

## **Consortium for the Study of Writing in College: Supplemental Questions for the National Survey of Student Engagement**

### **Introduction**

In spring 2009, a 27-question supplemental survey was administered with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to institutions participating in the Consortium for the Study of Writing in Colleges (CSWC). The Consortium and survey are products of a partnership between the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) and NSSE and were designed as a tool for colleges and universities to assess writing in their curricula and to inform strategic planning. Seventy-five institutions joined the CSWC, twenty-seven of which were selected as Evergreen's comparison group by Institutional Research and Assessment. The comparison group, selected because of their similar Carnegie classifications, included 16 BA-Arts and Sciences or BA-Diverse institutions and 11 Master's-Small or Master's-Medium institutions. Two-thirds of them have private affiliations and one-third of them are public, (see Appendix A for selected peer institutions). Twenty-five percent of all Evergreen first-year students and 22% of all seniors are represented by the results of the survey.

The survey consisted of four distinct question sets: Process items, Genre and Strategy items, Teaching Best Practices, and Higher Order Thinking Activities. Results were provided in standard NSSE format – frequency distributions (used in this report to identify patterns among Evergreen students) and mean comparisons (used here to compare Evergreen with our peers). **Process** questions pertained to tasks or tools used in the development of a piece of writing, such as brainstorming, seeking feedback on a draft, and proofreading. **Genre and Strategy** questions dealt with types and styles of writing, such as narration, position, and use of visual content. The **Teaching Best Practices** segment addressed methods of instruction and level of explanation given. The section on **Higher Order Thinking Activities** included two questions about students' plans to prepare a portfolio of and/or submit written work for publication before graduating.

Comparing the responses of Evergreen first-year and senior students with each other and with their peers in the Consortium provided valuable insight into the college writing experience at Evergreen. Evergreen seniors tended to score higher than Evergreen first-year students.

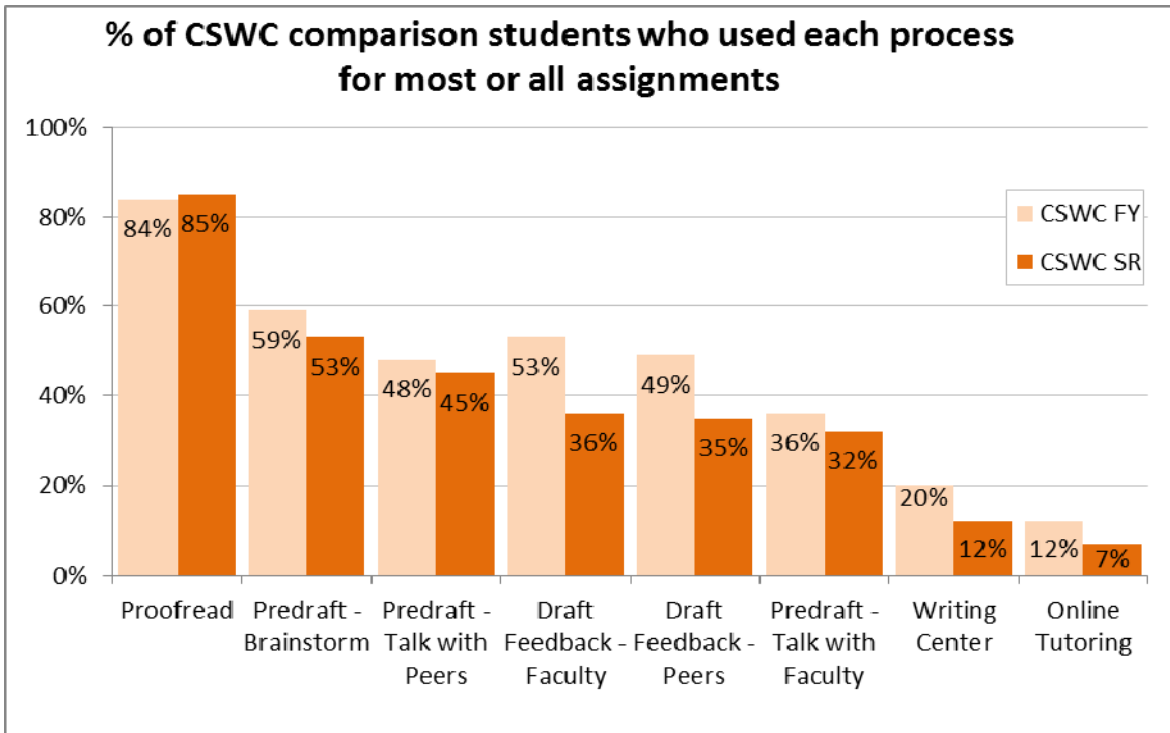
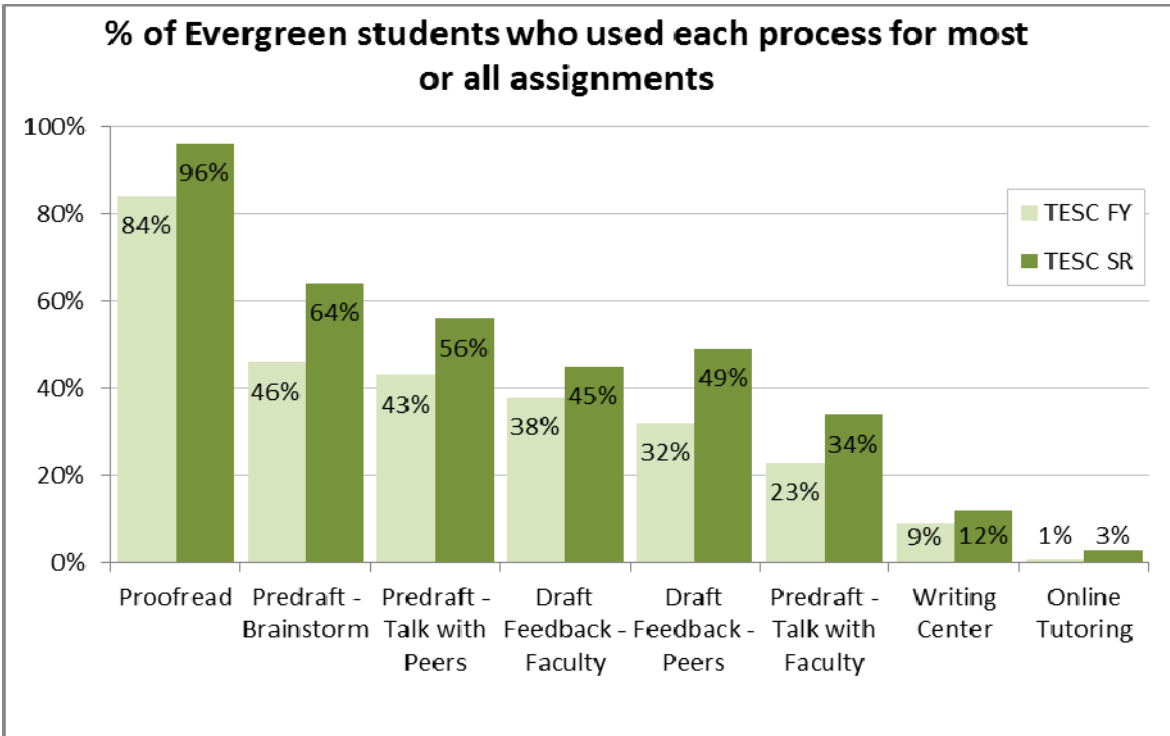
With only two exceptions, Evergreen first-years scored at or below CSWC peers. The two items for which Evergreen first-years were significantly higher were preparing a portfolio and writing assignments in which require analysis or evaluation of material. On the other hand, Evergreen seniors tended to score at or above the level of CSWC seniors. Evergreen seniors were only significantly less likely than CSWC peers to use online tutoring, write in the style of a specific field, and receive explanation from faculty about learning objectives and evaluation criteria for assignments. The data suggest that first-year students at Evergreen experience a relative lack of guidance in writing compared to their peers, yet Evergreen seniors continue to employ effective writing practices with greater frequency than CSWC seniors. These findings are discussed in the following report in the context of each of the four question sets.

