

# Writing Proficiency in the Montana University System

Newsletter 19 January 2006

## Scorers Needed: Staff from All School Districts Invited to Training and Scoring

This fall all of Montana's high schools were mailed invitations to participate in the 2006 Montana University System Writing Assessment. At the time of this printing roughly 100 schools plan to administer the MUS Writing Assessment during the 2006 testing window: February 13 through March 17. Although staff from participating schools are urged to attend training and scoring sessions, anyone can participate in this free professional development offered by the University System.

Schools have three testing options: 1) students may handwrite essays into test booklets; 2) students may word process essays, print them out, and staple them into the test booklets; or 3) students may go to a testing website where they will enter their demographic data, type their essays, and submit them electronically. These essays will be printed with score sheets and scored in the same manner as the paper tests.

Schools that have sent in the paperwork for testing should receive test booklets, prompts, and administration instructions by February 10.

Training and scoring for the Montana Writing Assessment is a worthwhile professional development opportunity for the writing teachers of Montana, K-12 through college. Often teachers from schools that are not testing students take advantage of this training in order to learn about holistic scoring, to discuss student writing with other teachers, and to judge how well their own students write in comparison to a statewide sample. Several convenient sites are hosting these events. Trainers from local schools and colleges will serve as leaders. (See article on Training of Trainers.)

The first day, which begins at 8:30 a.m. at each site, is devoted to learning holistic scoring and achieving scoring consistency through discussion and practice. On the second day, participants will put their skills to work by scoring about 60 essays. Lunch and light breakfasts are provided on both days.

Schools pay for travel and substitute teacher costs. There is no registration fee for training. For college credit, participants must complete an assignment PRIOR to scoring. Training and scoring are scheduled for the following:

March 23-24	MSU Great Falls COT Heritage Hall
March 27-28	Billings (MSU-Billings Education Bldg)
March 29-30	Miles City (Miles Community College)
April 3-4	Helena (Colonial Inn, 443-2100)
April 6-7	Missoula (Grant Creek Inn)
April 10-11	Bozeman (Holiday Inn)
April 18-19	Whitefish (Mountain Bank)

See registration form on page 5. Assignments required of participants seeking college credit range from reading and reporting to developing lesson plans and assigning practice essays to conducting mini-action research projects.

**Montana University System  
46 North Last Chance Gulch  
Helena, MT 59620-3201**

Jan Clinard, Director  
Academic Initiatives  
Phone: 406 444 0652  
FAX: 406 444 1469  
Email: jclinard@che.montana.edu



Visit our website :  
[www.mus.montana.edu/writingproficiency/index.htm](http://www.mus.montana.edu/writingproficiency/index.htm)

Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education

Proficiency  
Admissions

## **Writing Proficiency Policy Takes Effect in 2007**

At their November 2005 meeting in Bozeman, the Montana Board of Regents unanimously passed a Writing Proficiency Policy (see pages 3-4). Beginning in 2007, students seeking full admission to a four-year degree program in the Montana University System must satisfy a writing proficiency standard based on minimum scores from the ACT Optional Writing Test, the SAT Essay or Writing Section, the Montana University System Writing Assessment, or the AP or CLEP writing tests.

Students who do not demonstrate the necessary writing proficiency may be admitted to a two-year program or to a four-year degree program on a provisional basis until they have met certain criteria, such as earning a C- or better in a transitional composition course. (See sections I d & e. of Policy.) Because the policy goes into effect in the fall of 2007, it applies to students who are currently high school juniors. As with Mathematics Proficiency, this policy is phased in, beginning with low threshold scores in 2007 and gradually reaching the proficient level in 2009.

This policy will:

- Inform high school juniors if they are on target to enter a freshman composition course that is developmental or a composition course that will count toward core or degree requirements;
- Ensure that students take the developmental course they need during their first year in college; and
- Identify students who need more intensive writing instruction as high school seniors in order to graduate at the “proficient” level in writing.

