# A TEST of LEADERSHIP

## HIGHER EDUCATION'S NEED TO RECLAIM LEARNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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# DRAFT

## Introduction

How is it we meet here today in *reaction* to a federal commission report whose title, *A Test of Leadership,* questions the quality of American higher education and demands a far greater level of public accountability? We do so because despite local efforts the academy as a whole has neglected to take sufficient responsibility for its own educational and professional accountability in terms of assessing student learning. The Spellings Commission report and its title *A Test of Leadership,* challenges higher education.

The Commission report deals with a number of very important policy issues such as cost and unit-record keeping and says little about graduate education, itself problematic in many ways. I will focus today, however, on two of its core premises: that undergraduate education quality is inadequate given the challenges we face in the 21st century; and the solution to quality improvement requires a more transparent accountability informed by value-added learning assessment. I will argue that there is a vacuum of academic leadership in these matters, that without measuring student learning there is little one can say about quality or accountability, and that the academy at its peril remains, at best, ambivalent in its response to date. Further, given the irresolvable conflict higher education perceives is inherent in the external demand to use learning assessment for both improvement *and* accountability, I suggest a resolution—to follow the principle of "trust but verify" by asking the academy to do exactly that, employ value-added assessment simultaneously to inform improvement and accountability. The approach I offer is exemplified by my experience with the Collegiate Learning Assessment project.

There *is* a growing dis-ease about what now passes for higher education led not by angry students, as in the 60's, but by parents, business, political, and academic leaders who sense a dangerous hollowing of an increasingly precarious Ivory tower. And there *is* ample evidence that for far too many of our college and university students, "higher" education hardly rises to the occasion implied by the word unless we are talking about binge drinking. Virtually every study within and outside the academy acknowledges we are not doing as well as we should. It was recently reported, for example, that only thirty-five percent of recent college graduates passed the National Adult Literacy Exam, a low standard indeed but worse yet, a decline from college graduates ten years ago.

There is an academic leadership vacuum with regard to the issues of quality, accountability, and learning assessment, the recent book, *Our Underachieving Colleges* by Harvard's president, Derek Bok, notwithstanding. That vacuum is understandably but ominously being filled by business, state, and federal voices, a danger I hope we can avoid because faculty and administrators are *potentially* better placed and qualified to identify problems and make changes than outside groups. The test of leadership posed by the Commission, however, is a fair one and if the test is not passed by the academy with flying colors there will be further erosion of both institutional control and the increasingly fragile notion of higher education as a public good.

## THE CALL FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

It is the educational and professional duty of higher education to systematically assess its impact on student learning as an essential condition for improvement and transparent accountability. Why do I say that? Because student learning is higher education's *raison d' etre*; we know that appropriate and timely feedback to students and faculty increases student learning and our training and professional status obligates the academy to be transparent in its endeavors, as it does in all professions. Moreover, colleges and universities are subsidized by the public, either

directly through tax revenues and/or through tax exemption and thus their responsibility for rigorous student and institutional assessment *and* public accountability. Perhaps most important, given economic and civic requirements of an information- driven, global reality, the academy must responsibly lead the education reform necessary for the learning of higher order skills, a reform that necessarily requires a far better articulation and assessment of such outcomes.

During the past twenty years concerns about access and cost have dominated the public debates about higher education. But more recently, in the shadow of the K-12 high-stakes testing and "No Child Left Behind" movements, the issues of higher education quality and learning assessment have been moved to center stage. More than forty states, for example, have laws on the books requiring that public institutions provide evidence of student learning. Each of the regional accreditation associations, the official arbiters of higher education quality, now specifies assessment of student learning as the ultimate criterion of educational quality. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in its national two-year study of higher educational quality, (GREATER EXPECTATIONS: *A New Vision of Learning as a Nation Goes to College*) calls for institutional accountability based on student learning, and in a recent paper, "Our Students' Best Work," AAC&U asserts that "too many institutions and programs still are unable to answer legitimate questions about what their students are learning in college."

The corporate community weighs in as well. The Business-Higher Education Forum recently disseminated its report PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY for STUDENT LEARNING in HIGHER EDUCATION: ISSUES and OPTIONS, in which they argue strongly for measures of student learning as the central component of a higher education accountability system. "One of the most important public policy imperatives in higher education is to enhance institutional productivity by focusing on learning….." (p.13). The SHEEO study of eighteen months ago points to better accountability as crucial and the Spellings Commission echoes these earlier voices.