## Process Items

A standout item for both first-years and seniors at Evergreen was the practice of proofreading. The majority of respondents for both groups reported they proofread their final drafts for “All assignments” before turning them in. Use of the campus writing center was fairly consistent between first-year and senior students as well, with almost half of each group using the writing center for at least one assignment and about 9% of first-years and 12% of seniors visiting the writing center as a regular practice.

	Class	1 None	2 A Few	3 Some	4 Most	5 All	N
Brainstormed (listed ideas, mapped concepts, prepared an outline, etc.) to develop your ideas before you started drafting your assignment	FY	7%	14%	<b>33%</b>	30%	16%	170
	SR	4%	10%	22%	<b>41%</b>	23%	162
Talked with your instructor to develop your ideas before you started drafting your assignment	FY	11%	29%	<b>38%</b>	19%	4%	170
	SR	8%	24%	<b>33%</b>	19%	15%	165
Talked with a classmate, friend, or family member to develop your ideas before you started drafting your assignment	FY	8%	15%	<b>34%</b>	32%	11%	169
	SR	4%	11%	29%	<b>35%</b>	21%	165
Received feedback from your instructor about a draft before turning in your final assignment	FY	17%	22%	23%	<b>25%</b>	13%	168
	SR	11%	16%	<b>28%</b>	25%	20%	165
Received feedback from a classmate, friend, or family member about a draft before turning in your final assignment	FY	12%	25%	<b>30%</b>	21%	11%	169
	SR	7%	16%	27%	<b>31%</b>	18%	164
Visited a campus-based writing or tutoring center to get help with your writing assignment before turning it in	FY	<b>56%</b>	21%	14%	6%	3%	167
	SR	<b>52%</b>	20%	16%	8%	4%	163
Used an online tutoring service to get help with your writing assignment before turning it in	FY	<b>89%</b>	6%	4%	0%	1%	167
	SR	<b>90%</b>	5%	2%	1%	2%	164
Proofread your final draft for errors before turning it in	FY	2%	3%	11%	22%	<b>62%</b>	169
	SR	1%	1%	3%	19%	<b>77%</b>	165

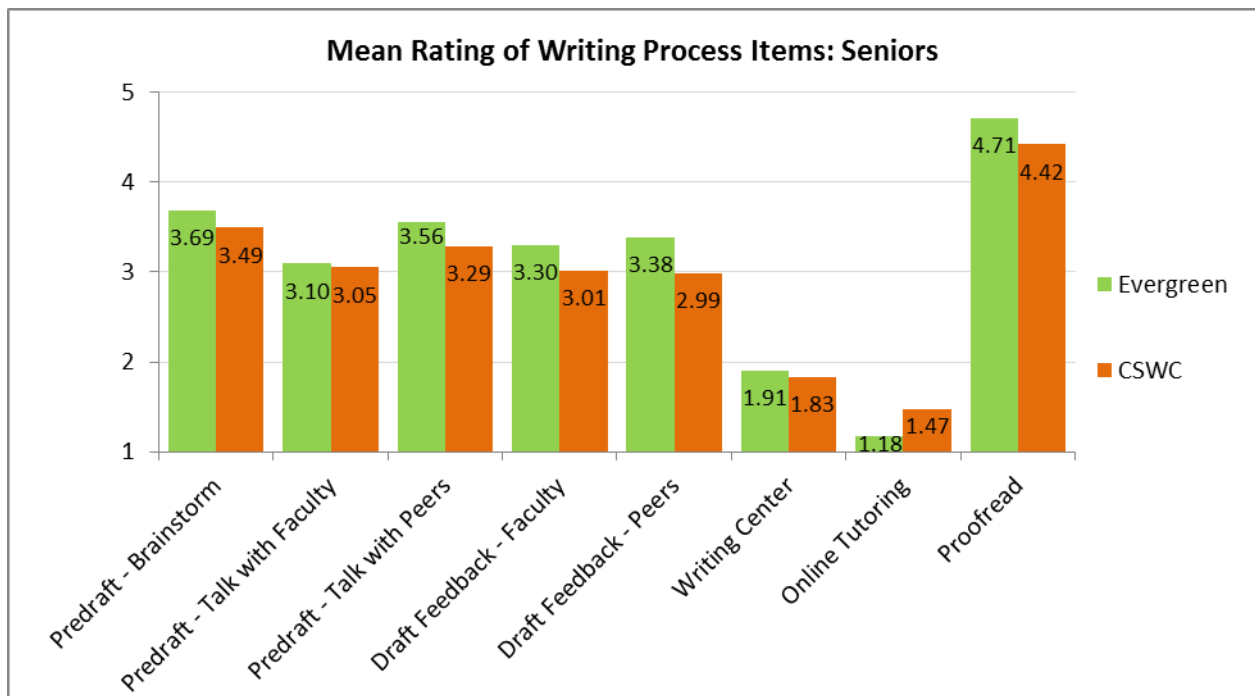
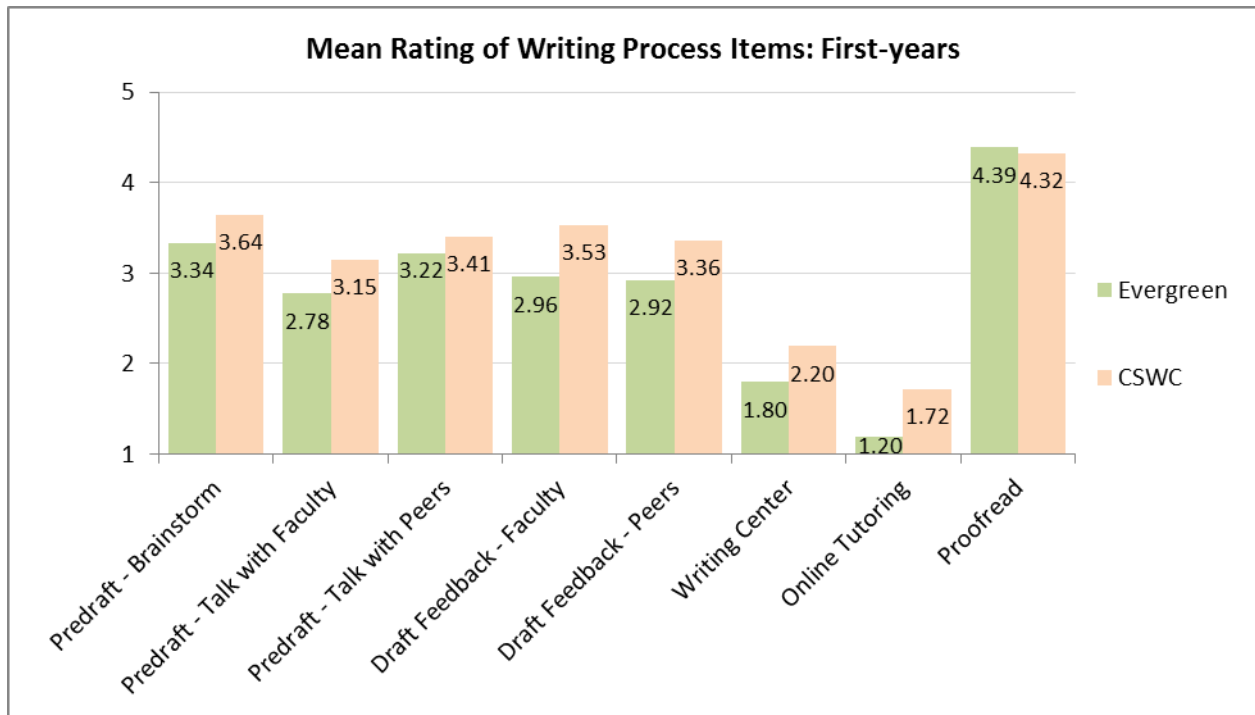
For all eight Process items, a higher percentage of Evergreen seniors reported doing a task for *most or all assignments* compared to Evergreen first-years. This pattern is the opposite of the comparison colleges, where first-year students employ writing process techniques with greater frequency than they do later as seniors.