The Board of Regents also supported a recommendation from the Board of Public Education to form an “implementation” committee to assist with implementation of the policy. The implementation committee will consist of eight people, four from P-12 and four from postsecondary.

---

### **Writing Proficiency Implementation Committee**

At their November 2005 meeting, the Board of Regents supported creation of a Writing Proficiency Implementation Committee appointed by the Leadership Group through the auspices of the P-20 committee. The formal charge to the Committee is yet to be approved by the Leadership Group: Commissioner Stearns, Superintendent McCulloch, Jan Lombardi, Education Policy Advisor to the Governor, and Steve Meloy, Executive Secretary of the Board of Public Education.

#### Committee Members

Beverly Ann Chin, Professor, English Department, University of Montana

Cathy Corr, Instructor, Department of Arts and Sciences, University of Montana College of Technology

Art Bangert, Professor, Education Department, Montana State University

Roger Barber, Deputy Commissioner for Academic and Student Affairs, Montana University System

Judy Snow, Assessment Director, Office of Public Instruction

Corri Smith, K-6 Teacher, Great Falls Public Schools

Jan Thomson, Executive Director, Montana ASCD

Rene’ Rasmussen, High School English Teacher, Chester Public Schools

### Proposed DRAFT Charge

The purpose of the Writing Proficiency Implementation Committee is to facilitate the successful implementation of the Writing Proficiency Policy that was adopted by the Montana Board of Regents in November 2005. Successful implementation will be characterized by:

- clear communication of the purpose and provisions of the policy to internal and external stakeholders;
- continuation of the effective procedures already developed for the administration of the Montana University System Writing Assessment, including conducting the test, preparing trainers, completing the scoring, and communicating the results to students, school districts, OPI, OCHE, and the campuses of the MUS;
- continued refinement of effective procedures for collecting, interpreting, and disseminating available data on test scores (ACT, SAT and the MUSWA), test efficacy and scorer feedback to many of the same stakeholders described in the previous bullet;

**MONTANA BOARD OF REGENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

*Policy 301.16 – Writing Proficiency*

**I. Board Policy:**

A. Any student seeking full admission to a four-year degree program at Montana State University- Bozeman, Montana State University-Billings, Montana State University-Northern, The University of Montana-Missoula, Montana Tech of The University of Montana, and The University of Montana-Western must satisfy a writing proficiency standard. That standard is as follows:

For Fall 2009 and the following years, students must earn a minimum score of:

- 7 on the Writing Subscore or an equivalent score on the Combined English/Writing section of the Optional Writing Test of the ACT; or
- 7 on the Essay or an equivalent score on the Writing Section of the SAT; or
- 3.5 on the Montana University System Writing Assessment; or
- 3 on the AP English Language or English Literature Examination.

B. The writing proficiency standard will be phased in, beginning in Fall 2007.

1. For Fall 2007, students must earn a minimum score of:

- 5 on the Writing Subscore or 16 on the Combined English/Writing section of the Optional Writing Test of the ACT; or
- 5 on the Essay or 390 on the Writing Section of the SAT; or
- 2.5 on the Montana University System Writing Assessment, or
- 3 on the AP English Language or English Literature Examination.

2. For Fall 2008, students must earn a minimum score of:

- 6 on the Writing Subscore or an equivalent score on the Combined English/Writing section of the Optional Writing Test of the ACT; or
- 6 on the Essay or an equivalent score on the Writing Section of the SAT; or
- 3 on the Montana University System Writing Assessment; or
- 3 on the AP English Language or English Literature Examination.

C. In lieu of the indicators set out in paragraphs A and B above, students may offer CLEP Subject Examinations in Composition if their scores on the examination meet or exceed the ACE Recommended Score for Awarding Credit of 50.

D. A student who has not yet demonstrated the ability to meet these standards may be admitted (without condition) to a two-year degree program or admitted provisionally to a four-year degree program on any campus of the Montana University System.

