**WRITTEN COMMUNICATION AND CRITICAL THINKING
CORE GRADUATION COMPETENCIES PILOT PROJECT**
University of San Francisco
Office of Assessment and Accreditation Support

The Process
The Office of Assessment and Accreditation Support (OAAS) collected written work from courses populated by graduating seniors in the College of Arts & Sciences (CAS), the School of Management (SOM), and the School of Nursing & Health Professions (SONHP). Specifically, the student artifacts were collected from eight of the nine programs across the three discipline areas within CAS—Arts & Humanities, Math & Sciences, and Social Sciences— graduating the highest percentages of students, as well as the BS Business Administration and BS Nursing programs.

This resulted in the collection of 515 artifacts. A random sample of 10% of the artifacts was selected to be scored, except in cases where small numbers of artifacts were collected. For those programs, all artifacts were scored. The random sample was stratified by the number of artifacts collected from each program. Prior to scoring, the expectation at least 75% of student artifacts were expected to meet or exceed standards set by faculty.

Faculty Raters
Fifteen faculty served each day as raters for the written communication and critical thinking scoring sessions on June 20 – 21, 2017. Two raters scored each artifact. In the cases in which consensus was not achieved, an additional rater scored the artifact to help reach consensus.

The Rubric
Faculty raters scored student work using an integrated written communication and critical thinking rubric developed by Rhetoric & Language faculty (see appendix). Written communication was composed of three criteria: context, organization, and style. Critical thinking was composed of two criteria: assumptions and position. Raters scored each artifact using a 4-pt. scale (1 = *Unsatisfactory*, 4 = *Exemplary*). Artifacts met or exceeded standards when rated as competent or exemplary.
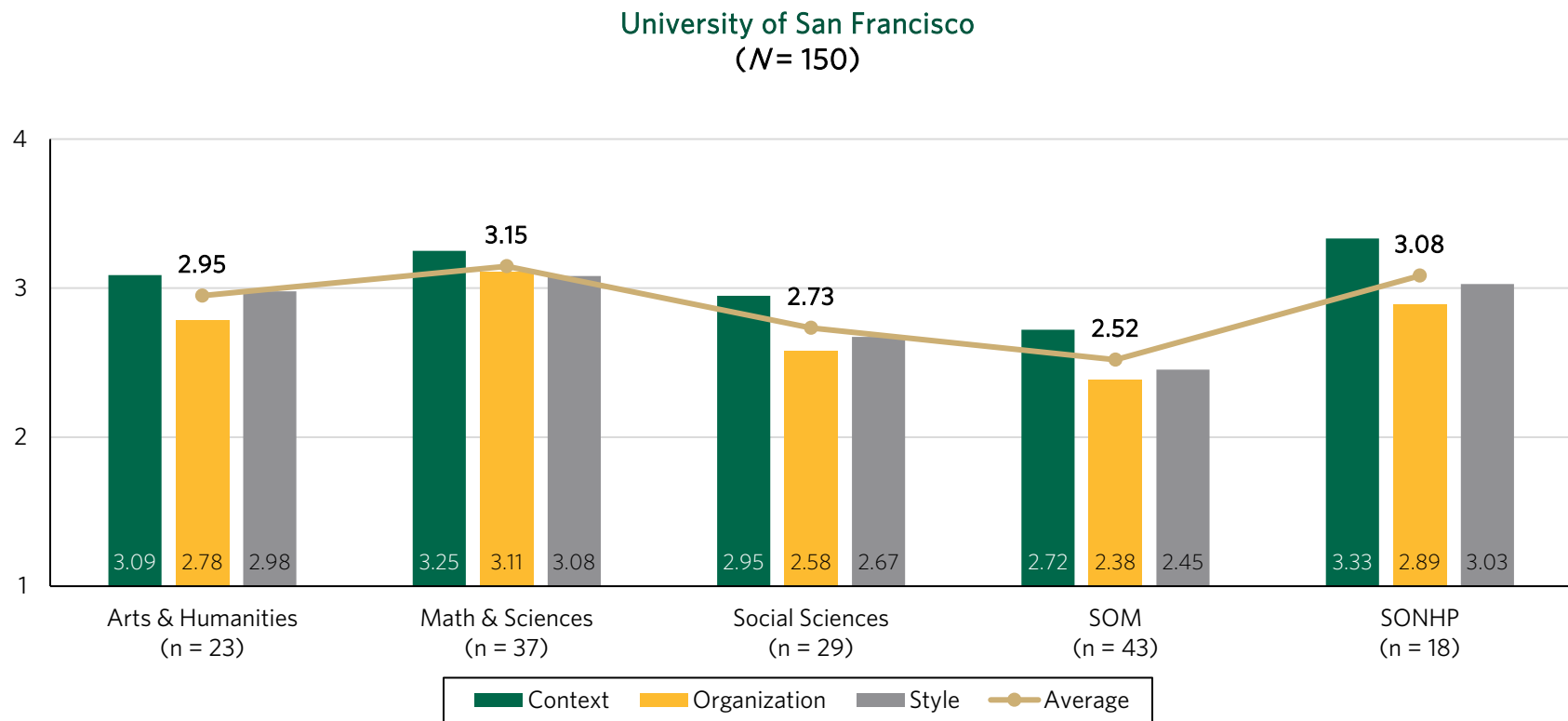
WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Average Performance Level
The figure on the following page depicts the average performance level of students in each area or school on the three written communication criteria (context, organization, and style). Across the criteria:

- Arts & Humanities scored an average of **2.95**, with means ranging between **2.78** (**organization**) and **3.09** (**context**).
- Math & Sciences scored an average of **3.15**, with means ranging between **3.08** (**style**) and **3.25** (**context**).
- Social Sciences scored an average of **2.73**, with means ranging between **2.58** (**organization**) and **2.95** (**context**).
- School of Management scored an average of **2.52**, with means ranging between **2.38** (**organization**) and **2.72** (**context**).
- School of Nursing & Health Professions scored an average of **3.08**, with means ranging between **2.89** (**organization**) and **3.33** (**context**).