## Comparison to peers

NSSE calculates mean responses for survey items and tests for significant differences between Evergreen ratings and the CSWC comparison group. The responses of Evergreen first-year students indicate a *lower* use of nearly all writing process activities than CSWC peers, while Evergreen seniors report significantly *more frequent* utilization of half of these 8 process items than CSWC seniors.

(1=No assignments, 2=Few assignments, 3=Some assignments, 4=Most assignments, 5=All assignments)



Writing Process items with *statistically significant differences* ( $p < .01$ ) between Evergreen and CSWC students are noted as follows:

Evergreen students did significantly **more** of the following than their peers:

**First-years:** None

**Seniors:**

- Talked with a classmate, friend, or family member to develop your ideas before you started drafting your assignment
- Received feedback from your instructor about a draft before turning in your final assignment
- Received feedback from a classmate, friend, or family member about a draft before turning in your final assignment
- Proofread your final draft for errors before turning it in

Evergreen students did significantly **less** of the following than their peers:

**First-years:**

- Brainstormed (listed ideas, mapped concepts, prepared an outline, etc.) to develop your ideas before you started drafting your assignment
- Talked with your instructor to develop your ideas before you started drafting your assignment
- Received feedback from your instructor about a draft before turning in your final assignment
- Received feedback from a classmate, friend, or family member about a draft before turning in your final assignment
- Visited a campus-based writing or tutoring center to get help with your writing assignment before turning it in
- Used an online tutoring service to get help with your writing assignment before turning it in

**Seniors:**

- Used an online tutoring service to get help with your writing assignment before turning it in

