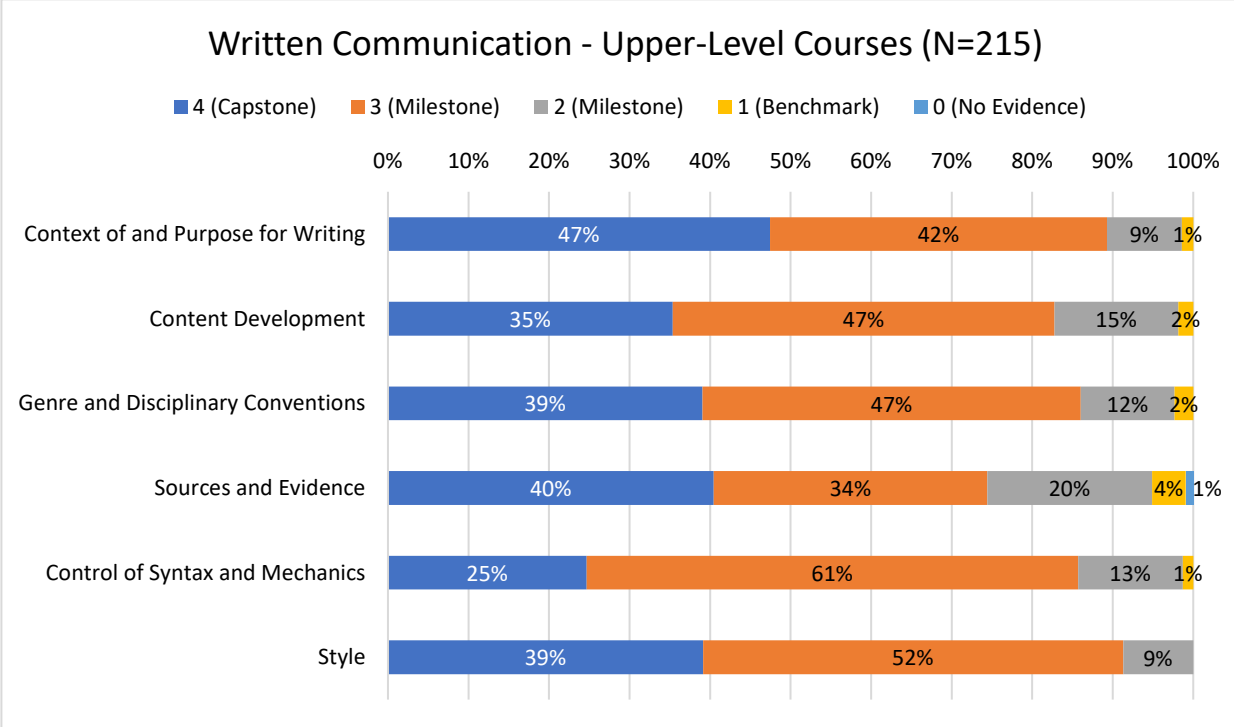


Figure 5. Score Distribution by Course Level

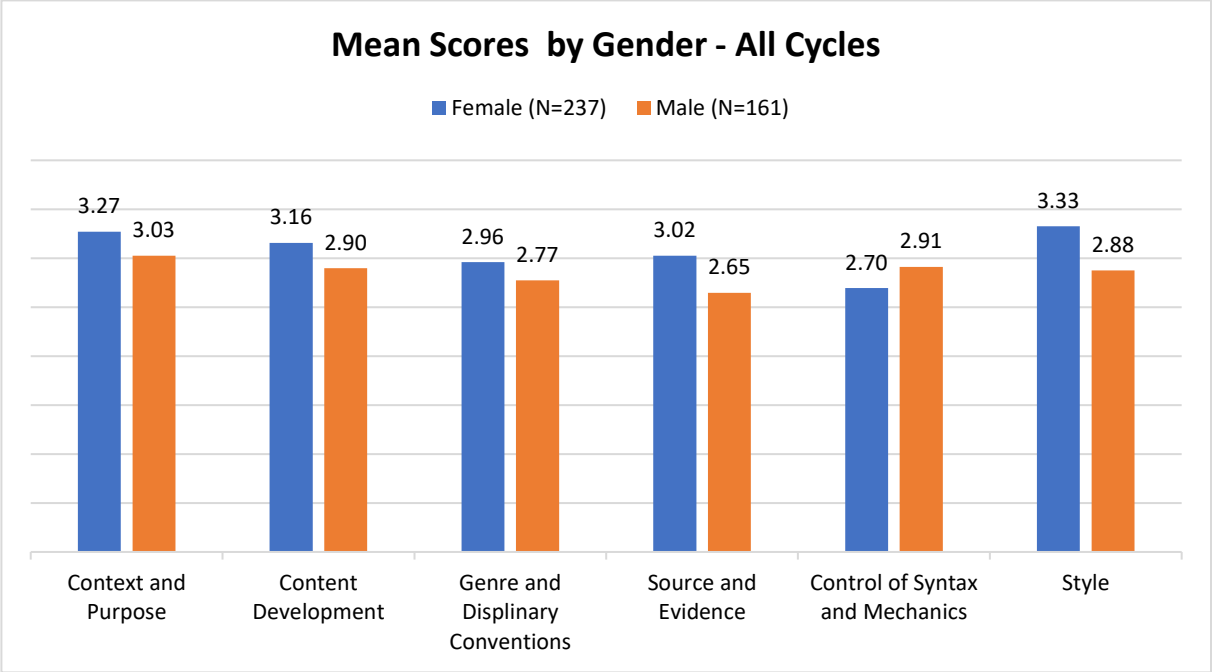




Score Distribution by Gender

Figure 6 shows mean scores by gender and in subsets by gender and class levels. **Figure 7** and **Figure 8** illustrate score distribution by gender in