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(N = 150)

	Arts & Humanities (n = 23)	Math & Sciences (n = 37)	Social Sciences (n = 29)	SOM (n = 43)	SONHP (n = 18)
Context	3.09	3.25	2.95	2.72	3.33
Organization	2.78	3.11	2.58	2.38	2.89
Style	2.98	3.08	2.67	2.45	3.03
Average	2.95	3.15	2.73	2.52	3.08

Context   **Organization**   **Style**   **Average**

Overall Performance Level
The following figure depicts the percentage of each performance level for USF. Artifacts met or exceeded standards when rated to be competent or exemplary.

- Overall, **87%** of the student artifacts met or exceeded standards for **context**, **74%** met or exceeded standards for **organization**, and **78%** met or exceeded standards for **style**.
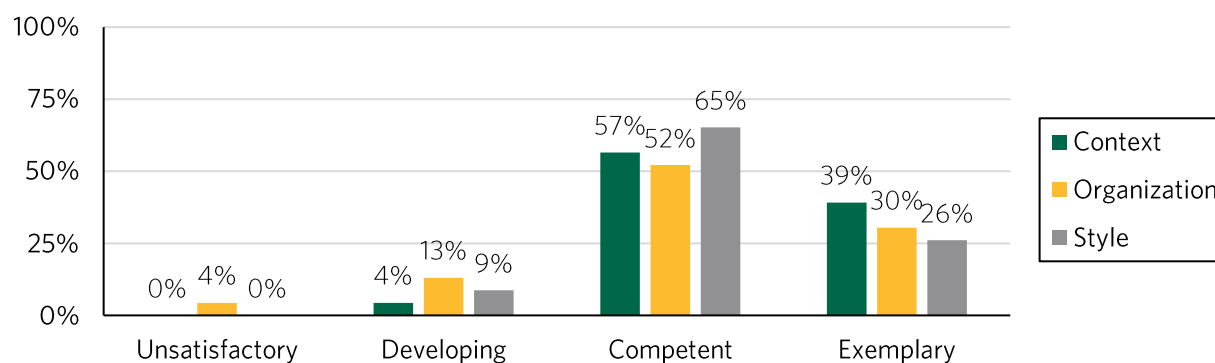
University of San Francisco
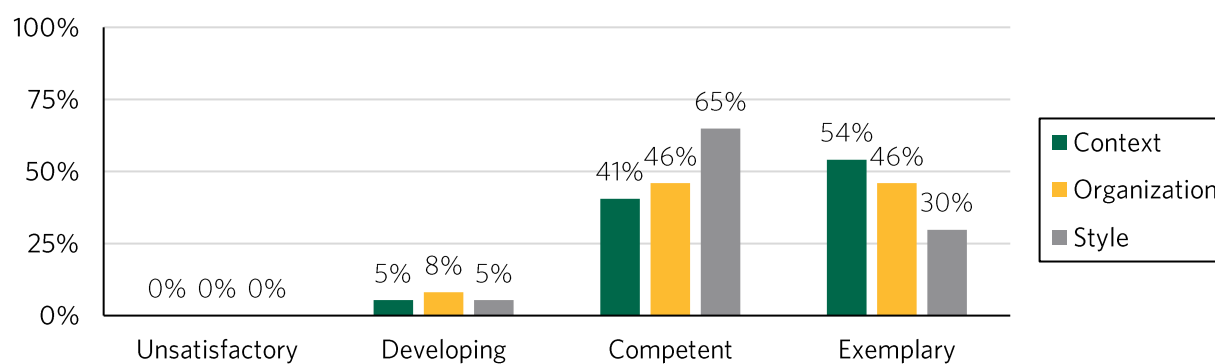(N = 150)
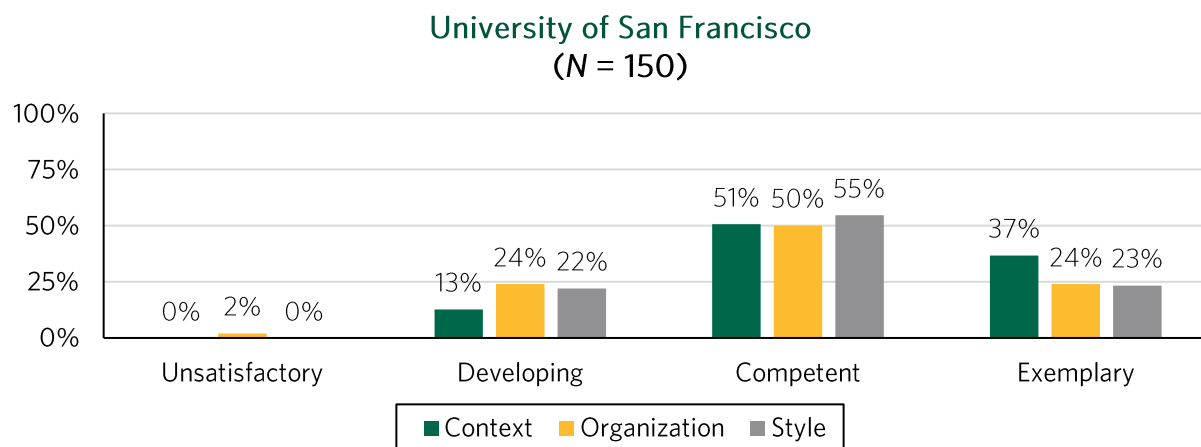
Performance Level by Area or School
The figures on the following pages depict the percentage of each performance level for written communication broken down by area or school. Artifacts met or exceeded standards when rated competent or exemplary.