**Public Good versus Private Benefit**

The calls for accountability, in particular the use of student learning as the key accountability variable, are particularly salient at a time in American history when financial support for public institutions has greatly eroded. Once supported to the tune of 40-70% of their budgets, state institutions are now calling themselves "state-assisted" with many now receiving only 10-20% state-funding and considering the benefits of going private. In the both the public and private spheres, tuition has risen precipitously to maintain "quality," say higher education leaders, and in lieu of any solid evidence to the contrary, the market has borne the higher prices in the belief that *perceived* educational value is worth the cost.

But faith in higher education has begun to erode--increasingly the perception is that sufficient value is not being received for the cost. Where once this country was unified in its belief that higher education was a public good (e.g. the extensive network of land-grant institutions, tax exemptions for all of higher education, the federally supported GI Bill), we have come to believe that individual beneficiaries of higher education ought to shoulder most of the cost and hence we see decreased state tax support, sharply rising tuition, and federal and state grant aid increasingly being replaced by student loans and individual student debt.

This is an era in which a college degree is increasingly seen as a commodity, a credential to be possessed rather than a mark of intellectual distinction. The transformation of American thinking about its higher education systems as primarily a private benefit is due in part to this commodification process but it also may be the result of the lack of the transparent accountability system necessary to affirm or reclaim people's faith in the importance of intellectual quality—"higher" education,—rather than viewing it as nothing more than another marketplace product to be purchased whenever possible, at discounted rates. As higher education increasingly becomes

the sorting mechanism for the private sector—awarding degrees as a means to sort prospective employees—the focus necessarily shifts to acquiring the degree rather than acquiring an education.

**The Value-Added, Learning Assessment Imperative**

Higher education ought to be held accountable to a variety of constituents but that means different things to different people. We have been utilizing actuarial data such as cost, graduation rates, admissions selectivity, minority access, or student satisfaction surveys, none of which tell us much about what and how well students are learning. To judge quality and whether or not a college or university is accountable, one needs first and foremost to assess learning and I suggest *value-added* learning assessment in particular must be taken as the *sine qua non* of quality, the necessary but not sufficient ingredient that can ultimately best inform accountability and institutional improvement. The Commission makes that same claim:

> Student achievement, which is inextricably connected to institutional success, must be measured by institutions on a "value-added" basis that takes into account students' academic baseline when assessing their results.

Without measuring what students know and can do as they enter college and comparing that with how they have progressed by the end of a degree program, one is stuck with what we have now—admissions selectivity as the arbiter of quality. But who is hurt by this? The privileged class gets its children into the so called "best" schools who may not necessarily learn much and then they still get the best jobs. There is thus an incentive to maintain the status quo. To focus on learning and its transparent assessment is a radical idea.

More than that, however, one also has to measure students against clear and high standards; it does us no good to have students show great learning gains without at the same time making sure they reach an adequate level of competence. Without the use of reliable and valid metrics of student learning, without clear public and high standards, decisions about pedagogical and curricular innovation or better uses of technology, for example, will continue to be decided by faculty politics and economic rather than educational considerations.

Let me be clear here— accountability must also be applied to students. While it is the responsibility of faculty to hold appropriately high expectations for students, provide clear objectives, offer appropriate instruction, and provide timely feedback, it is simultaneously the responsibility of students to put forth the necessary effort required to be successful lest they suffer the consequences and receive failing grades. But this issue, too, is in the hands of faculty whose expectations, standards, pedagogy, testing and grading regimes powerfully influence student behavior.

**The Function of Learning Assessment**

What is learning assessment? It is the gathering of information from which one can make formative and/or summative judgments about the quantity and quality of learning with the type of assessment used dependent on what is being judged. To measure mastery of factual information, for example, a short-answer test may well suffice. To measure writing ability requires adequate writing samples from many contexts that may include course-level writing assignments, and/or a thesis requirement, and/or a comprehensive writing portfolio.

Other kinds of performances call for different forms of judgment. Faculties in the fine and the performing arts, for example, find written evaluations insufficient to the assessment task and have

developed practical yet sophisticated scoring rubrics to judge performance. Scientists use laboratory exercises as part of their assessment rubrics. Post-college assessment such as licensing exams in medicine, pharmacy, nursing, and law assess both what one has learned and whether or not one can skillfully apply such knowledge and understanding. We *do* know how to assess the quality and quantity of learning without it being monolithic as some charge it must inexorably become; the key is higher education taking the responsibility to assess learning.