lower-division courses and upper-division, respectively. **Figure 7** and **Figure 8** answer the question, "how did female and male students perform in each dimension in lower- and upper-level courses?"

Figure 6. Mean Scores by Gender



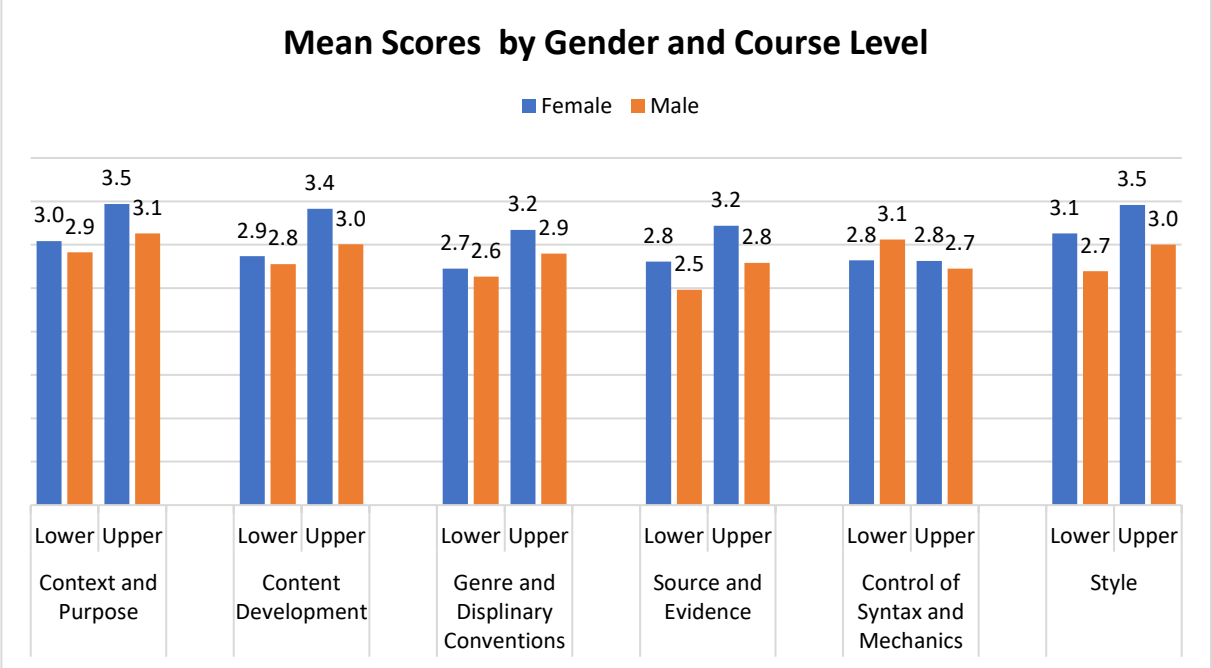
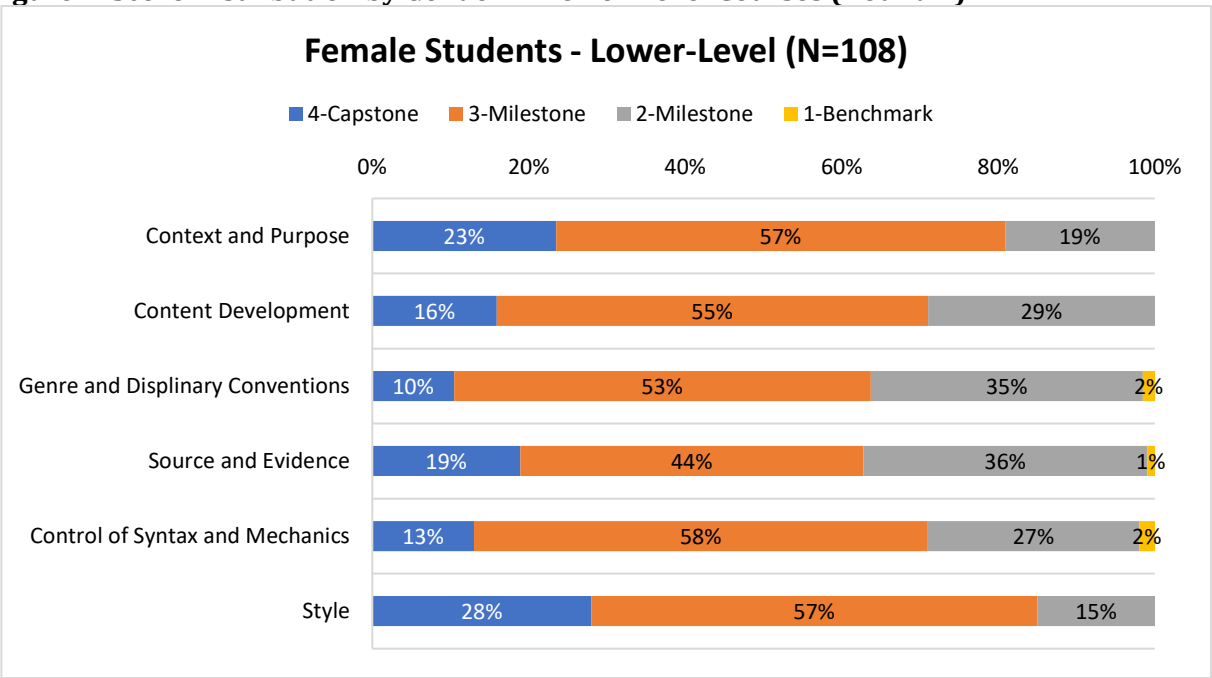