- For Arts & Humanities, **96%** of the student artifacts met or exceeded standards for **context**, **83%** met or exceeded standards for **organization**, and **91%** met or exceeded standards for **style**.
- For Math & Sciences, **95%** of the student artifacts met or exceeded standards for **context**, **92%** met or exceeded standards for **organization**, and **95%** met or exceeded standards for **style**.
- For Social Sciences, **93%** of the student artifacts met or exceeded standards for **context**, **69%** met or exceeded standards for **organization**, and **76%** met or exceeded standards for **style**.
- For the School of Management, **74%** of the student artifacts met or exceeded standards for **context**, **56%** met or exceeded standards for **organization**, and **53%** met or exceeded standards for **style**.
- For the School of Nursing & Health Professions, **83%** of the student artifacts met or exceeded standards for **context**, **78%** met or exceeded standards for **organization**, and **89%** met or exceeded standards for **style**.
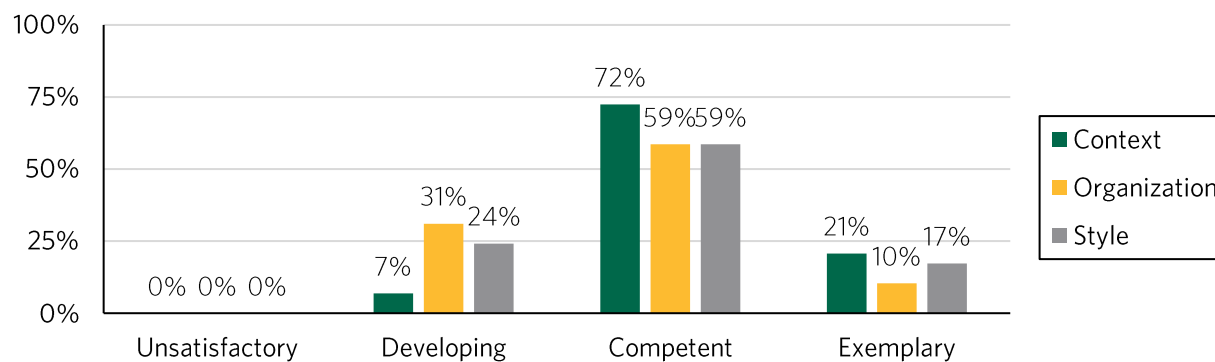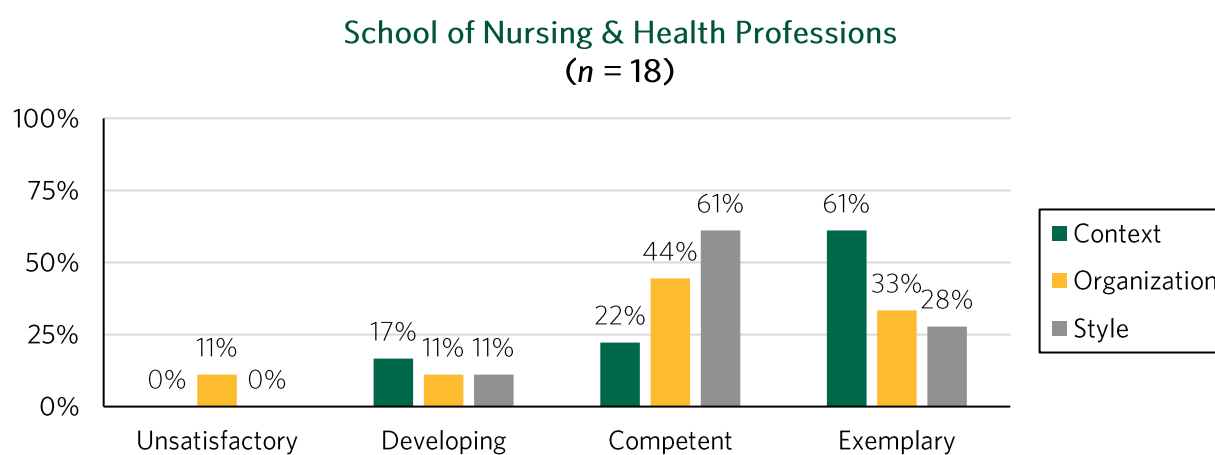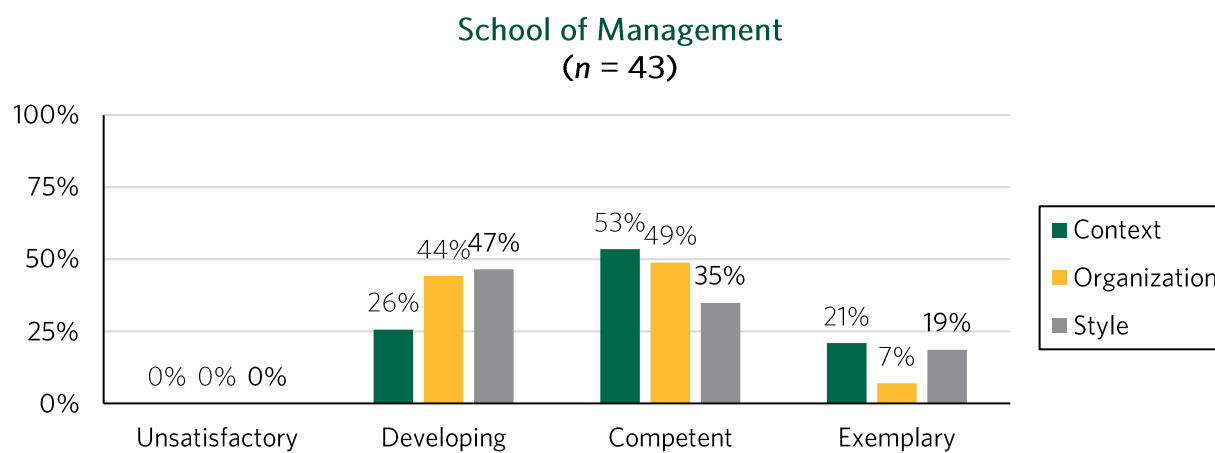
Arts & Humanities
(*n* = 23)