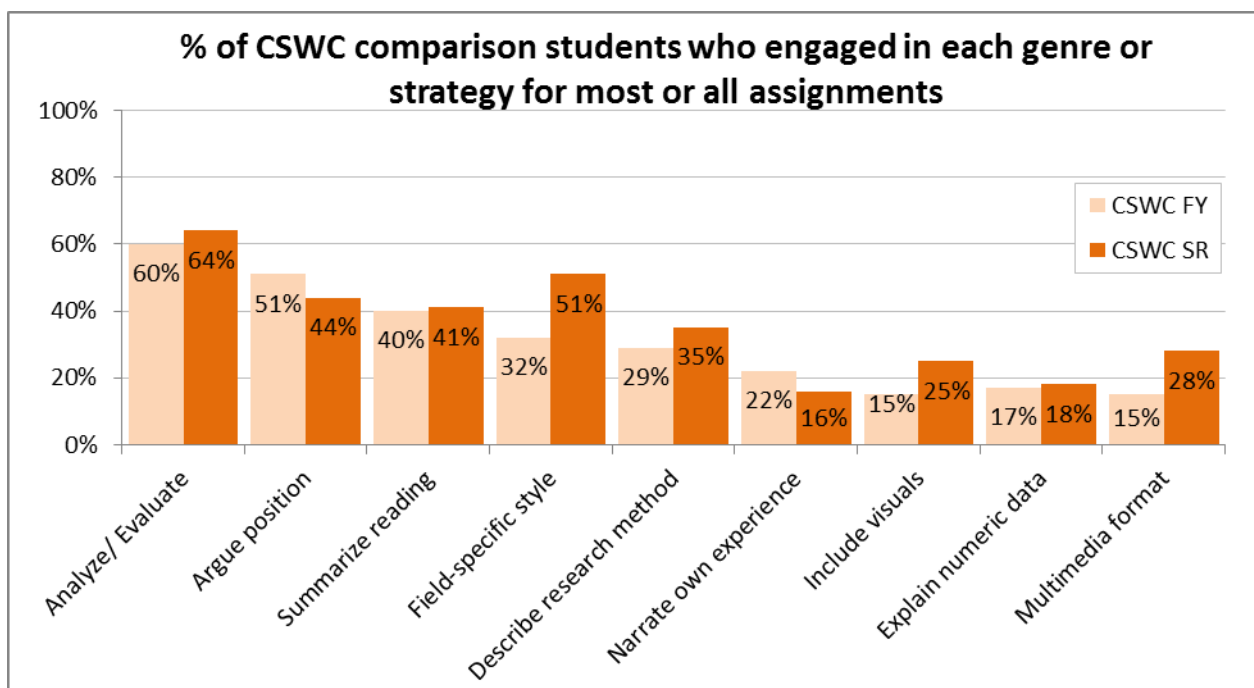
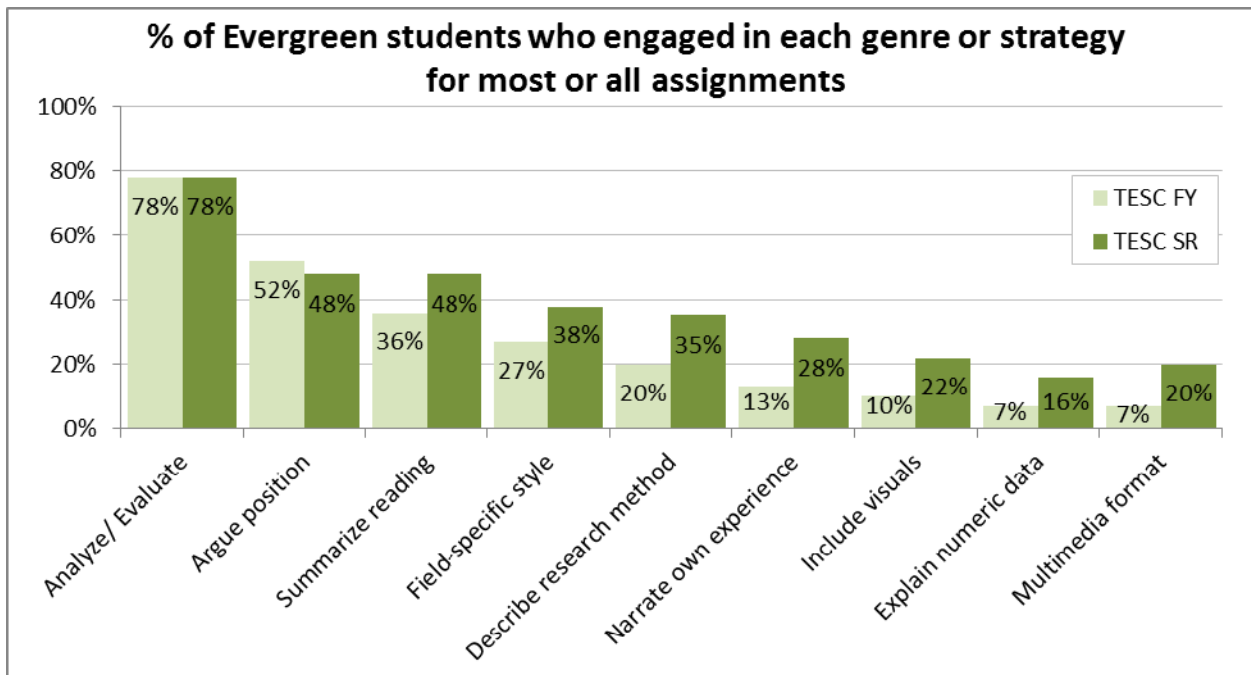
## Genre and Strategy

Over 90% of Evergreen first-year and senior students completed writing assignments that asked them to analyze, evaluate, or summarize something they read, argue a position using evidence and reasoning. It was also quite common for both groups to narrate one of their own experiences (81% FY, 88% SR), and for them to describe the methods and findings of their own research project (74% FY, 81% SR). They were much less likely to explain the meaning of numerical or statistical data in writing, with 51% of first-years and 31% of seniors reporting they had no such assignments in the current year. In addition, 33% of first-years and 21% of seniors had no assignments in which they incorporated visual content. First-year students also reported fairly low use of multimedia in creating projects, with nearly one-third having no such assignment during the year. Use of multimedia and inclusion of visual content was more prevalent among seniors than first-years.

During the current school year, in how many of your writing assignments did you:	Class	1 No assign	2 Few assign	3 Some assign	4 Most assign	5 All assign	N
Narrate or describe one of your own experiences	FY	19%	29%	<b>40%</b>	11%	2%	169
	SR	12%	14%	<b>46%</b>	19%	9%	164
Summarize something you read, such as articles, books, or online publications	FY	8%	21%	<b>34%</b>	28%	8%	169
	SR	6%	7%	<b>40%</b>	32%	16%	162
Analyze or evaluate something you read, researched, or observed	FY	1%	6%	15%	<b>48%</b>	30%	167
	SR	1%	2%	19%	<b>44%</b>	34%	164
Describe your methods or findings related to data you collected in lab or field work, a survey project, etc	FY	26%	23%	<b>32%</b>	15%	5%	168
	SR	19%	16%	<b>30%</b>	20%	15%	163
Argue a position using evidence and reasoning	FY	8%	13%	27%	<b>32%</b>	20%	169
	SR	6%	15%	<b>30%</b>	29%	19%	163
Explain in writing the meaning of numerical or statistical data	FY	<b>52%</b>	24%	17%	4%	3%	165
	SR	<b>33%</b>	27%	25%	9%	7%	163
Write in the style and format of a specific field (engineering, history, psychology, etc.)	FY	<b>34%</b>	21%	17%	17%	10%	166
	SR	17%	20%	<b>25%</b>	24%	14%	162
Include drawings, tables, photos, screen shots, or other visual content into your written assignment	FY	<b>33%</b>	28%	30%	6%	4%	165
	SR	21%	24%	<b>33%</b>	10%	12%	163
Create the project with multimedia (web page, poster, slide presentation such as PowerPoint, etc.)	FY	30%	35%	27%	5%	2%	164
	SR	18%	26%	<b>36%</b>	11%	9%	163