Figure 7. Score Distribution by Gender in Lower-Level Courses (Round 1)



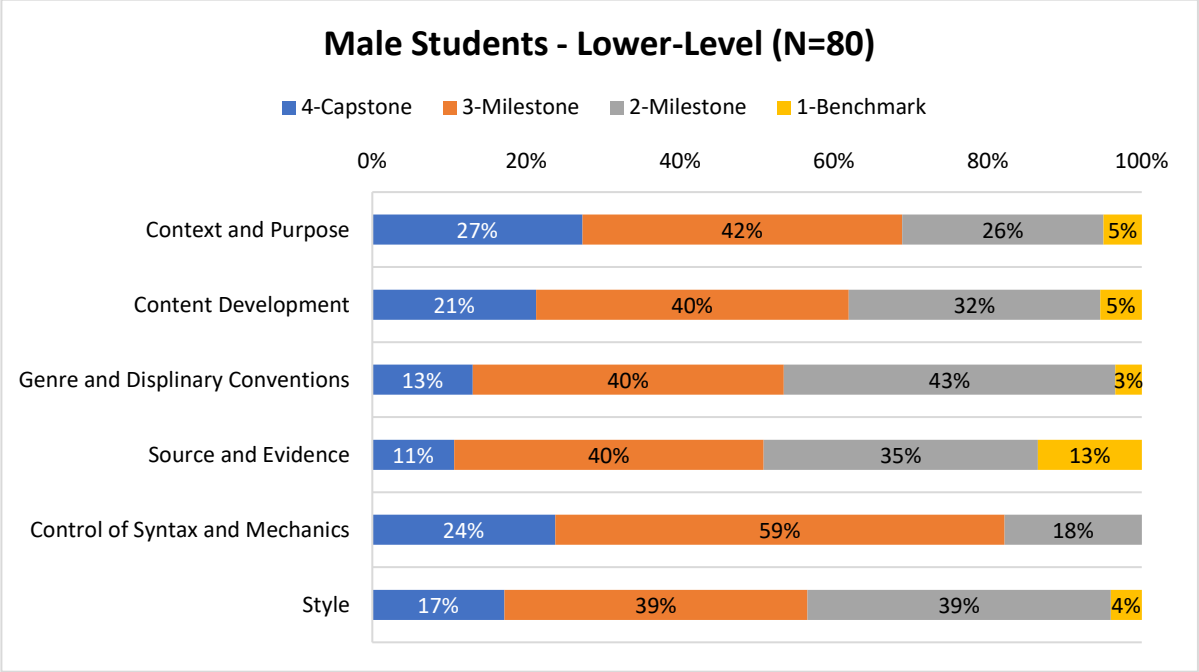
