Quality Initiative Summary Report
## Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) 2011-2012 Summary

The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) is a nationally standardized exam conducted by the Council for Aid to Education. The CLA assesses college-level student learning on higher-order skills, such as critical thinking and written communication. Results are reported at the institution level (rather than individual student performance) for the purpose of generating national comparison data on student performance (including gains) in these higher order skills. The purpose of the CLA is not to rank institutions, but rather to help the institution identify areas for improvement in teaching and learning. It is anticipated that institutions will use CLA results to compliment other data sources, and not as the sole measure of student performance in these areas.

The exam is administered to freshmen and seniors across one academic year. To be statistically sound, 100 freshmen and 100 seniors must complete the exam, which is approximately 90 minutes in length. Results are adjusted for ACT and institutional averages are compared similar institutions. Of specific interest are value-added scores.

The exam requires students to provide written responses to either a Performance Task or an Analytic Writing Task (randomly assigned). Performance Tasks include scenarios of real life problems that require decision-making by relying on various sources of data, such as newspapers, reports, emails, pictures and graphs. The resources are selected to vary in credibility and relevance to the task, in order to evaluate students' skills of analyzing the resources and choosing suitable evidence to construct and write a persuasive argument. The Analytic Writing Task includes a pair of prompts called Make-an-Argument and Critique-an-Argument. Make-an-Argument prompt asks students to support or reject a position on some issue; and a Critique-an-Argument prompt asks them to evaluate the validity of an argument made by someone else.

NMSU administered the CLA in 2011-2012, and results indicate that generally, NMSU students' performance is average, and at the expected level in comparison to similar institutions (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Observed CLA Scores vs Expected CLA Scores
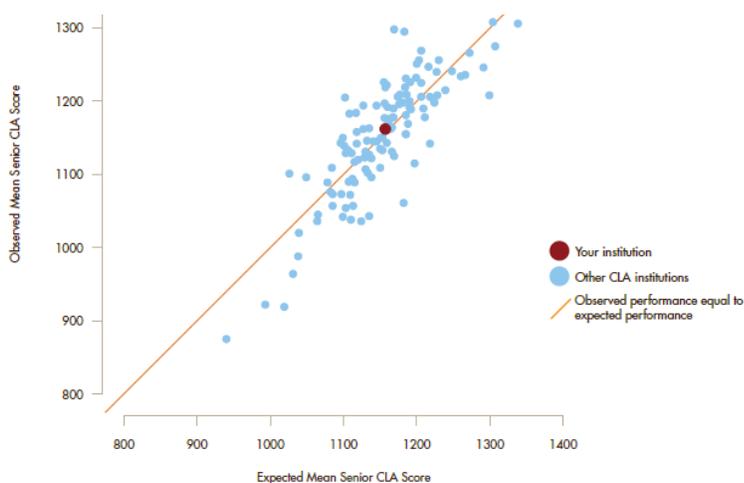
More specifically, for each task student responses are evaluated using a 6-point rubric, for a) Analytical Reasoning and Evaluation, b) Writing Effectiveness and c) Writing Mechanics. Student responses on the Performance Task are also evaluated for Problem Solving using the same 6-point scale.

Of the four categories considered in the exam – Performance Task, Analytic Writing Task, Make-an-Argument, and Critique-an-Argument. Value-added scores are placed on a standardized (z-score) scale and assigned performance levels. Schools that fall between -1.00 and +1.00 are classified as "near expected," between +1.00 and +2.00 are "above expected," between -1.00 and -2.00 are "below expected," above +2.00 are "well above expected," and below -2.00 are "well below expected." A negative value-added score does not necessarily indicate that no gain occurred between freshman and senior year, but that the gain was lower than would typically be observed when testing students of similar entering academic ability. NMSU results show a negative value- added in Performance Task and positive value-added in the remaining three categories (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Value-Added and Precision Estimates

	Performance Level	Value-Added Score	Value-Added Percentile Rank	Confidence Interval Lower Bound	Confidence Interval Upper Bound	Expected Mean CLA Score
Total CLA Score	Near	0.11	55	-0.39	0.61	1157
Performance Task	Near	-0.01	48	-0.62	0.60	1161
Analytic Writing Task	Near	0.19	57	-0.40	0.78	1155
Make-an-Argument	Near	0.32	62	-0.33	0.97	1146
Critique-an-Argument	Near	0.04	48	-0.57	0.65	1163

Tables 2 (freshmen) and 3 (seniors) show the performance comparison between NMSU and similar institutions for freshmen and seniors respectively.
- Generally, both NMSU freshmen and seniors performed well, compared to their counterparts at the other participating institutions.
- NMSU seniors, like other seniors, are weakest in "problem solving" and strongest in "writing mechanics."