Math & Sciences
(*n* = 37)

Social Sciences
(*n* = 29)

School of Management
(*n* = 43)

	Context	Organization	Style
Unsatisfactory	0%	0%	0%
Developing	26%	44%	47%
Competent	53%	49%	35%
Exemplary	21%	7%	19%

School of Nursing & Health Professions
(*n* = 18)

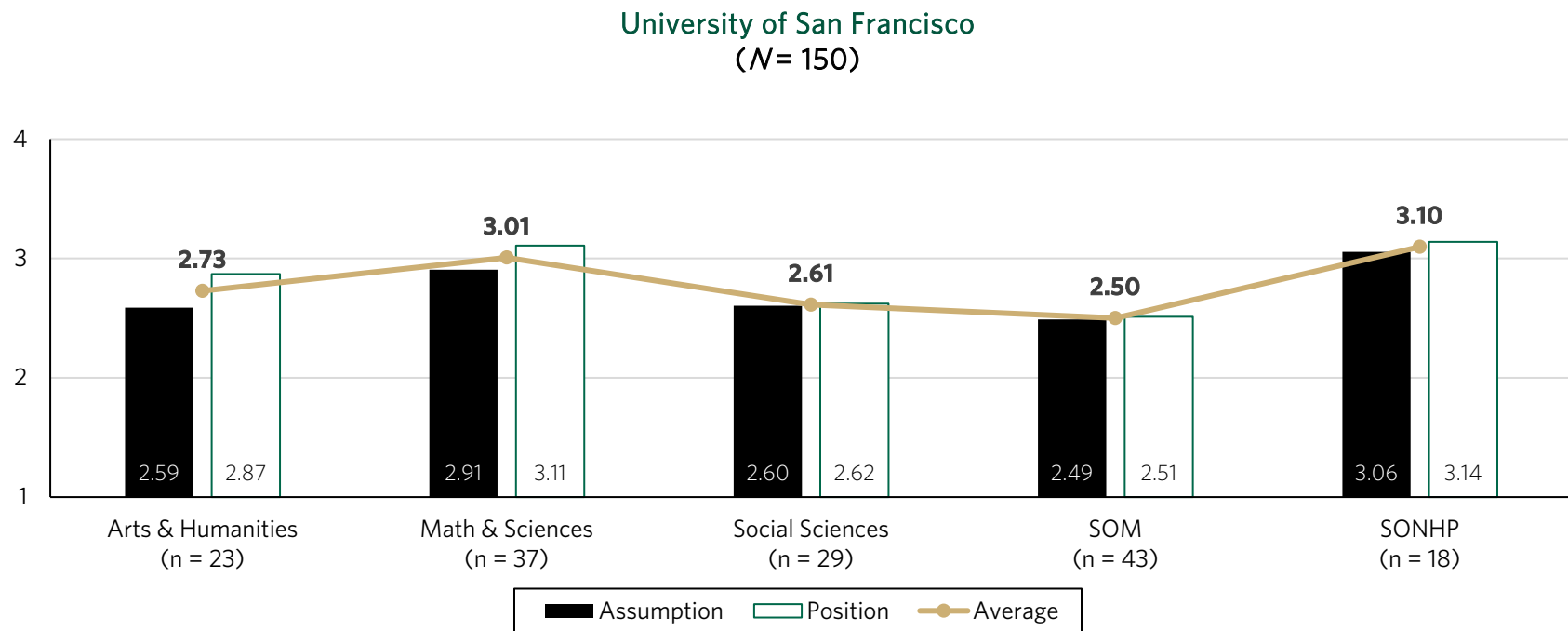|	Context	Organization	Style
Unsatisfactory	0%	11%	0%
Developing	17%	11%	11%
Competent	22%	44%	61%
Exemplary	61%	33%	28%

CRITICAL THINKING

Average Performance Level
The figure on the following page depicts the average performance level of students in each area or school in the two critical thinking criteria (assumptions and position). Across the criteria:

- Arts & Humanities scored an average of 2.73, with means ranging between 2.59 (**assumption**) and 2.87 (**position**).
- Math & Sciences scored an average of 3.01, with means ranging between 2.91 (**assumption**) and 3.11 (**position**).
- Social Sciences scored an average of 2.61, with means ranging between 2.60 (**organization**) and 2.62 (**position**).
- School of Management scored an average of 2.50, with means ranging between 2.49 (**organization**) and 2.51 (**position**).
- School of Nursing & Health Professions scored an average of 3.10, with means between 3.06 (**organization**) and 3.14 (**position**).