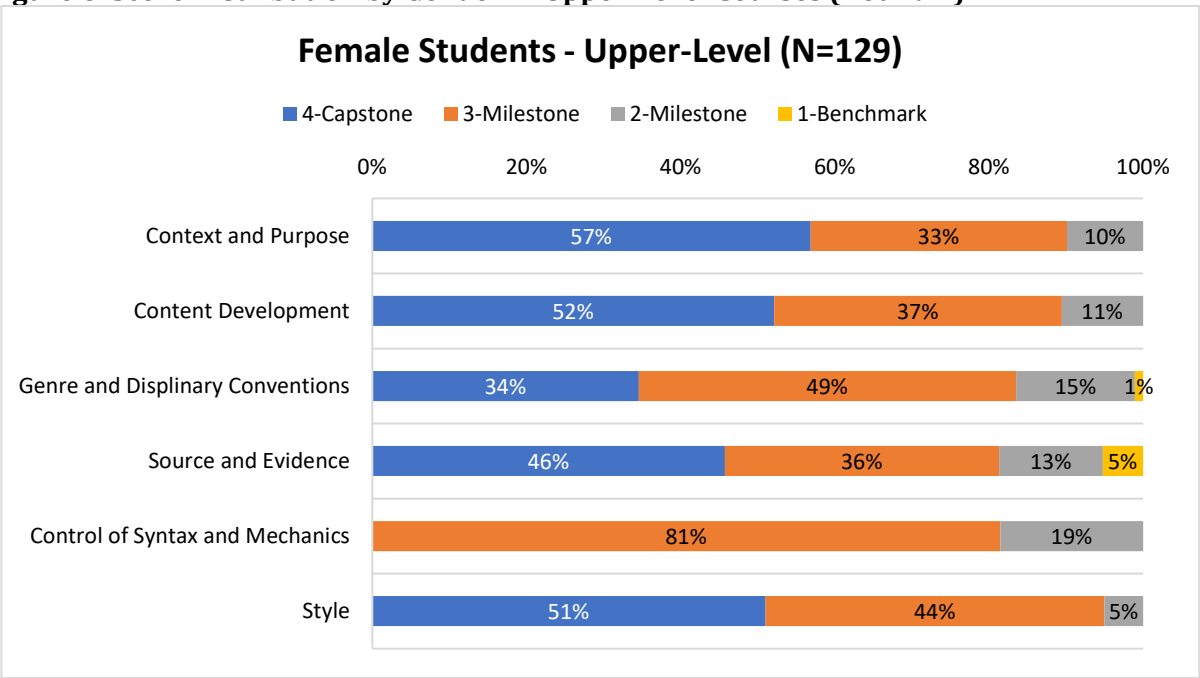
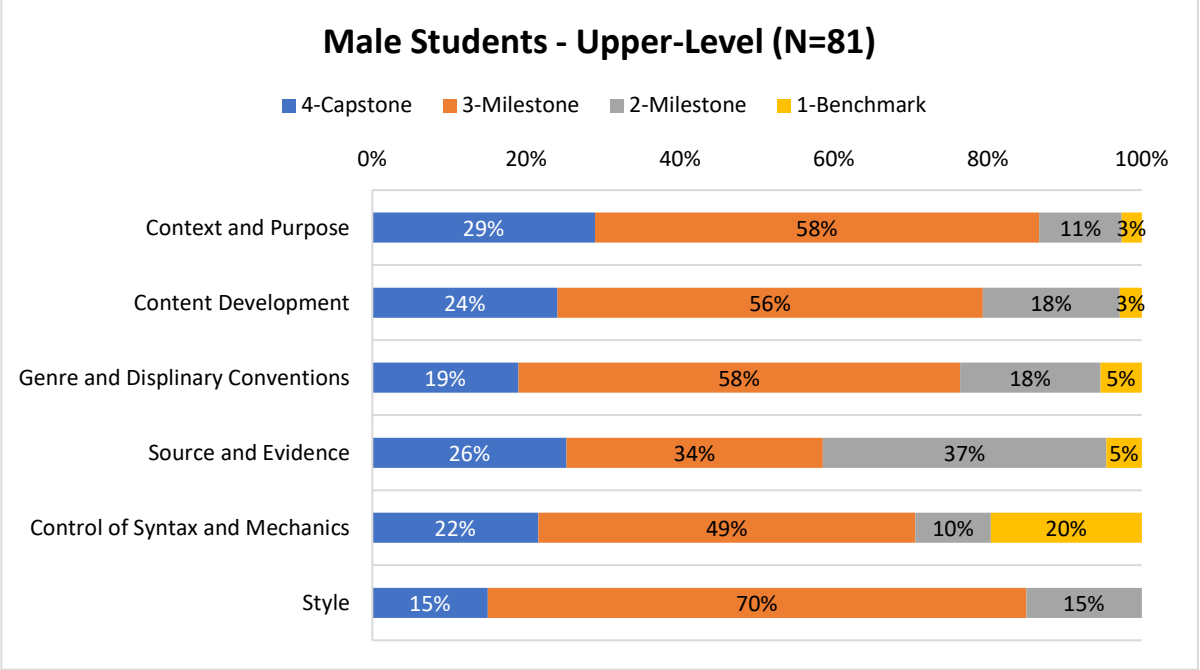