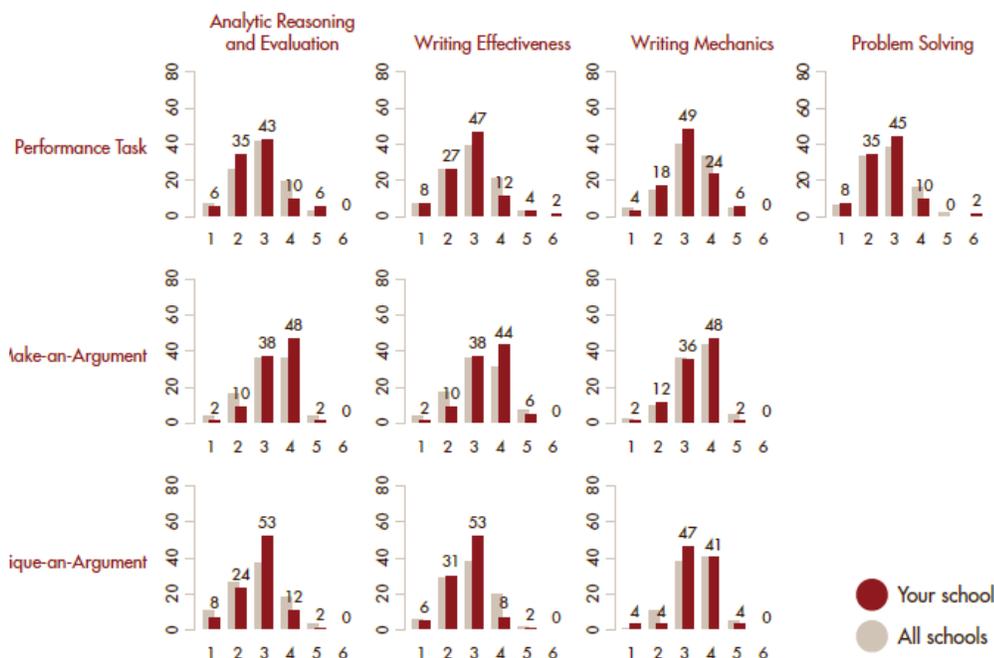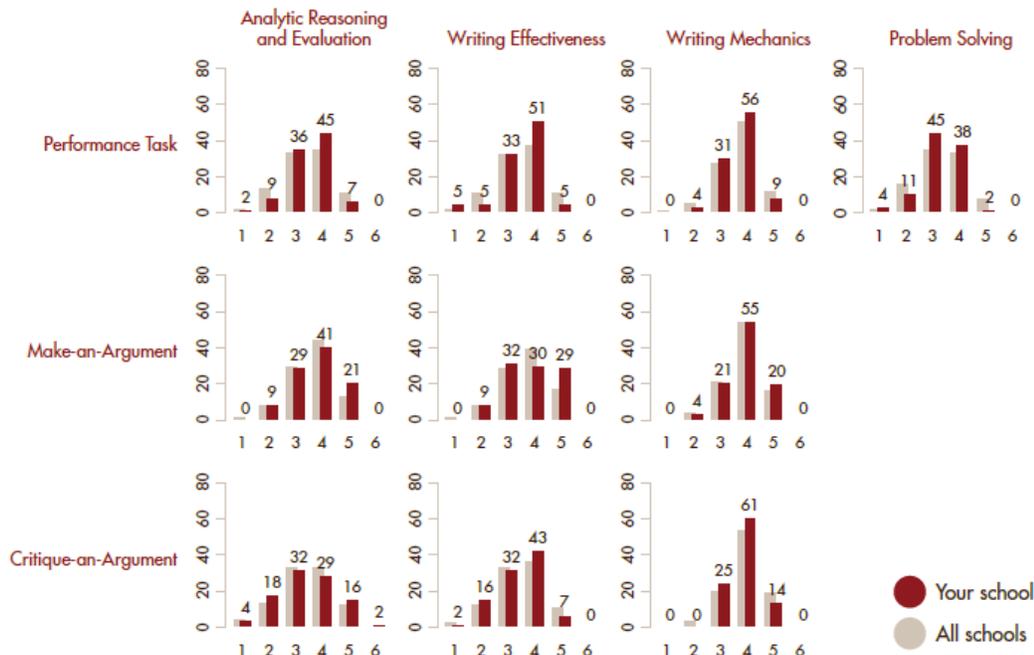*Table 2 – Freshmen: Distribution of Subscores*

Table 3 – Senior: Distribution of Subscores

Demographic comparison of the freshmen participants with the senior participants indicated the freshmen were more female, minority, English as a second language, and first generation college students than the senior participants (Table 4). Also, the freshmen had a lower mean Entering Academic Ability (EAA) score. While this indicates the freshmen participants are not a similar population to the senior participants, it may also indicate that although NMSU is attracting minority, first generation students, they are less apt to become graduating seniors than their white, English language, college prepared peers.

Table 4 – Percent of Category for Each Student Group

Category	Freshmen	Seniors
Female	65%	54%
English is Primary Language	77%	86%
White, Non-Hispanic	37%	50%
Parents have college degree	39%	56%
Mean Entering Academic Ability	968	1,069