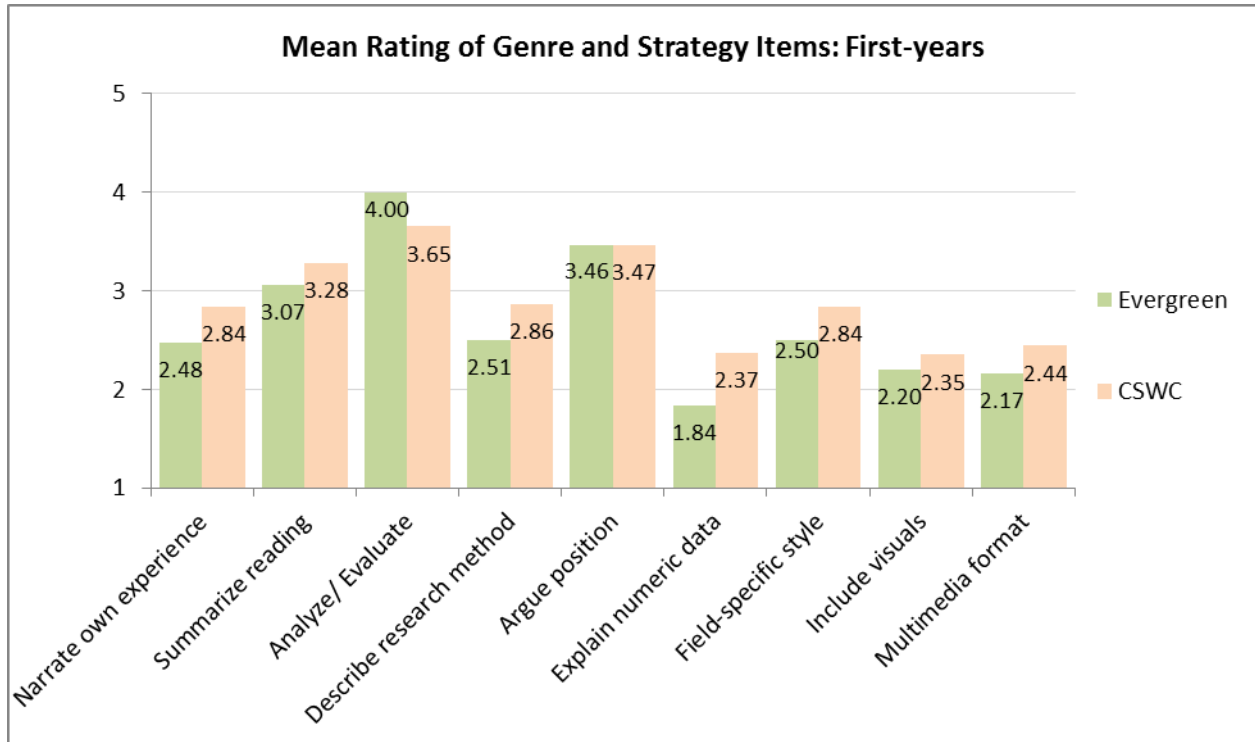
At Evergreen, first-years and seniors were equally likely to have frequent writing assignments that required analysis and evaluation, whereas at the comparison schools, this activity was more common among their seniors than first-years. Interestingly, first-years at both Evergreen and CSWC schools are more likely than seniors to argue a position using evidence. In all other genre and strategy areas, Evergreen seniors reported more frequent assignments than freshmen, with the largest increases in writing in the style and format of a specific field and describing research methodology and results. Notably, Evergreen seniors are more likely than first-years for narrate or describe their own experience, whereas at comparison schools this type of writing was more common among their first-year students.

(1=No assignments, 2=Few assignments, 3=Some assignments, 4=Most assignments, 5=All assignments)

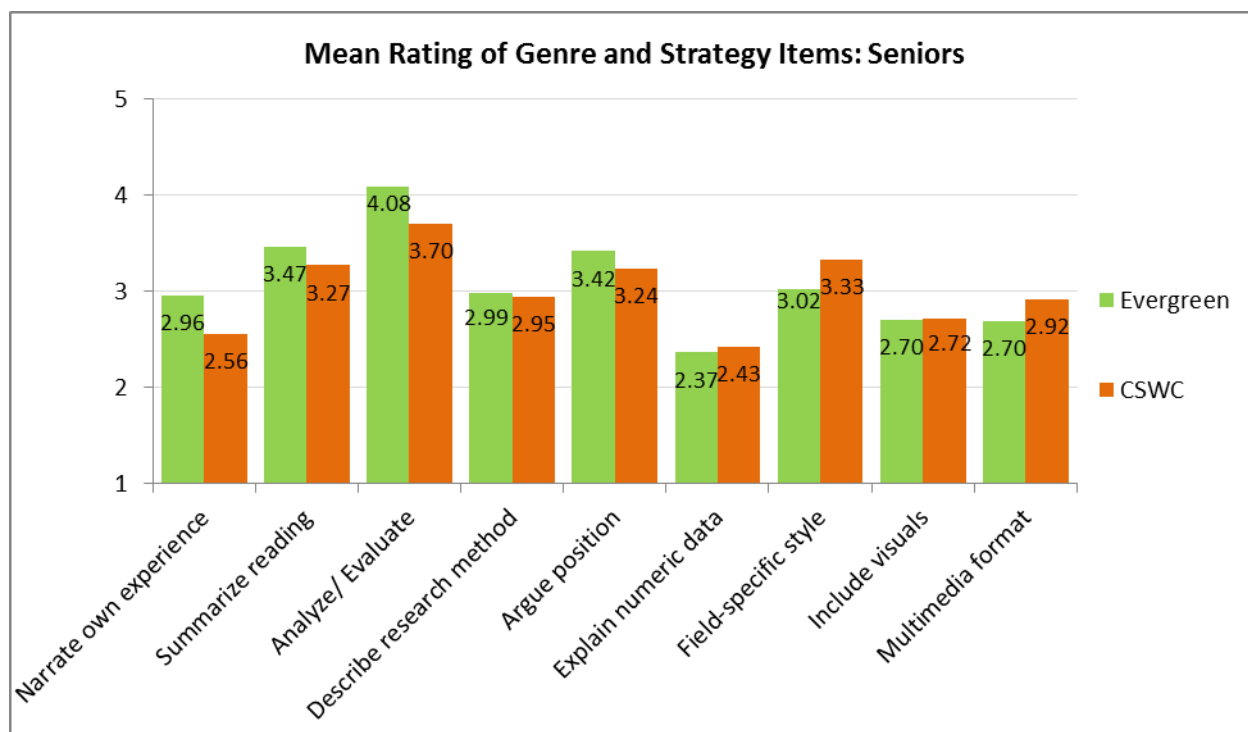


## Comparison to peers

Both groups of Evergreen students were significantly less likely than their peers to complete assignments in the style of a specific field, which is likely an artifact of Evergreen’s intentional focus on interdisciplinarity. In addition, Evergreen first-years were significantly less likely than CSWC first-years to narrate their own experience, summarize, describe research, explain numeric information, or work with multimedia. On the other hand, both Evergreen groups were significantly more likely to analyze or evaluate something they read, researched, or observed than their CSWC peers.