E. Before gaining full admission status to a four-year program, the student may prove that he/she has the appropriate proficiency in the following ways:

- 1. re-take one or more of the listed writing assessments to earn the required score;
- 2. earn a grade of C- or better in the composition course that is the prerequisite to the composition course that satisfies the general education program requirements described in Board [Policy 301.10](#);
- 3. submit a letter to the admissions office documenting a disability that prevented him/her from adequately demonstrating proficiency in a test setting if no accommodation was provided at the time of the test.

- F. A student receiving a score of 5.5 or higher on the MUS Writing Assessment will be issued a certificate of merit from the Montana Board of Regents for use in applying for college admissions or scholarships.

High schools throughout Montana will receive:

- certificates of appreciation from the Montana Board of Regents for their partnership activities with the Montana University System on behalf of the Writing Assessment project;
- awards of merit from the Montana Board of Regents for the exemplary performance earned by their students on the Writing Assessment project, based on criteria developed by the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education.

- G. By Fall 2007, the Montana University System will:

1. determine how this policy should be applied to the groups of students exempted in Section H, based on the Montana Board of Regents' expectation that all students in four-year degree programs should satisfy a writing proficiency standard.
2. determine how this policy should impact the writing placement examinations on the campuses of the Montana University System, based on the Montana Board of Regents' expectation that students should not have to take multiple writing examinations as part of their initial matriculation in the System.
3. establish a uniform system to collect and report student data related to writing proficiency to provide evaluation and analysis of the writing proficiency requirement.

- H. The following categories of students are exempt from the provisions of this policy:

1. non-traditional students (those who do not enter college for a period of at least three years from the date of high school graduation or from the date when they would have graduated from high school);
2. summer-only students; and
3. part-time students taking seven or fewer college-level semester credits.

## **II. History:**

ITEM 89-003-R1195 Approval of Proficiency Admission Requirements and Developmental Education in the Montana University System, November 17, 1995; ITEM 107-109-RO500 Report from Joint K-16 Composition Standards Committee on Writing Proficiency Standards for Admission and Graduation from MUS, July 6, 2000; ITEM122-115-R0104 Writing Proficiency Recommendation, January 15, 2004; ITEM 129-109-R1105 Writing Proficiency Policy, November 16, 2005.

Other admissions standards can be found on the OCHE website:  
<http://www.montana.edu/wochelp/borpol/>, listed in the 300 section.

## Training and Scoring (March 23—April 19) Registration

Please FAX this registration form as soon as possible, but at least **by March 15** to Jan Clinard: FAX (406) 444-1469. Or, you may call 444-0652 or e-mail [jclinard@oche.montana.edu](mailto:jclinard@oche.montana.edu) with this information.

**Please check the date and site you wish to attend.**

_____	March 23-24	MSU Great Falls COT Heritage Hall
_____	March 27-28	Billings (MSU-Billings Education Bldg)
_____	March 29-30	Miles City (Miles Community College)
_____	April 3-4	Helena (Colonial Inn)
_____	April 6-7	Missoula (Grant Creek Inn)
_____	April 10-11	Bozeman (Holiday Inn)
_____	April 18-19	Whitefish (Mountain Bank)

Name of School or Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Names of scorers:	E-mail addresses:	One College Credit? (Y/N)
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____
5. _____	_____	_____

6. Additional team members may be listed on another sheet.

For one college credit, scorers must complete an assignment PRIOR to scoring. For the Miles City and Billings sites, credit will be available from MSU-Billings. Contact [kholt@msubillings.edu](mailto:kholt@msubillings.edu) for assignment. For Bozeman and Great Falls, credit will be available from MSU-Bozeman. Contact [abangert@montana.edu](mailto:abangert@montana.edu) for assignment. For Missoula, Kalispell, and Helena credit will be available from UM-Missoula. Contact [beverly.chin@mso.umt.edu](mailto:beverly.chin@mso.umt.edu) for assignment. You may be charged a minimal processing fee for credit. Please be prepared to complete course registration materials.