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(N = 150)

	Arts & Humanities (n = 23)	Math & Sciences (n = 37)	Social Sciences (n = 29)	SOM (n = 43)	SONHP (n = 18)
Average	2.73	3.01	2.61	2.50	3.10
Assumption	2.59	2.91	2.60	2.49	3.06
Position	2.87	3.11	2.62	2.51	3.14

Legend: Assumption ◼ Position ▭ Average ●

Overall Performance Level
The figure below depicts the percentage of each performance level for USF. Artifacts met or exceeded standards when rated competent or exemplary.

- Overall, **75%** of the student artifacts met or exceeded standards for **assumptions** and **79%** met or exceeded standards for **position**.

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### (N = 150)
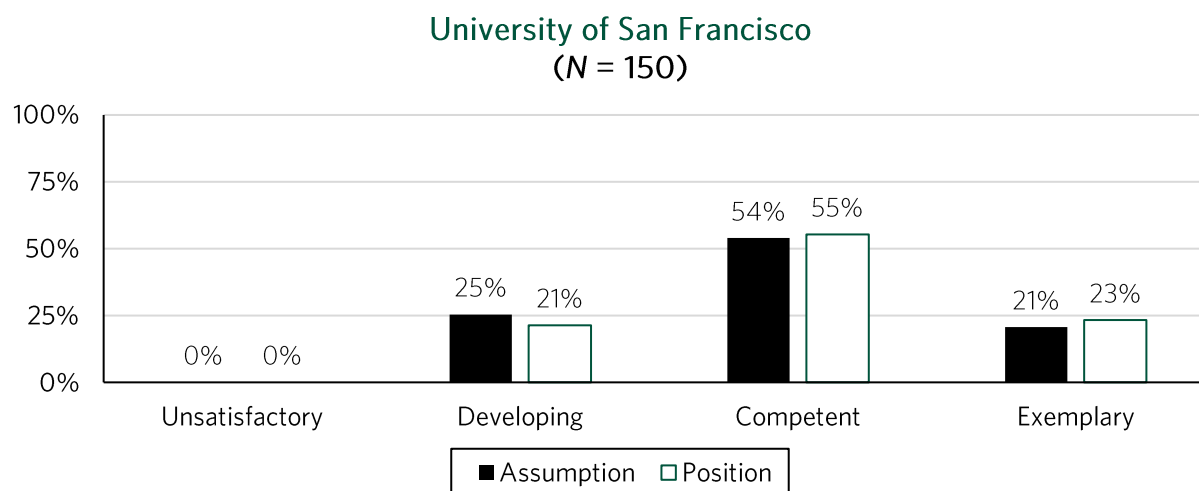
Performance Level by School
The figures on the following pages depict the percentage of each performance level for critical thinking broken down by area of school. Artifacts met or exceeded standards when rated competent or exemplary.