Genre and Strategy Writing Process items with *statistically significant differences* ( $p < .01$ ) between Evergreen and CSWC students are noted as follows:

Evergreen students did significantly **more** of the following than their peers:

**First-years:**

- Analyze or evaluate something you read, researched, or observed

**Seniors:**

- Narrate or describe one of your own experiences
- Analyze or evaluate something you read, researched, or observed

Evergreen students did significantly **less** of the following than their peers:

**First-years:**

- Narrate or describe one of your own experiences
- Summarize something you read, such as articles, books, or online publications
- Describe your methods or findings related to data you collected in lab or field work, a survey project, etc.
- Explain in writing the meaning of numerical or statistical data
- Write in the style and format of a specific field (engineering, history, psychology, etc.)
- Create the project with multimedia (web page, poster, slide presentation such as PowerPoint, etc.)

**Seniors:**

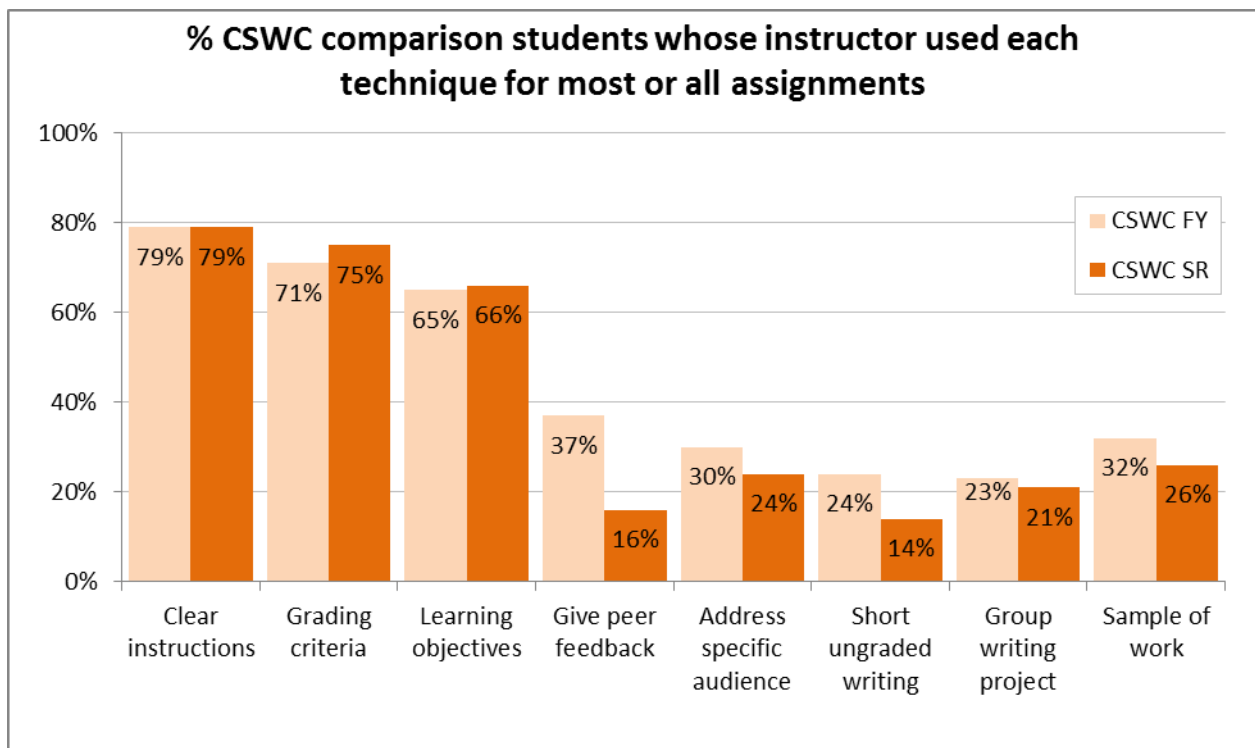
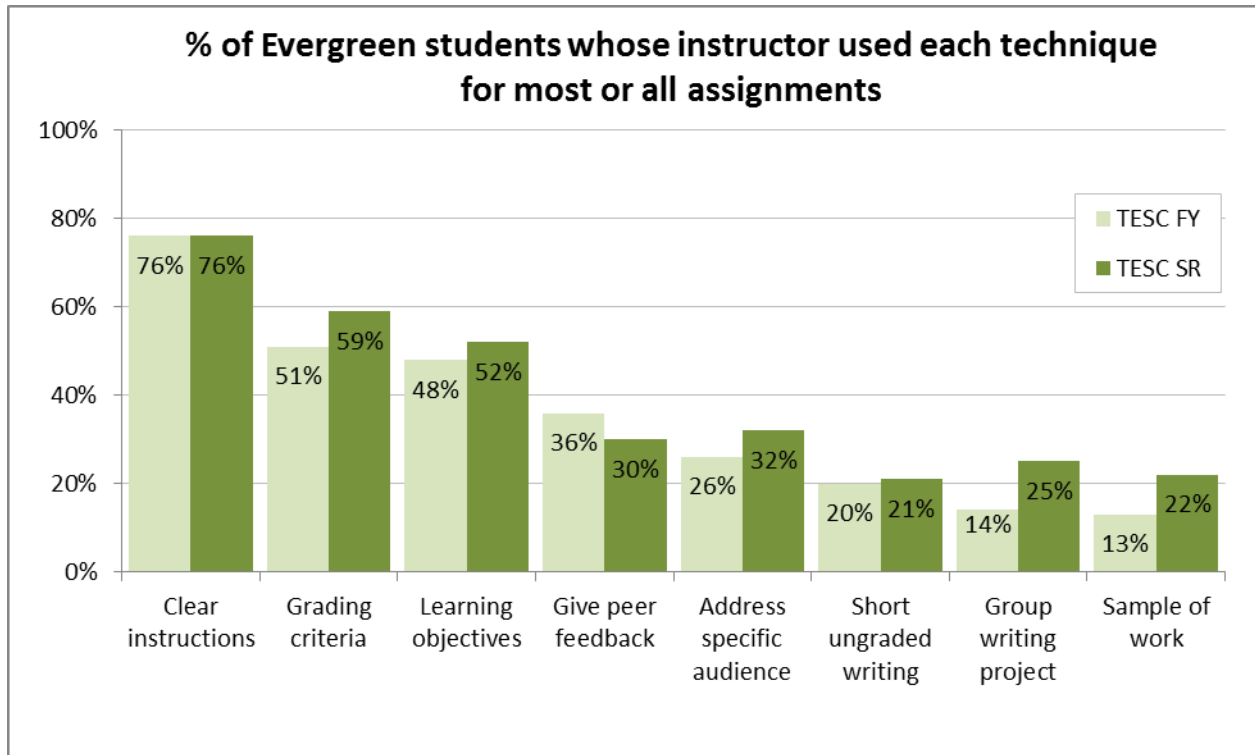
- Write in the style and format of a specific field (engineering, history, psychology, etc.)