## Training of Trainers (February 23-24) Helena, Holiday Inn Downtown

Please FAX this registration form as soon as possible, but at least **by February 10** to Jan Clinard: FAX (406) 444-1469. Or, you may call 444-0652 or e-mail [jclinard@oche.montana.edu](mailto:jclinard@oche.montana.edu) with this information. Note: Trainers must also participate in scoring and register on form above. To reserve sleeping rooms, call 443-2200 and ask for OCHE block.

Names of trainers:	Years scored:	Two College Credits? (Y/N)
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____

Trainers' expenses will be paid for 1) the Holiday Inn hotel room in Helena; 2) four days for substitute teachers; 3) two college credits; and 4) breakfasts and lunches at Training of Trainers and Training and Scoring sites.

- equitable and clearly communicated admissions practices at each campus of the Montana University System;
- effective proficiency-building course work and/or academic support services at each campus of the Montana University System, recognizing the resource constraints of the various campuses;
- collaborative programs and processes to assist high school students and their teachers to prepare for, and succeed in, the Montana University System Writing Assessment;
- processes and practices that sustain an ongoing professional dialogue between teachers of writing across the P-20 spectrum in Montana;
- identification of the measures and instruments necessary to provide meaningful data for the evaluation of the policy's provisions and the achievement of the policy's purposes;
- identification and allocation of resources necessary to support the policy.

In an effort to meet these criteria, the Implementation Committee will:

1. identify critical stakeholders and constituencies, and assist with the communication activities that involve those stakeholders;
2. review the writing proficiency requirement, in the context of admission and retention data from each of the campuses of the Montana University System, and advise the System on consistent and effective practices;
3. provide advice and support for the administration, training, scoring, data collection and reporting procedures of the Montana University System Writing Assessment;
4. make recommendations to improve writing instruction and assessment practices in the State based on test data from ACT, SAT, Advanced Placement and the Montana University System Writing Assessment;
5. assist with the ongoing professional dialogue between teachers of writing across the P-20 spectrum and recommend practices to improve that dialogue;
6. help identify and procure necessary resources to support student preparation in writing, communications, assessments, professional development and data analysis related to the writing proficiency initiative.

---

## **Training of Trainers Scheduled**

In Training of Trainers, educators: 1) learn principles of Montana's large scale writing assessment; 2) review prompts, select anchor papers, and write annotations; 3) conduct training and scoring sessions for other teachers; and 4) apply effective strategies for teaching and assessing writing. Participants may earn 2 graduate credits. Scoring is tentatively scheduled at seven regional sites. Three to five trainers are needed at each site.

While the development of new training materials is difficult and time-consuming, test users recommend annual introduction of new writing prompts. To achieve a balance, the MUS Writing Assessment uses two "old" prompts (and their anchor and practice papers) and two new prompts. To produce a timely set of training materials, teachers who administer the 2006 Writing Assessment before February 23 bring their completed tests to Training of Trainers.

Training of Trainers is slated to begin at 9 a.m. on Thursday, February 23 and adjourn at 3:30 p.m. on Friday, February 24 at the Holiday Inn in Helena. To make room reservations call 443-2200 and ask for the block of rooms under the Commissioner of Higher Education. Light breakfasts and lunches are provided each day.

Trainers have many of their expenses paid through a grant administered by the University of Montana. These paid expenses include a room at the Holiday Inn, substitute teacher costs, and college credits.

## **Online Testing Requires Computer Capacity**

Schools that elect to use the Online Version of the Montana University System Writing Assessment must have the computer and network capacity to test their students.