**The Academy's Reaction**

The academy's reaction to learning assessment has ranged across the continuum from: "it cannot nor should not be measured;" "assessment is cost and time prohibitive;" "this will result in one test for all and no one test can measure all that is important nor do justice to the diversity of institutions;" and "standardized, short answer tests are unacceptable," to its embrace by NASULGC and AASCU, two of higher education's leading organizations. It remains to be seen whether or not the national organization rhetoric of embrace will be embraced by the institutions themselves.

A part of the academy's prior rejection of comprehensive learning assessment and calls for greater accountability is that many in the academy simply do not see a problem—"the marketplace and the diversity of institutions are working fine, thank-you," they say, and thus they see no need for an assessment solution. Others agree on the need for accountability but believe "standardized" assessment is wrongheaded. Amy Gutmann, president of the University of Pennsylvania, recently made the claim that value-added assessment would not work because the very bright Penn students would do superbly when they came in, and superbly when they left and thus any value-added test would be no measure of what they learned at Penn. This is what I refer to as the "diamonds in, diamonds out, garbage in, garbage out" principle.

To be fair, president Gutmann did say that accountability in higher education is crucial and pointed to the University's high graduation rate as a better measure of her school's performance, unaware, obviously, that graduation rates are predicted mostly by admissions selectivity. Parenthetically, our Collegiate Learning Assessment research affirms that admission selectivity does predict graduation rate, but that similar graduation rates result in far different value-added learning outcomes. We also have found that there is no ceiling effect on CLA measures—the preponderance of highly talented students similar to those at the University of Pennsylvania score far below what is possible.

But it is also the case that the academy is willing and able to ratchet up the quality of learning assessment—there are scores of campuses experimenting with various forms of learning assessment using portfolios, oral and written comprehensive examinations, thesis requirements, and more than two-hundred CLA institutions experimenting with how to measure value-added learning as one of a variety of measures. Moreover, our value-added data show that *where* you go to college does make a difference, something educational research for the past forty years has not been able to demonstrate.

Surely objections to systemic and institutional learning assessment must be taken seriously, especially in light of the NCLB experience. It is true we do not know how to assess all things we consider important but that hardly leads to a conclusion that we should not assess at all. And, yes, no *one* test, much less a short-answer test, can measure all that is worth teaching or do justice to the diversity of campus missions. But this admission does not lead to the conclusion that learning assessment can not or should not be done on a more systematic and transparent basis given the valid educational reasons to do so.

**Inherent tension between high and low-stakes learning assessment**

While the *educational* benefit of assessment is somewhat obvious, even if honored in the breach, learning assessment for other purposes is now demanded and becomes far more problematic. Learning assessment for what purpose? To improve teaching and learning? To certify student competence? To decide accreditation status? To determine state or federal funding allocation? To rank schools? Put another way, there is great tension between low-stakes and high-stakes assessment, between gathering data for student or institutional improvement on the one hand, and/or to be held accountable by a board of trustees, the state, the federal government, or accrediting agencies on the other. To date, higher education understandably has responded mostly with fear that learning assessment will serve primarily ranking and funding functions, not a surprising concern from those heretofore sheltered from serious public scrutiny regarding the making of educational sausage.

At the moment there is no common agreement about what to assess, much less sufficient tools to do so, and the professoriate will not tolerate the imposition of external testing in their domains. Ironically, I suppose, given this adverse reaction to having those outside the academy defining and measuring quality, one is hard put to understand why higher education has so meekly complied with requests to provide data to *U. S. News and World Report* whose ranking scheme everyone in the academy understands to be bankrupt. I see this as self-serving behavior, part of an academic assessment kabuki—"we will provide you with data we know bear little relationship to actually measuring learning; in return we can criticize your rankings and take no responsibility ourselves for such assessment." But the academy *should* hold itself accountable for far better learning assessment and if it refuses or is unable to do justice to such an expectation, then a No College Left Behind initiative by states and/or the federal government, sadly, will follow.