## Teaching Best Practices

Three-quarters of both first-year and senior students felt their instructors provided clear instructions for *most or all assignments*, which was the most prevalent practice for Evergreen among this set of teaching practices. At the same time, less than half of Evergreen first-years and only half of seniors reported they were told in advance what the instructor wanted them to learn from an assignment for *most or all assignments*. Additionally, 37% of first-year students and 26% of seniors reported never receiving a sample of a completed assignment written by the instructor or a student. 28% of first-years and 21% of seniors had no assignments during the year which asked them to address a specific audience.

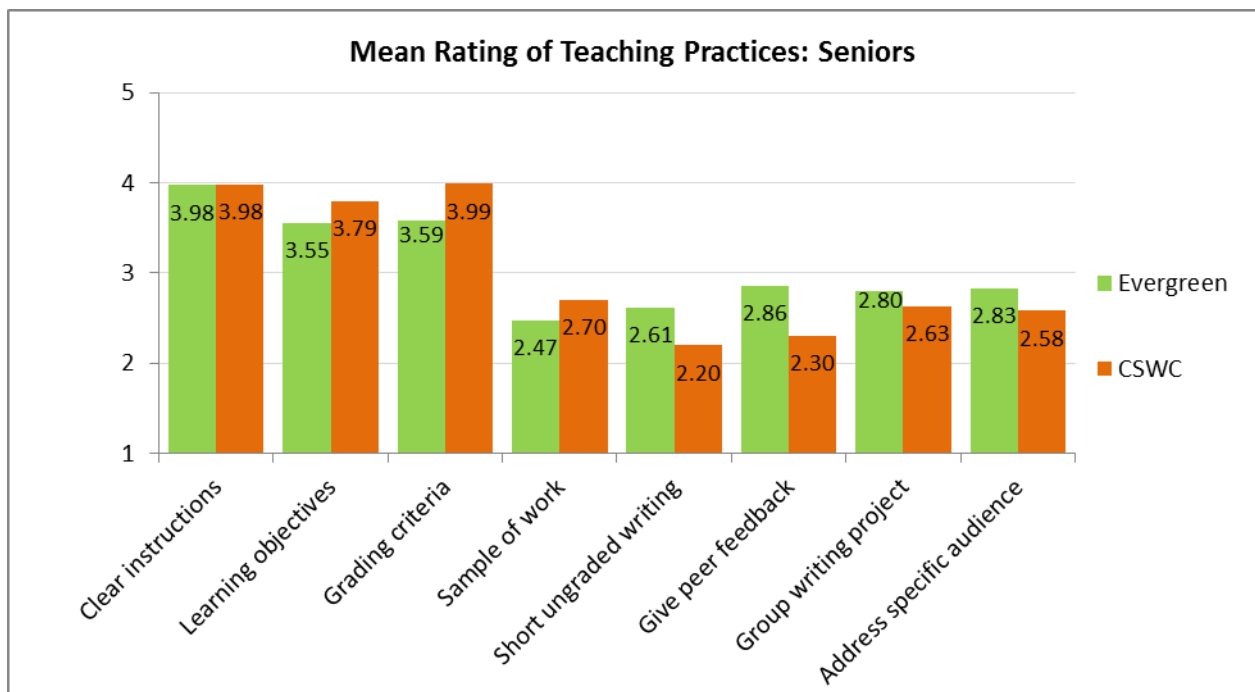
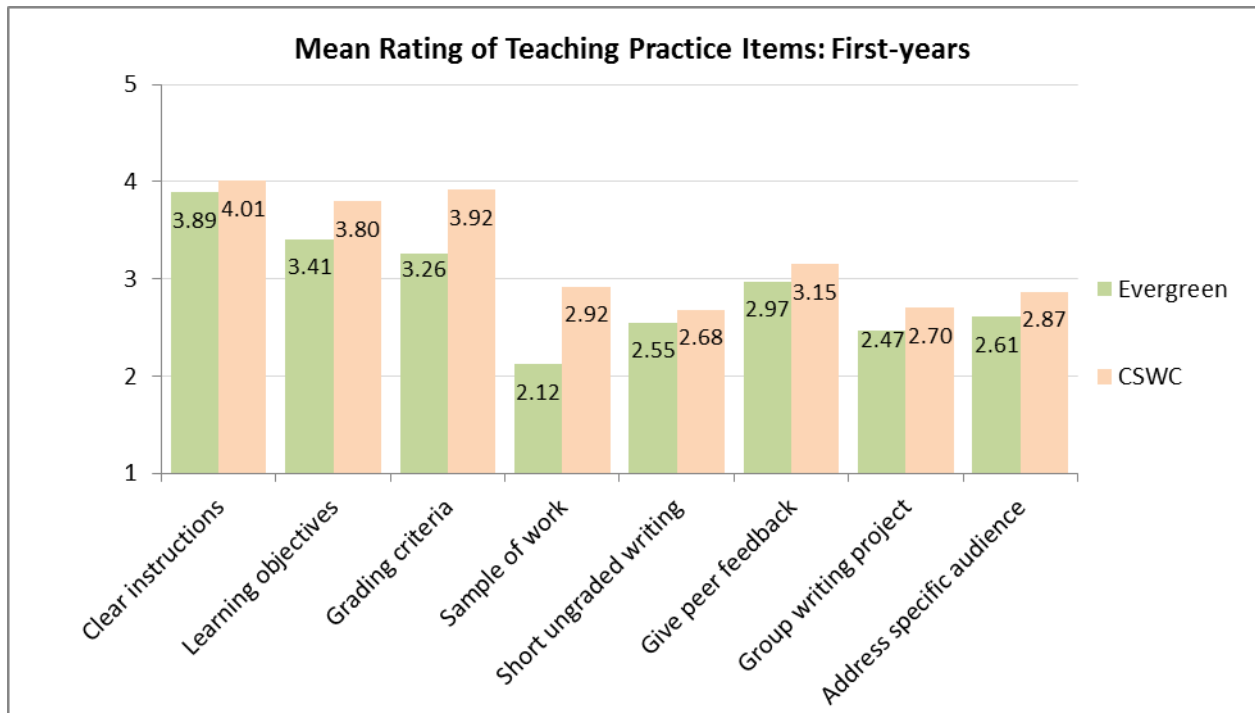
During the current school year, for how many of your writing assignments has your instructor done each of the following?	Class	1 No assign	2 Few assign	3 Some assign	4 Most assign	5 All assign	N
Provided clear instructions describing what he or she wanted you to do	FY	2%	9%	13%	<b>49%</b>	27%	163
	SR	1%	4%	19%	<b>45%</b>	31%	163
Explained in advance what he or she wanted you to learn	FY	6%	12%	<b>34%</b>	31%	17%	162
	SR	5%	11%	<b>33%</b>	25%	27%	163
Explained in advance the criteria he or she would use to grade your assignment	FY	16%	14%	19%	<b>31%</b>	20%	161
	SR	10%	13%	18%	26%	<b>33%</b>	163
Provided a sample of a completed assignment written by the instructor or a student	FY	<b>37%</b>	33%	17%	10%	3%	162
	SR	26%	<b>31%</b>	20%	16%	6%	163
Asked you to do short pieces of writing that he or she did not grade	FY	22%	<b>30%</b>	29%	13%	7%	162
	SR	19%	28%	<b>32%</b>	12%	9%	161
Asked you to give feedback to a classmate about a draft or outline the classmate had written	FY	17%	12%	<b>36%</b>	27%	9%	161
	SR	18%	17%	<b>34%</b>	20%	10%	163
Asked you to write with classmates to complete a group project	FY	23%	25%	<b>37%</b>	12%	2%	163
	SR	17%	20%	<b>38%</b>	18%	7%	163
Asked you to address a real or imagined audience such as your classmates, a politician, non-experts, etc.	FY	<b>28%</b>	19%	27%	17%	9%	162
	SR	21%	21%	<b>25%</b>	18%	14%	163