- For Arts & Humanities, **78%** of the student artifacts met or exceeded standards for **assumptions** and **87%** met or exceeded standards for **position**.
- For Math & Sciences, **78%** of the student artifacts met or exceeded standards for **assumptions** and **92%** met or exceeded standards for **position**.
- For Social Sciences, **79%** of the student artifacts met or exceeded standards for **assumptions** and **76%** met or exceeded standards for **position**.
- For the School of Management, **63%** of the student artifacts met or exceeded standards for **assumptions** and **65%** met or exceeded standards for **position**.
- For the School of Nursing & Health Professions, **83%** of the student artifacts met or exceeded standards for **assumptions** and **78%** met or exceeded standards for **position**.
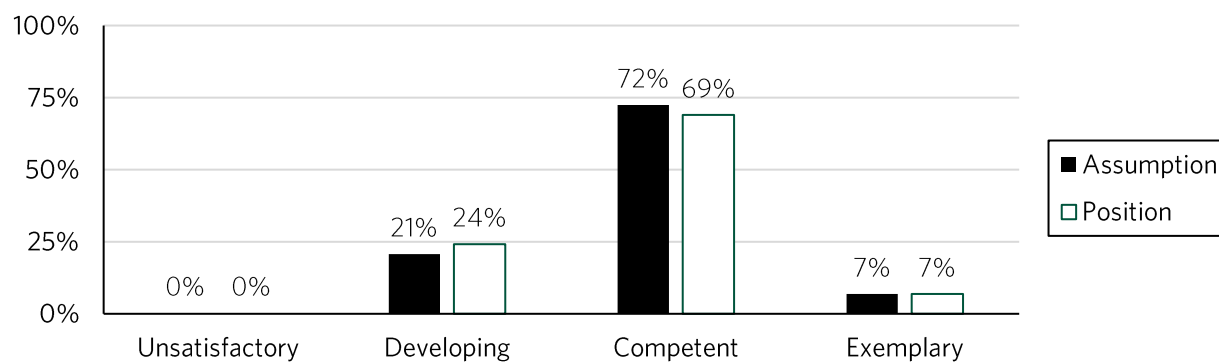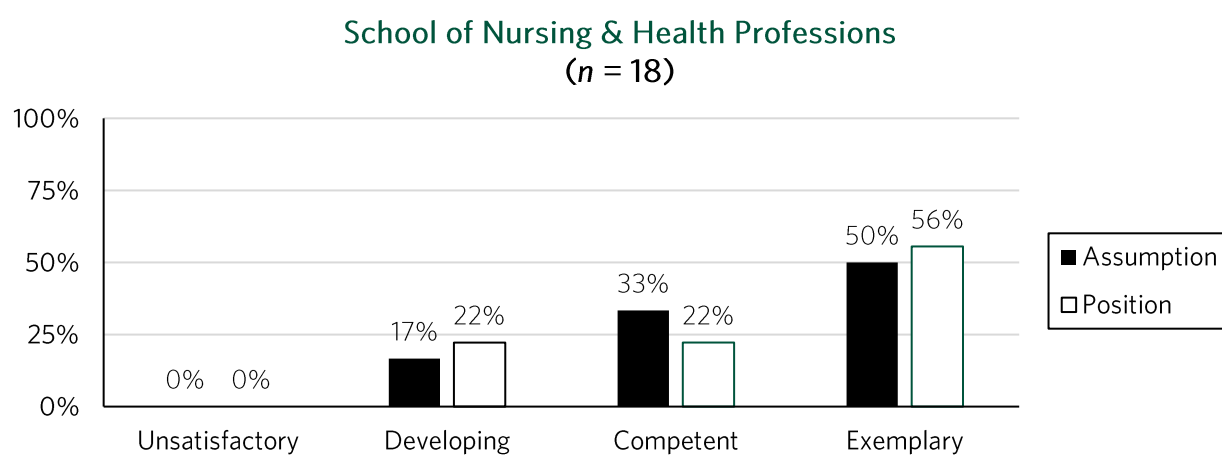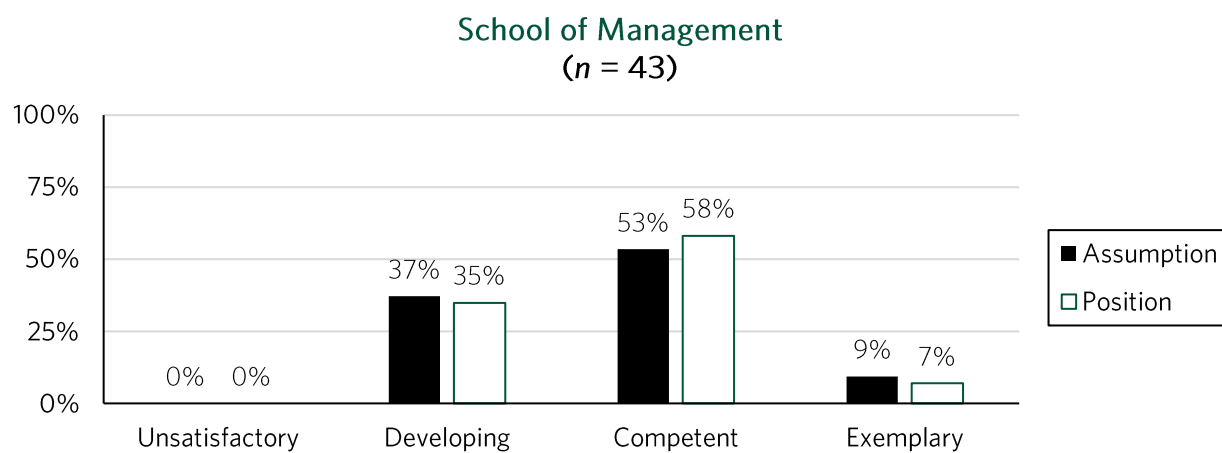
Arts & Humanities
(*n* = 23)

Math & Sciences
(*n* = 37)

Social Sciences
(*n* = 29)

School of Management
### (*n* = 43)