**Resolving the tension: Trust but Verify**

So, how does one begin to resolve the inherent tension between learning assessment for institutional improvement and demands for external accountability? How does one choose between what at worst is the anarchy, arrogance, and myopia of the ivory tower, and the uninformed control, distrust, and micro-management inherent in increased government intrusion? I think it is possible that learning assessment can simultaneously serve the two masters of improvement and accountability if one takes seriously the old adage "trust but verify." I am suggesting that states, boards of trustees, and the federal government defer to the best wisdom of the academy and reciprocally that the academy willingly take on the educational and moral responsibility of systematic learning assessment that will ultimately validate the trust boards, states, the federal government, and the public should faithfully place in them.

How we begin to tackle this accountability dilemma is crucial. I suggest we ought to begin on the strongest *educational* grounds—the transparent measurement of learning for the purpose of improving teaching, learning, and institutional efficacy. As appropriate measures are developed and campus cultures of evidence are strengthened, higher education increasingly will begin to feel comfortable with making results public. Practically speaking, appropriate and rigorous learning assessment will need to be made public by accreditors, themselves representatives of the academy.

The time and effort this will take is prodigious and financial incentives for development and use of assessment measures will be necessary if we expect there to be widespread change in this direction. This first step in providing incentives for higher education to take the risks inherent in such an enterprise is the foundation on which we can build useful public policy. In return for such support is verification; it is legitimate to ask—are institutions doing useful learning assessment or not and if not, why not? And to rebuild trust there should be a moratorium, perhaps five years to give higher education the chance to put in place credible assessment protocols.

**The Collegiate Learning Assessment project as Case Study**

I am optimistic that we do have firm ground on which we can build useful learning assessments and that the academy can and will take the necessary leadership. The example I point to is the Collegiate Learning Assessment project for which I serve as Co-Director with Roger Benjamin, President of the Council for Aid to Education. CLA has been used by 231 colleges and universities to measure value-added learning in terms of critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem-solving, and writing. The outcomes measured by the CLA are *de facto* promises in virtually all admission bulletins and college catalogues that students will learn how to think and communicate well if they enroll in a particular college or university, outcomes equally valued by parents, employers, and graduate schools.

We developed a number of CLA criteria to inform what such measures should look like. They had to be:

- face-valid--able to measure valued outcomes fundamental to the Information Age that mirror the requirements of serious thinking and writing tasks in life outside of the classroom
- psychometrically sound—valid, reliable, and sophisticated enough to measure higher-order learning
- able to measure value-added—a focus on what difference a given college makes over the entire college experience
- standards-based, allowing for professional judgments to be made about what would be considered inadequate, adequate and exceptional competence expected for any college graduate
- non-high-stakes—performance measures that would serve students, teachers, and the institution rather than determining student pass/failure or institutional support
- cost-effective, given the limited funds available to do assessment work
- computer rather than paper-based to enable wide-spread use
- able to be used across institutions to foster cross-institutional dialogue, and to benchmark quality and in doing so would provide signals to any given institution as to how effective and efficient they were compared to similarly situated institutions
- able to serve as assessment templates that ultimately could be used by faculties to develop similar measures and exercises across the entire curriculum
- able to be used by campuses in various cost/benefit analyses to determine, for example, if institutional changes in curriculum, pedagogy, and technology, were making a difference in student learning

The CLA aggregates individual student performance to the institutional level as the primary unit of analysis. The focus is on how well the institution as a whole contributes to student development by examining the "value added" that an institution provides. Value-added is defined in two ways. One definition looks at how much student learning changes over time. Do seniors earn significantly higher scores on measures of student learning than when they are first-year students? The other measure of "value-added" is the degree to which a school's students earn higher or lower scores than would be expected compared to students at **other** similarly situated institutions. In other words, how well do the students at one school do relative to the performance of "similarly situated students" at other colleges? We use both cross-sectional studies—sampling entering first-year students and last semester seniors—and longitudinal studies in which entering freshmen are followed through all four or five years of college.

The CLA uses two types of measures: Performance Tasks and Analytical Writing Tasks. Each performance task requires that students use an integrated combination of critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem solving, and written communication skills to answer open-ended questions about a hypothetical but realistic situation. These tasks are not specific discipline or academic major dependent. In addition to a task's directions and questions, each also has its own mini-

library of relevant and diverse documents, such as letters, memos, summaries of research reports, newspaper articles, photographs, diagrams, maps, tables of numbers, charts, and interview notes or transcripts. Students are instructed to use only these materials in preparing their answers to the questions.

