# Session: College Essay Rubric

**Facilitator:** Amy Christie, Deans of College, Rebecca Warchut

**Date and Time:** Friday, March 20, 2015

**Topic:** College Application Essay Rubric Roll Out

**Total Time:** 90 minutes

**Intended Audience: CRS 9-11 Teachers, College Counselors, Deans of College, Summer Program Coordinators, COMP 11 & 12 Teachers**

**Pre-Work:**

* None

**Supporting/Table Facilitators:** Deans of College

**School Follow Up Requests:**

* Determine school-based structures to support College Essay norming through the IPP: LASW and email to Rebecca Warchut and your RS.
* Determine leadership team presence for coaching and feedback at ALT and ATT sessions

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| **Aims:** | | |
| Team College & Team Comp Will Be Able To:   * Articulate why we revised the Personal Statement Rubric and how it will lead our scholars towards stronger personal statements and increased acceptance into higher quality schools * Describe the purpose, structure, and function of the Personal Statement Rubric * Norm on the standard bearers and language of the rubric | | |
| **Session Description/Connection to PD Arc/Priorities**  In this session, members of Team College and Team Comp 11/12 will deeply engage with the new College Essay rubric and standard bearers to simultaneously internalize the bar and familiarize themselves with this tool so that they can support each other in using it to drive scholar achievement and ensure better college acceptance outcomes for scholars. | | |
| **Key Points**   * Our scholars are not consistently writing where they need to be yet. * The College Essay Rubric is an incredibly useful tool that helps us determine the key phases of the writing process to ensure the best outcomes for college applications.. * By honing in on individual sections of the rubric, this becomes a manageable, actionable tool. * By making this a priority, we will move our scholars faster and further than we could alone. * Make this work more sustainable by building our collective eye to excellence; * This is, arguably, the most important work that a student must do in order to get into college * This essay can be the difference in a greater likelihood of college graduation. | | **Potential Misunderstandings**   * XXXX??? * XXXX???? * This is tool is not core to my work, therefore I don’t know how useful it is to me. * The tool is too big and bulky for daily use. |
| **AGENDA AT A GLANCE**   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Time** | **Task** | | 15 | Comparing Two Essays (AA), Framing, and History of College Essay Rubric (15) | | 15 | Norming on the College Essay EOY Bar (K/M) | | 45 | Scoring competition (A) | | 10 | Practicing the pitch (A) | | 5 | Closing and Next Steps (C) | | | |
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| ***Materials*** | ***Assessment & Follow-up*** | |
| ***I will need:***   * Projector, Clicker, and Speakers * Chart Paper and Markers * Copy of the note-taking tool * Facilitator scoring cheat sheets and rationale * Post-Its for a parking lot   *Participants will Need:*   * Charged laptops * Note-taking tool * Standard bearers * Definitions * Rubric * Scoring charts/White Board Paddles | **Follow-up by Principals & Deans (dates):**   * Determine school-based structures to support PBA norming through the IPP: LASW and email to Rebecca Warchut and your RS. * Determine leadership team presence for coaching and feedback at ATT during FOI session(s) | |
| **Grouping/Physical Space Notes**   * DoCs should be grouped by school, especially for the competitive norming portion of the workshop, although their partner for the pitch will be from a different school. * Ideally, each school would have a table (or share a table), and there would be enough space to move around to practice the pitch. | **Additional Instructions/Notes for Facilitator**   * Table facilitators will oscillate between 2-3 schools during the norming competition, looking for trends for the mid-workshop interruption and troubleshooting/assisting as needed. | |

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| **Living the Learning (LtL) Legend:**  O= Opening  AA= Airtight Activity  K= Key Points  M= Additional Model  A= Application  C: Closing/Reflection |