Figure 8. Score Distribution by Gender in Upper-Level Courses (Round 2)

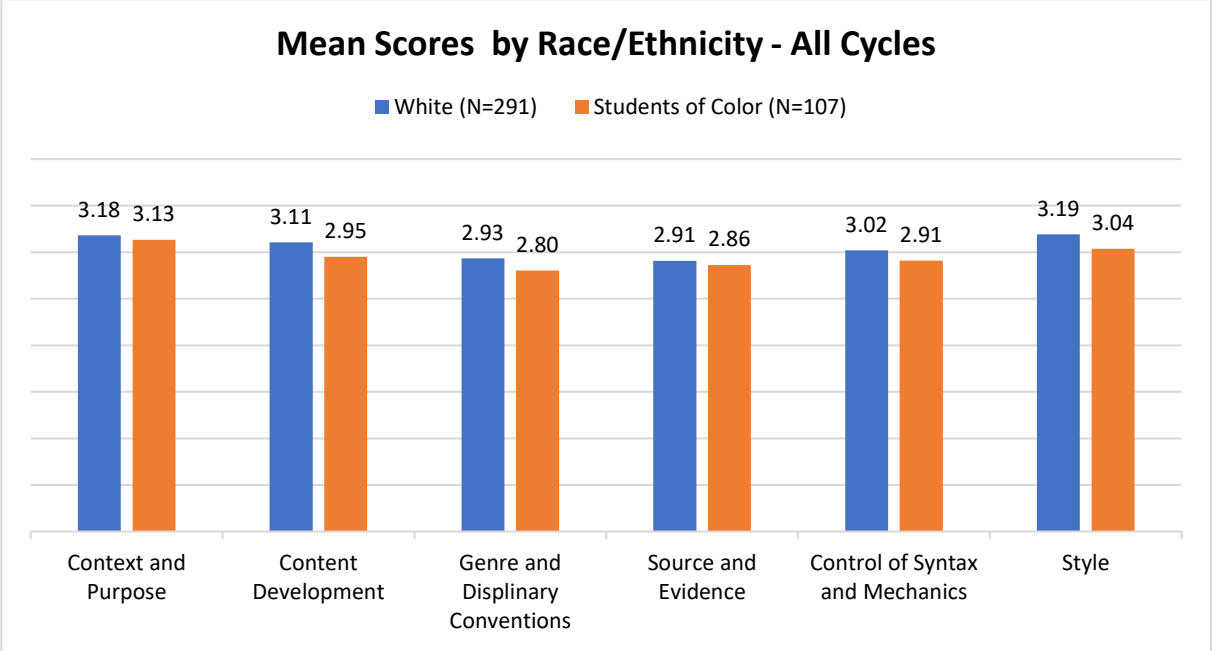




Score Distribution by Racial/Ethnic identity

Figure 9 demonstrates the average performance of white and non-white students in the whole sample and in a breakdown by course level. Given the limited number of students within different races and in order to protect their identity, we have reassigned race into two categories: white and students of color. **Figure 10 and 11** illustrate score distribution by race/ethnicity in lower-division courses and upper-division, respectively. **Figure 10 and 11** answer the question, "how did white students and students of color perform in each dimension in lower- and upper-level courses?"