CLA Analytical Writing tasks ask students to write answers to two types of essay prompts, namely: a "Make-an-argument" question that asks them to support or reject a position on some issue; and a "Critique-an-argument" question that asks them to evaluate the validity of an argument made by someone else. A *make-an-argument* prompts typically presents an opinion on some issue and asks students to address this issue from any perspective they wish so long as they provide relevant reasons and examples to explain and support their views on the matter. A *critique-an-argument* prompt asks students to critique an argument by discussing how well reasoned they find it in terms of the soundness of the argument's logic rather than simply agreeing or disagreeing with the position presented.

We consider the following items to be important aspects of critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and problem solving, and we score for these aspects across our measures. (see appendix for greater detail)

- marshal evidence from different sources;
- distinguish rational from emotional arguments and fact from opinion;
- understand tabular and figural presentations of data;
- deal with inadequate, ambiguous, and/or conflicting information;
- spot deception and logical holes in the arguments made by others;
- recognize information that is and is not relevant to the task at hand;
- identify additional information that would help to resolve issues;
- weigh, organize, and synthesize information from several sources.
- present their ideas clearly, including justifying the basis for their points of view.

There are five key elements underlying the CLA:

1. The outcomes we are measuring are fundamental to all disciplines.

2. The CLA focuses on the *institution* as a whole and its cumulative contribution to student learning by using a representative sample of students.

3. We are measuring *value-added* in two ways: what and how well students learn in their time in college: and how well a particular college or university adds value compared to a similarly situated peer institution e.g. similar quality of students, size, financial resources.

4. The outcomes—critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and written communication— are understood to be *collective* outcomes, competencies that are not learned in any one or a few required courses but rather are the cumulative result of the entire college experience. Thus, these outcomes are the collective responsibility of the faculty and the means by which to address these outcomes is a faculty-wide curricular and pedagogical decision and responsibility.

5. Appropriately assessing learning and providing timely feedback to students based on a variety of learning assessments are keys to improving student learning.

**CLA as a Signaling Device: Engaging the Faculty in Assessment**

Earlier I claimed that assessing learning is a necessary condition for improving the quality of higher education. The CLA assists in this effort by helping institutions focus on improving the teaching of key skills across all disciplines and by signaling a possible need to change institutional expectations, standards, curricula, and pedagogy. The signaling power of the CLA appears to be working catalyzing separate but related conversations. First, it is often the first time the faculty has confronted such collective learning data. It is usually the first time they recognize that what is being measured is ultimately their *collective* responsibility. One hears from individual faculty, "I teach chemistry, not writing!" "We teach sociology, not critical thinking!" But ultimately we find that faculty do expect good writing (thinking made visible) and that how to think critically within each discipline is a fundamental objective. They quickly move on to acknowledge that such outcomes cannot be taught sufficiently in any one or two courses designated for such purposes—these key outcomes are the responsibility of the entire faculty.

Second, many faculty tell us that they do not feel equipped to teach writing or critical thinking and that they do not have the time to require the kinds of assignments and reading of papers—final submissions, much less first-drafts—in addition to teaching the necessary "content" in their disciplines. Neither the institutional culture nor the reward system, they suggest, allow for this kind of intensive and extensive demand on students by faculty. But when faculty see that institutions similar to their own are often more successful in terms of these same learning outcomes they do inquire as to why this might be the case and ask, "What should we do now?" In short, we are encouraged by the very positive faculty responses we have had to date to value-added assessment of learning.

**Conclusion**

If governors and other state policymakers attempt to use the gross, surrogate measures of quality such as graduation rates, time to degree, or simple percentages of 18- to 34-year-olds in post-secondary education now mandated by a number of state legislatures and higher education governing boards, they will gloss over the fundamental causes of student and institutional success or failure. The key questions are clear—what institutional and system attributes support student success? What costs, even if they are higher than one would prefer, are justified because they enable professors to be better teachers and more students to succeed at higher levels of learning? Which institutional and/or state incentives and rewards best result in the kinds of institutional priority setting, cost containment, and innovations that result in increased student success? Assessment of student learning over time is the key variable in answering these questions.