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| ***Time*** | **Min.** | **Component** | ***Facilitator*** |
|  | 8 | **Do Now:** (5 minutes) Review the data from the six slides in your guided notes and respond to the questions.  Turn and Talk (3 minutes):   * What key takeaways you have from the data? * What are the short and long term implications of this data? |  |
|  | 2 | **Aims and Agenda**  Here’s how we’re going to spend our time today: SHOW AGENDA  In this session, we will be able to:   * Articulate why we revised the Personal Statement Rubric and how it will lead our scholars towards stronger personal statements and increased acceptance into higher quality schools * Describe the purpose, structure, and function of the Personal Statement Rubric * Norm on the standard bearers and language of the rubric   We will get there by norming on the College Essay rubric, practicing scoring on the College Essay rubric, and then making sure that we’ve had a chance to practice how we will invest and share this tool with scholars. |  |
|  | 10 | **The pitch: Returning to the Do Now: The Data**  I’m going to share - in a minute with the help of some people in this room – about the history of the college essay rubric, but I wanted to take a few minutes to explain why we decided to have both the College and Comp teams join forces on this work.  I wanted to ground us in the mission statement of Achievement First and more specifically quantify the goal as it relates to our most direct work.  As you looked at the data, you probably saw that of the 4000 colleges in the country, there are only a certain percentage of those first-year seats that are at schools with a high six-year graduation rate.  The six-year graduation rate is a number that we care a lot about. Given that our mission to ensure that students graduate from college within six-years at a rate of 75%, we need to be look to the colleges and universities who are doing well by our students- where we will feel more confident about their likelihood of success.  The challenge is that of those seats at institutions with high six-year grad rates, an even smaller percentage goes to underrepresented students – our students – at those colleges.  And, in many cases, the schools with high six-year grad rates are the ones with the most competitive, holistic admissions processes.  When we look back at some historical data, we had some students in previous senior cohorts that, in previous admissions cycles, were accepted based on their profiles (SAT and GPA) but were not. As a result, those competitive students went to less selective institutions which means lower six-year graduation rates.  SHOW SLIDE TO SHOW COMPARISON.  In addition, a lot of the work of our college counselors- the work that’s happening right now – is to call admissions officers as they review files and advocate for them, so that their file is considered as the committee reviews applicants. While we have made some significant progress on the college essay, here’s an example of some feedback we got from Colgate University:  SHOW SLIDE OF CESAR’S ADVOCACY CALL NOTES  **What does this mean?**  The great news is that we are talking today to best position the Class of 2016 for the most successful application season ever at AF.  And, we’ve already seen some early decision application results that tell us we’re getting closer and closer to getting some of this work to a really strong place.  So, this is our reset – our revision of the College Essay Rubric  Before we get into the rubric and standard bearers themselves, I want to take a few minutes to explain the work we’ve done to date and why we decided to move so aggressively at this revision.  We launched the first college essay rubric two years ago for the College and Comp teams to use as the common tool in an effort to get everyone – staff and students – aligned on what these essays should look like for college applications.  Many people in this room spent time using that rubric and going through the process with students – in a way that might’ve been frustrating.  **EMERY – CAN YOU SHARE WHAT SOME OF THE CHALLENGES WERE FROM THE OLD RUBRIC?**  *Highlight/Reiterate any of these points if Emery doesn’t hit them:*  As we were learning together, we had a few critical, significant challenges with the old rubric:   1. We created a rubric that we were excited about but:    1. **It lacked prioritization** – it was hard, from the teacher perspective, to figure out what strand to focus on first, etc.    2. **Too many categories** – there were too many rows and therefore often caused a stalemate of what to do next    3. **Teams were trying to do everything possible** to guide student through this process but didn’t feel like this tool actually got students to a better product    4. **It was difficult to determine next steps after scoring -**   While the quality of personal statements have improved, and while some of our scholars are writing strong personal statement - we are still not yet ensuring that all of our scholars are writing strong personal statements  We know that we have to get this right as the college essay – is often the piece that allows the student’s voice and spirit come alive. We needed to get this right.  **SO, WHAT HAVE WE DONE?**  What have we done so far:  **What we have done to date – how did we get here?