Figure 9. Mean Scores by Race/Ethnicity



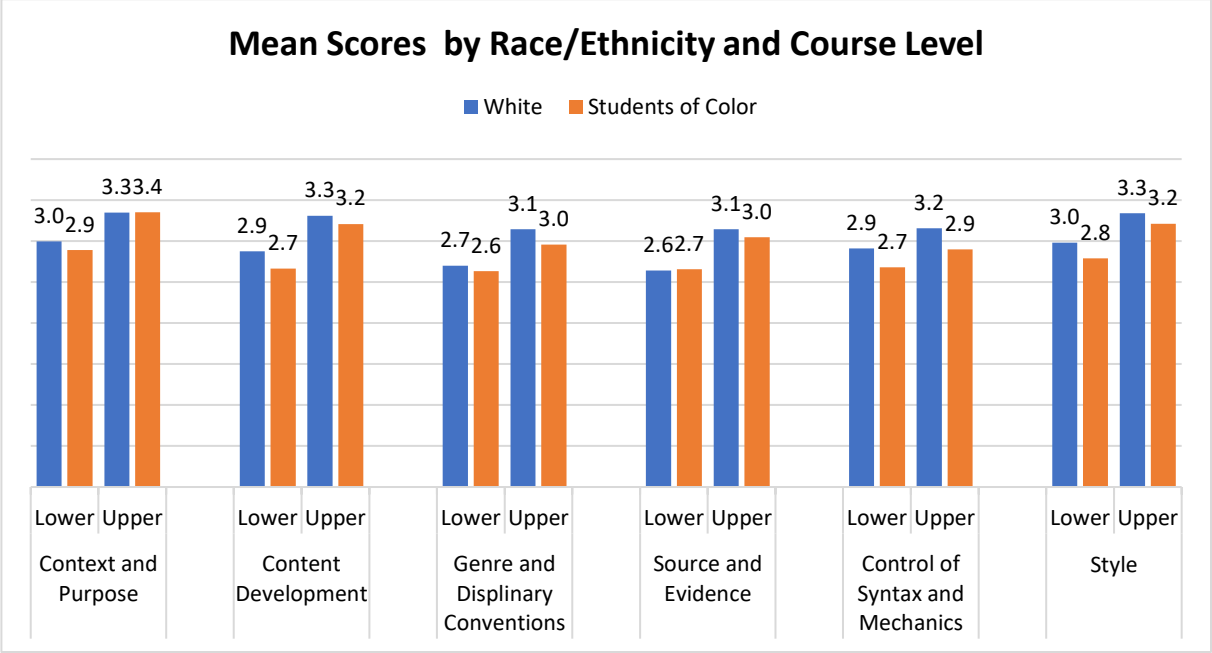
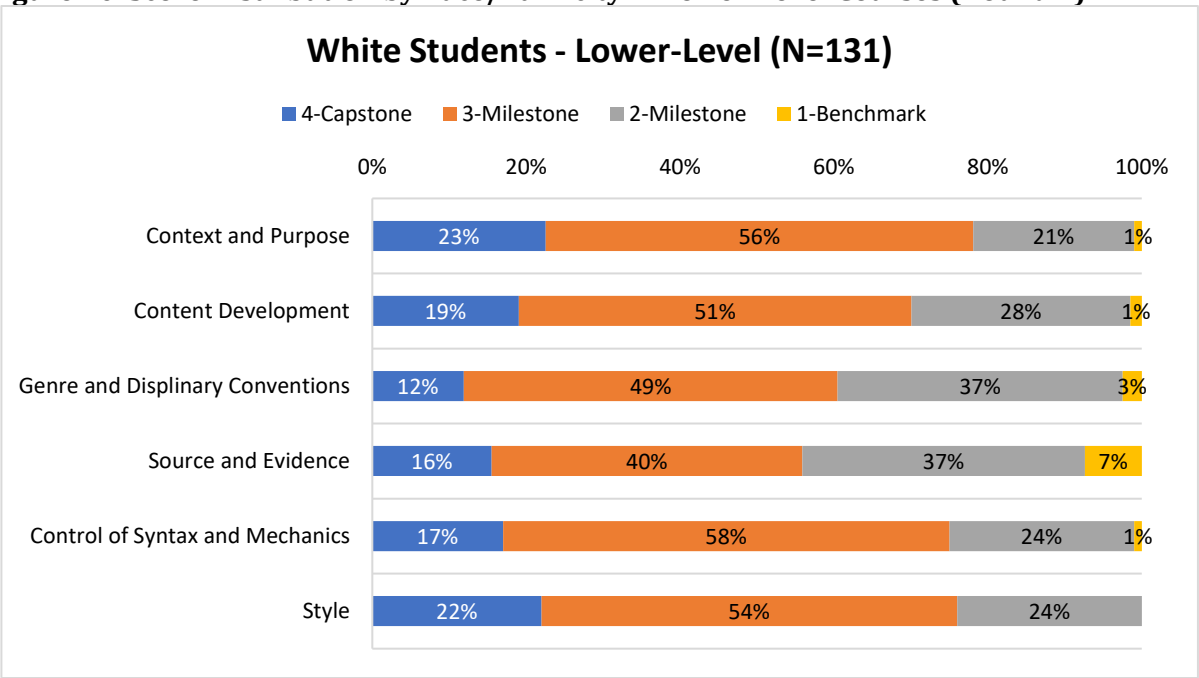


Figure 10. Score Distribution by Race/Ethnicity in Lower-Level Courses (Round 1)