So, now to return to where we started; this is a test of leadership. Indeed, collectively we in the academy have not taken sufficient responsibility for demonstrating what we do. Evidence has mounted indicating that we are failing our students in providing them with the skills they need. Students, parents, employers, accrediting agencies, and the government have raised valid concerns that we cannot and should not ignore. We do need to have greater transparency, first of which to make clear what we stand for: student learning. We must make clear that we are committed to ensure that our students know more and can do more the day they leave our campuses compared to the day they arrived. And by comparing this value added, we are not re-creating a useless form of competitive comparisons, but rather we are holding ourselves to a collective expectation that we all strive to improve these skills at least as much as our peers.

When we focus on learning and on developing these key skills, education can be both a public good and a private good, and we can simultaneously please the full range of stakeholders while still fulfilling the reason we all work in higher education. We can, we ought to all be on the same side on this issue

# Appendix

### Questions Scorers Ask While Evaluating CLA Measures

**Evaluation of evidence:**
*How well does the student assess the quality and relevance of evidence?*

- Does the student determine what information is or is not pertinent to the task at hand?
- Does the student distinguish between rational claims and emotional ones, fact from opinion?
- Can the student recognize the ways in which the evidence might be limited or compromised?
- Does the student spot deception and holes in the arguments of others?
- Has the student considered all sources of evidence?

**Analysis and Synthesis of evidence:**
*How well does the student analyze and synthesize data and information?*

- Does the student present their own analysis of the data or information, or do they simply present it as is?
- Does the student commit or fail to recognize logical flaws in an argument. (e.g. does the student understand the distinction between correlation and causation?)
- Does the student break down the evidence into its component parts?
- Does the student draw connections between discrete sources of data and information?
- How does the student deal with conflicting, inadequate, or ambiguous information?

**Drawing conclusions:**
*How well does the student form a conclusion from their analysis?*

- Is the student's argument logically sound?
- Is it rooted in data and information rather than speculation and opinion?
- Does the student choose the strongest set of data to support his or her argument?
- Does the student prioritize in his or her argumentation?
- Does the student overstate, or understate, his or her conclusions?
- Can the student identify holes in the evidence, and subsequently suggest additional information that might resolve the issue?

**Acknowledging alternative explanations/viewpoints:**
How well does the student consider other options and acknowledge that their answer is not the only perspective?

- Does the student recognize that the problem is complex with no clear answer?
- Does the student bring up other options and weigh them in their decision.
- Does the student consider all stakeholders or affected parties in suggesting a course of action?
- Does the student qualify their response and acknowledge the need for additional information in making an absolute determination.

## Writing

Analytic writing skills are invariably dependent on clarity of thought. Therefore, analytic writing and critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and problem solving are related skills sets. On the CLA, we measure critical thinking performance by asking students to explain their rationale for various conclusions in writing. In doing so, their performance is dependent on both writing and critical thinking as integrated rather than separate skills. We evaluate writing performance using holistic scores that consider several aspects of writing depending on the task. The following are illustrations of the types of questions we address in scoring various tasks.

Presentation:
*How clear and concise is the argument?*

- Does the student clearly articulate the argument?
- Does the student clearly articulate the context for that argument?
- Is the evidence used to defend the argument correct and precise?
- Is the evidence presented in a comprehensible and coherent fashion?

Development:
*How effective is the structure?*

- Is the organization of the argument logical? Is it cohesive?
- Are there any gaps in the development of the argument?
- Are there any significantly extraneous elements in the argument's development?
- In what order is the evidence presented, and how does that structure contribute to the persuasiveness and coherence of the argument?

Persuasiveness:
*How well does the student defend the argument?*

- What evidence is presented in support of the argument, and how effectively does the student present it?
- Does the student draw thoroughly and extensively from the available range of evidence?
- How well does the student analyze that evidence?
- Does the student consider counterarguments, and address weaknesses in his/her own argument?

Mechanics:
*What is the quality of the student's writing?*

- Is vocabulary and punctuation used correctly? effectively?
- Is the student's understanding of grammar strong?
- Is the sentence structure basic, or more complex and creative?
- Does the student use proper transitions?
- Are the paragraphs structured logically and effectively?

Interest:
*How well does the student maintain the reader's interest?*

- Does the student use creative and engaging examples or descriptions?
- Does the structure syntax and organization add to the interest of their writing?
- Do they use colorful but relevant metaphors, similes etc.?
- Does the writing engage the reader?
- Does the writing leave the reader thinking?