These requirements include the following:

- (1) computers with a processor speed of at least 250 MHz;
- (2) a browser that handles at least Javascript 1.1 (e.g. Internet Explorer version >4 or Netscape/Mozilla version >3 or Firefox version >0.99); and
- (3) a high school connection bandwidth >100 Kbits/second which should handle testing 50 students simultaneously. If the bandwidth is lower, then the school must test fewer students at a single time).

Schools using the online test may upload student names before the testing date or allow students to enter their own names. Students complete the information about themselves and their college plans online rather than using a scantron.

Although there are no paper test booklets, the prompts and test administration instructions are mailed to schools.

Tests are printed in Helena and bundled for scoring at the distributed test sites.

## Board Policy

### Enforcing Board Policy 301.7: The Board of Regents College Preparatory Program

Since 1990, students applying to the four-year degree programs of the Montana University System have been required to complete a College Preparatory Program (CPP). Counselors or other administrators submit their CPP courses to the Deputy Commissioner of Higher Education annually.

The Commissioner's Office has been reviewing these course lists over the past year, asking for documentation to ensure that the CPP courses meet the criteria established by the Policy. As a result, some courses that were previously approved as meeting a specific content area requirement have been moved to the "electives" category.

Not all high school courses are college preparatory, nor should they be. The purpose of some courses is to prepare students for the workforce immediately upon graduation. Some high school courses are remedial in nature, teaching skills that most students mastered before the ninth grade. In addition, each high school sets its own graduation requirements, which often include courses in life skills, physical education, or other areas that are not considered to be part of the college preparatory curriculum.

Portions of Policy 301.7 follow:

*In order to improve students' preparation for college-level work, the Board of Regents of Higher Education requires the following College Preparatory Program for students who wish to enter a campus of the Montana University System:*

*a. Four years of English: in each year the content of the courses should have an emphasis upon the development of written and oral communication skills and literature.*

*b. Three years of mathematics which shall include Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II (or the sequential content equivalent of these courses). Students are encouraged to take a math course in their senior year.*

*c. Three years of social studies which shall include Global studies (such as World History or World Geography); American History; and Government, Economics, Indian History or other third year courses.*

*d. Two years of laboratory science: one year must be earth science, biology, chemistry, or physics; the other year can be one of those sciences or another approved college preparatory laboratory science.*

*e. Two years chosen from the following:*

- *foreign language (preferably two years)*
- *computer science*

- *visual and performing arts, or*
- *vocational education units which meet the Office of Public Instruction guidelines.*

The "Procedures" section of the Policy states that: *Only persons who have completed the College Preparatory Program shall be eligible for a) Regents High School Honor Scholarships; and b) Other state-supported scholarships, fee waivers, or grants-in-aid awarded on the basis of academic achievement.*

To determine which courses meet the criteria for a College Preparatory Program, we recommend the following:

- If a course is questioned, send a syllabus and if available, the page(s) from your district curriculum document that shows alignment to state content standards.
- If your high school has an elective curriculum in the core content areas required for graduation (such as English), it's important that during their four years in that content area, students have covered all the content standards for Communication Arts found in the Montana School Accreditation Standards. Your curriculum documents should indicate which standards are met by each course. College preparatory courses in English emphasize *the development of written and oral communication skills and literature.*
- Make certain that course descriptions or syllabi are accurate. If the course description indicates that the purpose of the course is to "develop competence on the job," it may not be a college-preparatory course.
- The Montana Accreditation Content Standards provide a good basis for a course description or for curriculum, but content standards alone cannot be used to describe a course.

An example of the difference in college preparation and life skills or vocational preparation is the difference in economics (which qualifies among *three years of social studies*) and consumer science (a vocational education elective). Much of economics is theory, whereas consumer science tends to stress how students themselves seek employment, pay taxes, apply for Social Security, budget, etc. A class that attempted to do both might teach some practical, applied skills under the economic theories of exchange and consumption.