**  We’ve spent some significant time – involving many people in this room – to get to be able to bring us here together today. I’m going to have Sabrina – the DoC at AF Brooklyn share the work we’ve done so far  **Sabrina shares and highlights:**   * Each school really focused in on the work this fall- AF Amistad and AF Brooklyn * Dean of College cohort- we looked at essays within the context of the complete application to see how if/when they popped in a student’s overall application. * Reviewed a bunch of essays from this fall – from our most current seniors * Came together – spent a day – Deans of College, Amy, Elana, Adam and Team Comp (Rebecca) reading standard bearers to help determine the key strand of the revised rubric – * Created the revised rubric & aligned to that with SB   It’s worth naming that ultimately this is much stronger and we deeply believe in it; however no tool in and of itself is as effective in the absence in the work we do with scholars; we – the practitioners – are critical to ensuring that it’s used well and helps students through this important process.  That’s why we’re here today – to gather the troops and really get aligned on the vision of excellence, so that we can each play our part in ensuring that – just a year from now- the class of 2016 – from AF Amistad, AF Brooklyn, and AF Hartford (!) – will be accepted to some of the best schools in the country that we know do a much better job at supporting our scholars to and through college graduation. | ***GOAL:***  *-Make sure that participants deeply understand why we made this shift*  *-Make sure that participants understand the rationale for change and the work that’s been done prior to today* |
|  |  | Introducing The College Essay Rubric: (Direct instruction; pull rubric up on the screen)  We’re going over three parts of this rubric: The structure, some key terms and the value of this tool.  I’m going to pass out the new College Essay rubric and before we start norming or  **Dive 1: The Structure of the Rubric:**  The first facet of this rubric that I want to draw your attention to is the structure.  As we went through the revisions, a lot of our discussion and work came back to the phases of this process with a student. In short, there are certain checkpoints where a student and/or a counselor/teacher should determine whether or not the student is ready to go to the next phase of the process.  I’m going to give you 5 minutes to read and annotate the rubric. As you do, please consider the following questions:   * What checkpoints would you articulate to determine the proper points for assess student work and progress? (HINT: We thought of four) * What strands would you prioritize first, second, third, etc.? Why?   I wanted to first orient you to the structure of this tool as it will be a language that we’ll all start to use and it will help us be more strategic with our interventions and support of students if we can have a common language to articulate the phase that they’re in. This will also help us further explore and articulate the key instructional moves with the most common hurdles students need to overcome as they go through this process e.g. getting to the right insight.  **Dive 2: Terms of the Rubric**  Another facet of the rubric that is important for us to be clear on are the definitions of the various terms that distinguish the differences between different score levels. It is important that we’re clear on the specific definitions of those works so we can use them in our defense of scores when norming.  I’m going to give you some key terms that will critical for our norming session next.  DIRECTIONS FOR QUICK REVIEW:   * I’m going to ask specific role to respond to one of the questions on the next page of your guided notes. * You can use the extra tool of the “Terms Definition Sheet” as an additional support.   I’m going to give you 3 minutes to review the question assigned to your role and respond.  I’ll cold call three people – one from each group – to share out their responses.  3 MINUTES WORK TIME  COLD CALL FOR ANSWERS  Thanks Everyone – we’re not going to linger on the terms too much at this point as we’ll have more opportunities once we get into the actual norming itself. That said, as we start to norming, using these terms to support our scores will be critical to our discussion. Please feel free to reference your terms sheet as we get into norming.  To that end, let’s get into the norming! |  |
|  |  | Again, this is a complex tool, but the beauty of it is that when we are using it with scholars, we can zoom our focus into one criteria and one threshold. This is a tool that could even improve AC’s writing, and this is a tool that can move all of our scholars on the continuum towards writing more like AC.  The entire next session is dedicated to your digging into this tool and your grade level thresholds with other team members, but before we move on, are there questions about the tool itself?  We’re now going to look at a few samples of student work against the rubric together to move forward with a common understanding and benchmark.  Before we do that, let’s watch a video of some of our colleagues doing this work in the rebuild.  ***Video of Karen/Amy/Emery norming or Video of Sabrina/Adam/Cesar norming.***  What did you notice them doing? (*Grounding scoring in language from the rubric and evidence from the text*).  Look at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.  …Based on the following criteria:   * Insight * Story * Structure & Arc * *Narrative (if you get done early)* * *Language (if you get done early)* |  |