At Evergreen, first-years were more likely to be asked to provide feedback to classmates about a written draft than seniors. They experienced all of the other selected teaching practices at the same level or less often than seniors. There is little evidence that first-years at Evergreen received more directive writing assignments, clarity of expectations, or examples of work than seniors did, as they entered into the experience of college-level writing.



## Comparison to peers

Evergreen seniors were asked significantly more often than their CSWC peers to offer peers feedback on writing, address specific audiences, and write short, unevaluated pieces of writing. Those practices are more common with CSWC first-years, and then drop off among seniors. Compared to CSWC peers, both first-years and seniors at Evergreen were significantly less likely to receive an explanation of the learning objectives of a writing assignment or the criteria that would be used for evaluation. Furthermore, first-years also significantly lagged behind peers in being asked to address a real or imagined audience in their writing or to see an example of a completed work.



Teaching Best Practices items with *statistically significant differences* ( $p < .01$ ) between Evergreen and CSWC students are noted as follows:

Evergreen students reported significantly **more** of the following instructor practices than their peers:

**First-years:** None

**Seniors:**

- Asked you to do short pieces of writing that he or she did not grade
- Asked you to give feedback to a classmate about a draft or outline the classmate had written
- Asked you to address a real or imagined audience such as your classmates, a politician, non-experts, etc.

Evergreen students reported significantly **less** of the following instructor practices than their peers:

**First-years:**

- Explained in advance what he or she wanted you to learn
- Explained in advance the criteria he or she would use to grade your assignment
- Provided a sample of a completed assignment written by the instructor or a student
- Asked you to address a real or imagined audience such as your classmates, a politician, non-experts, etc.

**Seniors:**

- Explained in advance what he or she wanted you to learn
- Explained in advance the criteria he or she would use to grade your assignment

## Higher Order Thinking Activities

### Evergreen respondents

Respondents were asked whether they had done or planned to do two higher order thinking activities before graduating: Prepare a portfolio of their written work and submit a work of writing to a student or professional publication. 23% of Evergreen first-year students had already prepared a portfolio during their first year, and an additional 53% indicated they planned to do so before graduation. Yet, among Evergreen seniors the percent who had collected a portfolio of written work had only climbed to 28%. Thirty-six percent of first-year students planned to submit written work for publication before graduation, and 8% had already done so during their first year; yet only 13% of the seniors surveyed had actually done this.

Which of the following have you done or do you plan to do before you graduate from your institution?	Class	Have Not Decided	Do Not Plan to Do	Plan to Do	Done	N
Prepare a portfolio that collects written work from more than one class	FY	18%	6%	<b>53%</b>	23%	158
	SR	20%	18%	<b>33%</b>	28%	163
Submit work you wrote or co-wrote to a student or professional publication (magazine, journal, newspaper, collection of student work, etc.)	FY	<b>40%</b>	17%	36%	8%	162
	SR	23%	<b>44%</b>	20%	13%	163

### Comparison to Peers

A significantly higher percentage of Evergreen first-year students (23%) prepared portfolios in their first-year than CSWC first-years (12%). Evergreen seniors were not significantly different from the comparison group in this area. Slightly more Evergreen students submitted work for publication, but not to a significant degree.

*\*The item in bold font indicates where Evergreen students were significantly higher than the comparison group ( $p < .01$ ).*

Percent who have done each of the following before graduating:	Class	Evergreen	CSWC
Prepare a portfolio that collects written work from more than one class	FY	<b>23%</b>	<b>12%*</b>
	SR	28%	23%
Submit work you wrote or co-wrote to a student or professional publication (magazine, journal, newspaper, collection of student work, etc.)	FY	8%	5%
	SR	14%	10%

## Appendix A: CSWC Comparison Institutions

<b>Institution Name</b>	<b>Control</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>State</b>
Berry College	Private	Mount Berry	GA
Calvin College	Private	Grand Rapids	MI
Carlow University	Private	Pittsburgh	PA
Chowan University	Private	Murfreesboro	NC
Earlham College	Private	Richmond	IN
Ferrum College	Private	Ferrum	VA
Georgian Court University	Private	Lakewood	NJ
Graceland University-Lamoni	Private	Lamoni	IA
Husson University	Private	Bangor	ME
Lafayette College	Private	Easton	PA
Limestone College	Private	Gaffney	SC
Millsaps College	Private	Jackson	MS
Occidental College	Private	Los Angeles	CA
Seton Hill University	Private	Greensburg	PA
Spring Hill College	Private	Mobile	AL
Trine University	Private	Angola	IN
Wheaton College	Private	Norton	MA
Woodbury University	Private	Burbank	CA
CUNY York College	Public	Jamaica	NY
Fayetteville State University	Public	Fayetteville	NC
Francis Marion University	Public	Florence	SC
Indiana University Kokomo	Public	Kokomo	IN
The University of Texas of the Permian Basin	Public	Odessa	TX
The University of Virginia's College at Wise	Public	Wise	VA
University of Maine at Farmington	Public	Farmington	ME
University of Michigan-Flint	Public	Flint	MI
University of Washington Tacoma	Public	Tacoma	WA