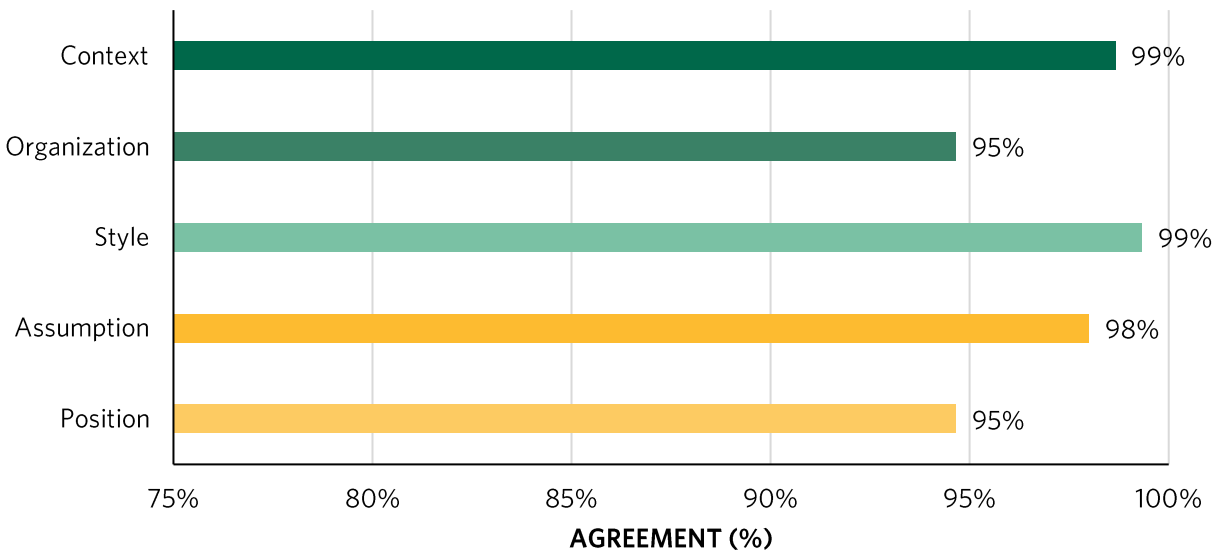## School of Nursing & Health Professions
(*n* = 18)
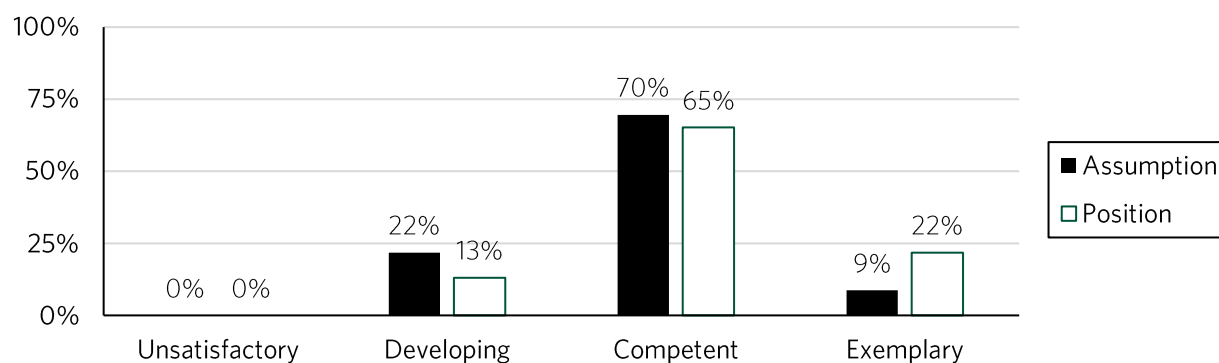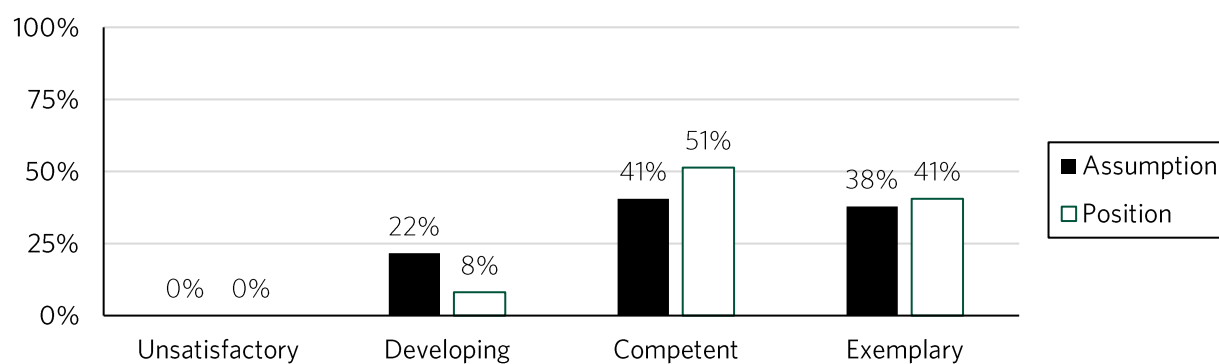
Inter-rater Reliability
As agreed upon during our calibration sessions, consensus was achieved when agreement was perfect or within one point. Inter-rater reliability across artifacts was high. On average, raters reached consensus **97%** of the time. Agreement ranged from **95%** for **Social Sciences** artifacts to **98%** for **Arts and Humanities** and **School of Management** artifacts (tie).