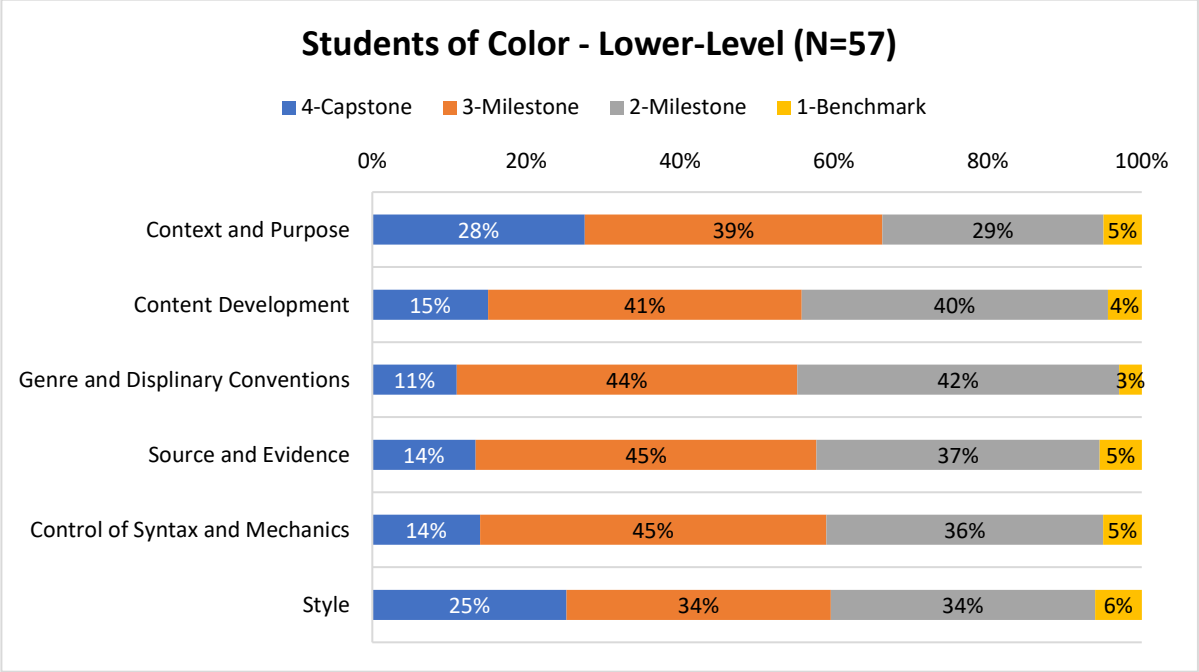
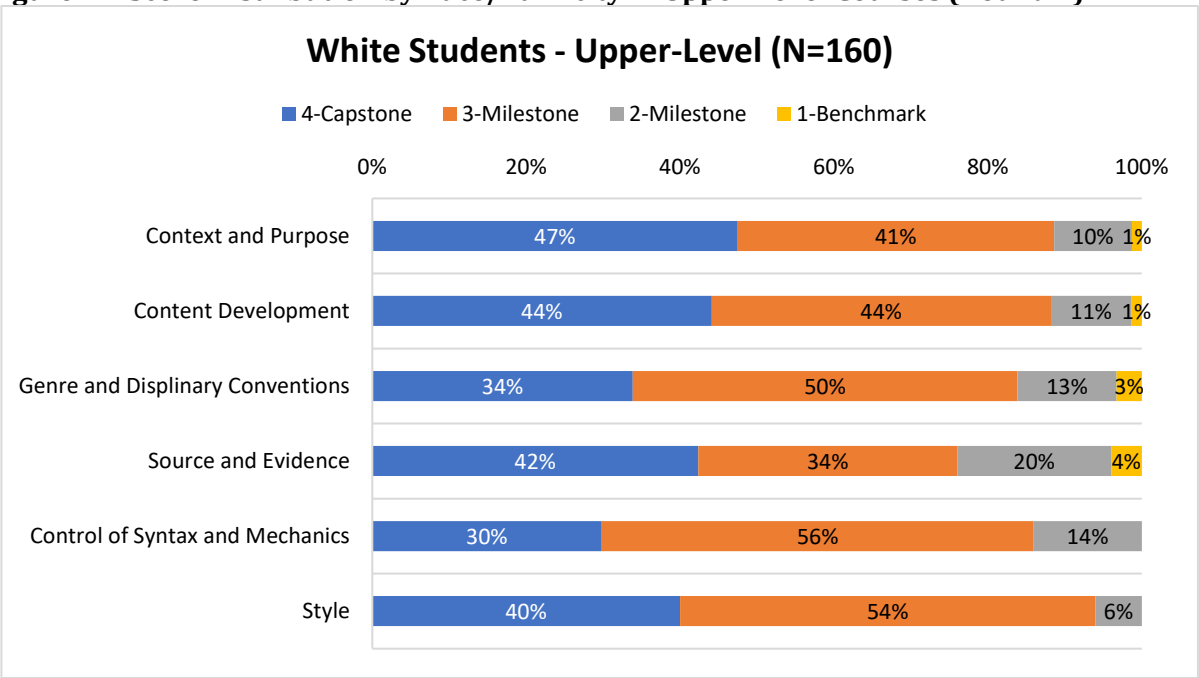
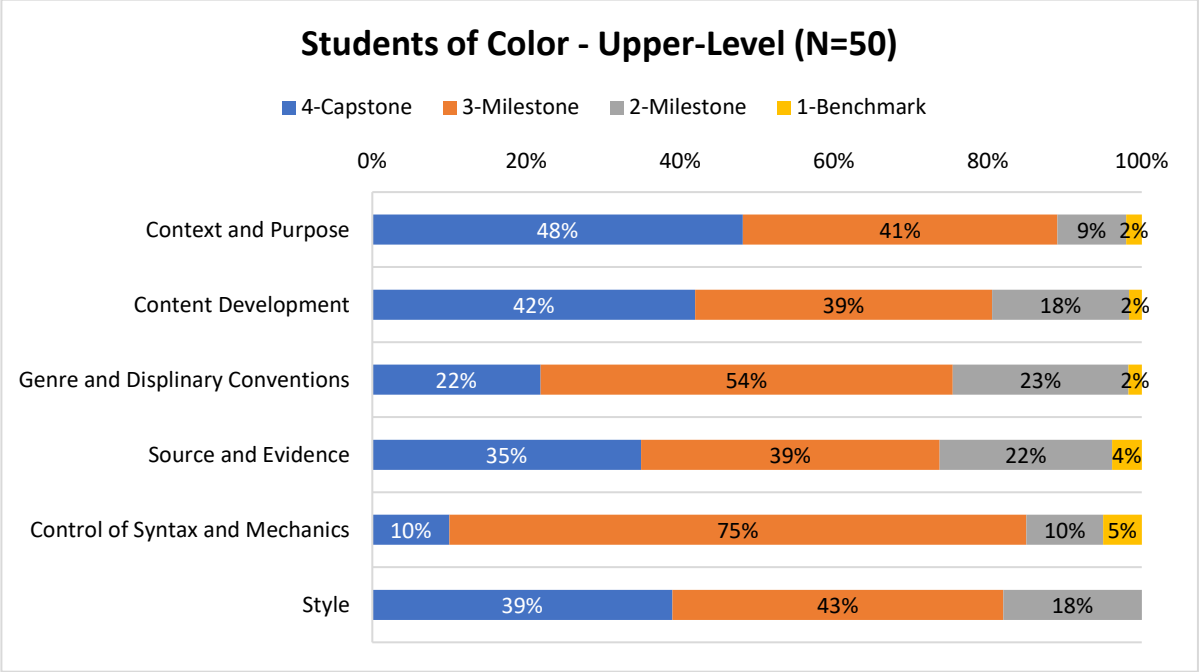