Remember that the purpose of the College Preparatory Program is to promote student success **at a four-year university**. Electives in foreign languages, fine arts and computer science will prepare your students better than vocational courses. For more information about the College Preparatory Program, see the "Preparing for College" webpage: <http://mus.montana.edu/hscp/index.html> or call Cathy Doyle at 444-0314.



## Students Use WEBwriters to Prepare for Writing Assessment

<http://webwriters.msugf.edu/>

WEBWriters provides students with the information and practice needed to earn top scores on the Montana University System Writing Assessment. At WEBWriters, students find clues about how to write a persuasive essay, the scoring rubric, sample essays, and links to more information about writing. WEBwriters is funded by the Student Assistance Foundation of Montana.

Some of Montana's top English teachers have volunteered to score practice essays. With WEBWriters, students get some feedback on their writing from the same teachers who will score the test in April. Students are encouraged to first get all the information they can from the self-help on WEBWriters. Then, if they want feedback, their teachers should schedule 40 minutes to type a practice essay and submit it to WEBWriters.

The school codes needed to submit essays are the "SC" four-digit numbers found in OPI's school directory and used in several programs at OPI. This directory is available online from OPI at [www.opi.state.mt.us](http://www.opi.state.mt.us). Click on Programs and Services, then School Directory, and scroll through the School Directory to find the SC listed after your school's name.



### Writing Proficiency Steering Committee

Beverly Ann Chin 243-2463  
Department of English  
The University of Montana  
32 Campus Drive  
Missoula, MT 59801  
[Beverly.chin@mso.umt.edu](mailto:Beverly.chin@mso.umt.edu)

Jocelyn Siler 243-4204  
Department of English  
The University of Montana  
32 Campus Drive  
Missoula MT 59812-1013  
[jfsiler@ism.net](mailto:jfsiler@ism.net)

Kathy Holt 657-2337  
College of Education CAFÉ Office  
Montana State University – Billings  
Billings MT 59101-0252  
[kholt@msubillings.edu](mailto:kholt@msubillings.edu)

Marsha Davis 447-8344  
Superintendent of Schools  
Lewis and Clark County  
316 North Park  
Helena, MT 59601  
[Mdavis@co.lewis-clark.mt.us](mailto:Mdavis@co.lewis-clark.mt.us)

Bruce Messinger 324-2001  
Superintendent  
Helena Public Schools  
55 South Rodney  
Helena MT 59601  
[bmessinger@helena.k12.mt.us](mailto:bmessinger@helena.k12.mt.us)

Phil Gaines 994-5194  
English Department  
Montana State University  
PO Box 172440  
Bozeman MT 59717-2300  
[gaines@english.montana.edu](mailto:gaines@english.montana.edu)

Arlene Walker-Andrews  
Associate Provost  
The University of Montana  
Missoula, MT 59812-3324  
[Arlene.Walker-Andrews@umontana.edu](mailto:Arlene.Walker-Andrews@umontana.edu)

Steve Tull  
PO Box 400  
Superior MT 59872  
[Stullmt@yahoo.com](mailto:Stullmt@yahoo.com)

Greg Hirst 653-1771  
211 Dawson  
Wolf Point MT 59201  
[Middy@nemotel.net](mailto:Middy@nemotel.net)

Katie Myers 268-6031  
GFPS PO Box 2429  
Great Falls MT 59403  
[Katie\\_myers@gfps.k12.mt.us](mailto:Katie_myers@gfps.k12.mt.us)

Mary Moe 771-4310  
Dean  
MSU GF College of Technology  
PO Box 6010  
Great Falls MT 59406-6010  
[mmoe@msugf.edu](mailto:mmoe@msugf.edu)

Judy Snow 444-3656  
Office of Public Instruction  
1300 Eleventh Avenue  
Helena MT 59620  
[jsnow@mt.gov](mailto:jsnow@mt.gov)

*Committee Members  
welcome your input.*

*Writing Proficiency  
Admissions Standards*