Category	Agreement
Arts & Humanities	98%
Math & Sciences	97%
Social Sciences	95%
SOM	98%
SOHNP	96%
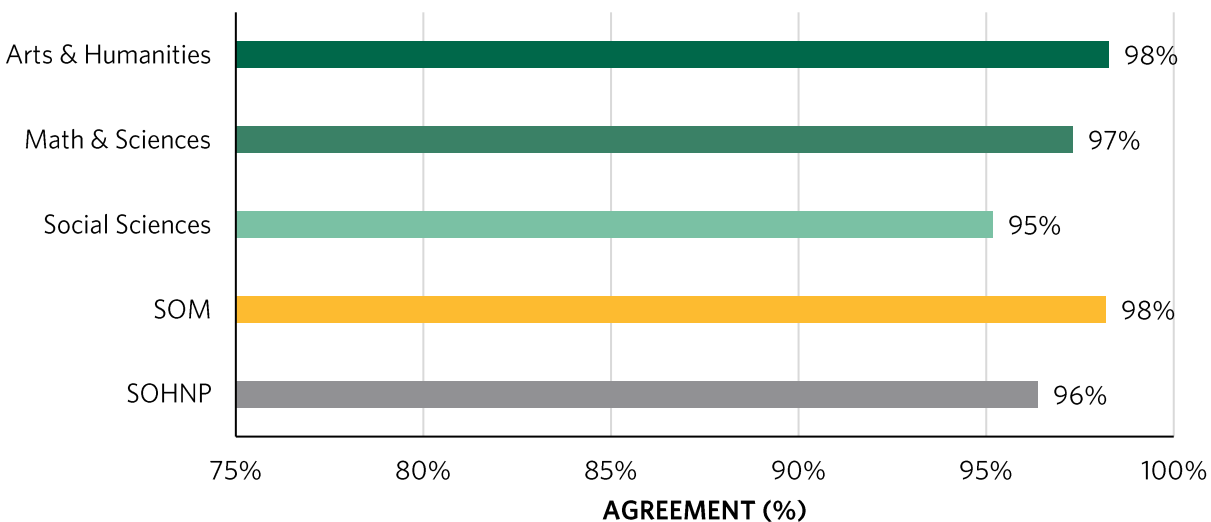
AGREEMENT (%)

Inter-rater reliability across criteria was high, too. Agreement ranged from **95%** for **organization** and **position** (tie) to **99%** for **context** and **style** (tie).

Criteria	Agreement
Context	99%
Organization	95%
Style	99%
Assumption	98%
Position	95%

AGREEMENT (%)

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Written Communication
- With the exception of organization, USF students generally met or exceeded expectations for written communication. There was, however, variability at the area/school level. For example, the School of Management did not meet standards for any of the written communication criteria. In contrast, The School of Nursing & Health Professions and the Math & Sciences area of the College of Arts and Sciences exceeded expectations. More work is needed to bolster the written communication skills of School of Management students.
- On average, context was consistently evaluated more favorably than organization and style. Future efforts to improve written communication should focus on organization and style.

Critical Thinking
- USF students generally met or exceeded expectations for critical thinking. Again, there was variability at the area/school level. Whereas the School of Management did not meet standards for critical thinking, the School of Nursing & Health Professions emerged as especially competent in critical thinking. More work is needed to bolster critical thinking in the Social Sciences area of the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Management.
- On average, assumptions and position were evaluated similarly by the raters.

REFLECTION

Strengths
- The calibration sessions were productive and consensus was easy to achieve after substantial discussion of the rubric.
- Due to the success of the calibration sessions, inter-rater reliability was very high.
- Rhetoric & Language faculty created an effective rubric that could be applied to a diverse set of student artifacts.

Limitations
- Small numbers of artifacts from programs in the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Nursing & Health Professions limits the ability to generalize.
- The nature of the artifacts collected, in particular from the School of Management, may have biased the results.

Moving Forward
- Create a schedule to institutionalize assessment of written communication and critical thinking.
- Develop criteria as to the suitability of the student work for assessment.
- Provide program chairs with more notice to select courses with work suitable for assessment.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION/CRITICAL THINKING RUBRIC
University of San Francisco

Criteria	Exemplary 4	Competent 3	Developing 2	Unsatisfactory 1
Context and Purpose for Writing (responds to context/situation; disciplinary or assignment expectations)	Content is organized around clear and significant central ideas. Rhetorical choices reflect sophisticated understanding of purpose, context, or disciplinary expectations.	Content relates to clearly stated central idea. Rhetorical choices relate to demands of purpose, context, or disciplinary expectations.	Writing minimally responds to demands of context; somewhat reflects awareness of purpose, context, or disciplinary expectations.	Writing is indifferent to purpose, context, or disciplinary expectations.
Organization, Development, and Coherence of Message (supports ideas with evidence and reasoning; uses analysis in evaluation)	Organizational pattern enhances the message. Develops complex ideas through use of reasoning and analysis, as well as, where requested, relevant and credible evidence.	Information presented in a mostly coherent order for the assigned task. Reasoning, analysis, and, where requested, credible evidence contribute to purpose of assigned task.	Information presented in a somewhat coherent order for the assigned task. Where requested, uses evidence to develop some ideas. Evidence may not be appropriate or credible.	Information is not clear and coherent. Ideas are not developed. Evidence, if requested, is lacking, is inappropriate, or in accurate.
Style and Presentation (communicates meaning appropriate for disciplinary or assignment expectations)	Uses language and syntax that is clear, concise, and economical to communicate meaning appropriate for the assigned task.	Uses language and syntax that is mostly clear, concise, and economical to communicate meaning appropriate for the assigned task.	Uses language and syntax that is inconsistently clear, concise, and economical to communicate meaning appropriate for the assigned task.	Language and syntax frequently impedes meaning and/or is inappropriate to the assigned task.
Assumptions (demonstrates awareness of position in the world)	Demonstrates clear and focused awareness of own assumptions in relation to others' assumptions.	Demonstrates some awareness of own assumptions in relation to others' assumptions.	Demonstrates minimal awareness of own and others' assumptions.	Does not demonstrate awareness of own or others' assumptions.
Student's Position (considers complexities and limits)	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is thoughtful, taking into account the complexities of an issue. Limits of position are acknowledged.	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) takes into account some of the complexities of an issue.	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is inferred or does not clearly take into account the complexities of an issue.	No specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is stated.