Figure 11. Score Distribution by Race/Ethnicity in Upper-Level Courses (Round 2)





IMPLICATIONS

Overall Student Performance

More than half of the students in the sample constantly scored at a high level in all general dimensions of written communication. UGA's collective effort to improve students' general education competencies has successfully led to **a growing number of students scoring above milestone (2) level in general**.

Difference by Course Level

It is particularly encouraging that **students in upper-level courses score higher than those in lower-level courses**. The difference was most salient in dimensions "Source and Evidence" and "Genre and Disciplinary Conventions." We should be cautious to interpret the result longitudinally, but the parallel assessments between lower- and upper-level courses display different levels of general education competencies between students at the entry to the UGA's general curriculum and those getting closer to completion.

Difference by Cycle

Students show a consistent and strong level of written communication competency, performing beyond Milestone (3) across four cycles. The highest proportion of student artifacts scored above 3-Milestone level in the most recent round, Fall 2022. This result is reasonable and encouraging, given that student artifacts for the fourth round were from upper-division writing-intensive courses.

Difference by Dimension

Students consistently show their strength in terms of their control for syntactic and technical aspects of writing as well as the ability to provide context and purpose for their work. Instructors might want to facilitate students to refine their writing skills to Capstone (4) level, especially in dimension "sources and evidence" by citing appropriate sources and evidencing their argument using various types of data.

Difference by Student Demographics

By gender, female students scored higher than male students across all dimensions. However, male students showed strength in the dimension "Control of Syntax and Mechanics." After the dimension was replaced with "Style," female students scored higher than male students. Male and female students performed at a similar level in lower-division courses, but the gap widened in upper-level courses where 30~50% of female students scored at Capstone (4) and less than 30% of male students received the same score.

The difference between white students and students of color was relatively minor, though the overall scores were higher among white students. The percentage of students receiving scores at Milestone (3) or above was similar across gender and all dimensions. Students in both groups showed a higher level of performance in upper-division courses, indicating the development of written competency over time.