|  |  | Now that we are grounded in the structure of the rubric and the key thresholds, you are going to have the opportunity to engage in a good old fashioned norming competition with your schools.  The school with the most points, with the most accurate scoring, **will win a catered breakfast for your school team and of course, bragging rights.**  Before we break into school teams for this, let’s review the protocol for scoring and norming on standard bearers.  You and your team are going to score and norm on three standard bearers on the strands of:   * Insight * Story * Structure & Arc * *Narrative* * *Language*   You want to deeply engage with the rubric so that you can support each other as you all use this tool to improve scholar performance.  Distribute (or point them to) scoring mechanisms (Scoring Rubric in Packet)  Please note on post-its outstanding norming questions.  Mid-work interruption based on the most commonly missed criteria.  **DIRECTIONS TO MOVE TO SCHOOL TEAMS FOR COMPETITION:**  Now that we’ve all had a chance to practice, I think it’s time to take off the gloves. ☺   * I’m going to share the direction for scoring points in each norming round, including the protocol we’ll follow as we review each essay. * Your team will get one of the Standard Bearer (that you read for pre-work), and as a team you’ll read for and score three strands of the rubric. * Your Dean of College will delegate an official score keeper for your team. * You’ll follow the protocol on the page in your packet. * When time is called, your team will have to share their official scores for the three strands of the rubric for that standard bearer. * Points will be awarded according to the following: 2 points for a correct answer, 1 point for a close answer   ROUND 1: XXXXX   * Read and Score on INSIGHT   + If agree, make sure to share rationale   + If disagree, 30 second from each opposite scores with rationale   + Once discussed, score again to norm   + Tally on school score sheet and share out. * Read and Score on STORY   + Same as above * Read and Score on STRUCTURE & ARC   + Same as above   Collect the scores by teams and tally results for the group to see current standings  ROUND 2: XXXXX   * Read and Score on INSIGHT   + If agree, make sure to share rationale   + If disagree, 30 second from each opposite scores with rationale   + Once discussed, score again to norm   + Tally on school score sheet and share out. * Read and Score on STORY   + Same as above * Read and Score on STRUCTURE & ARC   + Same as above   ROUND 3: XXXXX   * Read and Score on INSIGHT   + If agree, make sure to share rationale   + If disagree, 30 second from each opposite scores with rationale   + Once discussed, score again to norm   + Tally on school score sheet and share out. * Read and Score on STORY   + Same as above * Read and Score on STRUCTURE & ARC   + Same as above   Our goal this fall is to make sure that we’re ensuring that all students earn a 3 score overall, in order for their essay to pass our sniff tests and go out the doors to a college. We will also add a level of strategy, in that at many school, often the most competitive colleges with high six-year graduation rates for underrepresented students, conduct a holistic review of applications and as result will require a 4 or 5 before going out the door in order to best position students to be competitive in the applicant pool. |  |
|  |  | PLAN OF ATTACK FOR 15-16   * We’ll want to continue to work and norm on this – we will at ATT and other PD days in the future – especially as we continue to strengthen our eye * During our next session, the CRS 11/CC/Doc and then the COMP teams will run through the unit unpacking for Quarter 4 where both of these units will happen * This will occur during the spring – as we’ll each play a key role in getting the junior cohort to a much better place, sooner in this process * When we meet in the future, using LASW protocols, we’ll continue to norm , using the phases of the rubric, to determine next instructional steps * School based teams will figure out the frequency and focus of those LASW protocols at your school sites this spring, including any data collection you want to do across teams as we launch this revised process. * Reveal the Interactive Rubric – this will be the tool we use to allow this work to operate as a high bar across school and in order to help bring new people into the fold of the college application work. |  |
|  |  | Ultimately, you need to be the advocates for this vision. For this to truly live at your school, you need to invest your team in the purpose and power of the rubric. *(Project mission statement)*.  I also want to remind everyone that these are our students. I had the chance to talk to a few seniors – many who are earning acceptances to the schools with high six-year graduation rates – and I asked them how they think we could’ve supported them better in this process.  Here’s a slide of a lot of what they said – SHOW SLIDE  Here’s a little bit of what they shared with me – SHOW VIDEO  They had a lot of really great ideas but I think the biggest takeaway was HYPE.  We have to think about how we present this key piece of writing ot them and build a sense of a safe space and trust so that they feel able to share the stories we know will make them an asset to any college.  Take three minutes to jot down your pitch, and be ready to share it with someone else.  After three minutes, have people pair up (triads if time) with someone that they have not worked with yet, someone not from their school to share their elevator pitch and get feedback (one glow and one grow).  Ideally, have one person share their pitch with the entire group. |  |
|  |  | Closing and Next Steps  In 2015-2016, but really starting this spring, we will take a significant step forward in moving our student to and through a more streamlined, aligned process for writing this critical piece of writing to ensure that our scholars are telling their stories- the things that make them such an asset to any college campus. Our job will be to make this vision live, you are the stewards. You are the advocates. Through your individual and school-based work pushing to a clear vision of excellence, you can help ensure that our scholars’ stories are shared, and shared well. To that end,   * Determine school-based structures to support College Essay norming through the IPP: LASW and email to Rebecca Warchut and your RS. * Determine leadership team presence for coaching and feedback at ALT and ATT sessions   Thank you. |  |