

Writing Proficiency in the Montana University System

Newsletter Twenty-Eight **January 2009**

Testing and Professional Development Schedule Set

The 2009 Montana University System Writing Assessment may be administered on any day during a month-long window, **February 2 through 27**. Nearly 9,000 students are expected to test this year, 5,000 of whom will submit essays online (www.muswa.com). One advantage of selecting the online version is that these tests can be electronically retrieved should questions arise about their scores.

Training of Trainers, designed for experienced scorers who want to refine their leadership and training skills, will be held **February 18-19** in Helena, at Jorgenson's Inn. Currently, 46 trainers are registered. Trainers' lodging in Helena, four days of substitute teacher costs, and college credit are grant-funded.

Schools that participate in the MUSWA must send teachers, administrators, and/or counselors to assist with the scoring process, learn how the tests are scored and discuss the features of proficient writing with others, including college instructors. These annual workshops are critical to improving the quality of student writing. In order to complete the scoring process, one scorer is needed per forty tests.

Training and Scoring Sessions have been scheduled throughout Montana so that all interested teachers can find a site and a date that is convenient.



Registration materials are available on the website: <http://mus.edu/writingproficiency/index.asp>. Participants may earn Renewal Units at no cost or College Credit at a significant discount.

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Visit our website :

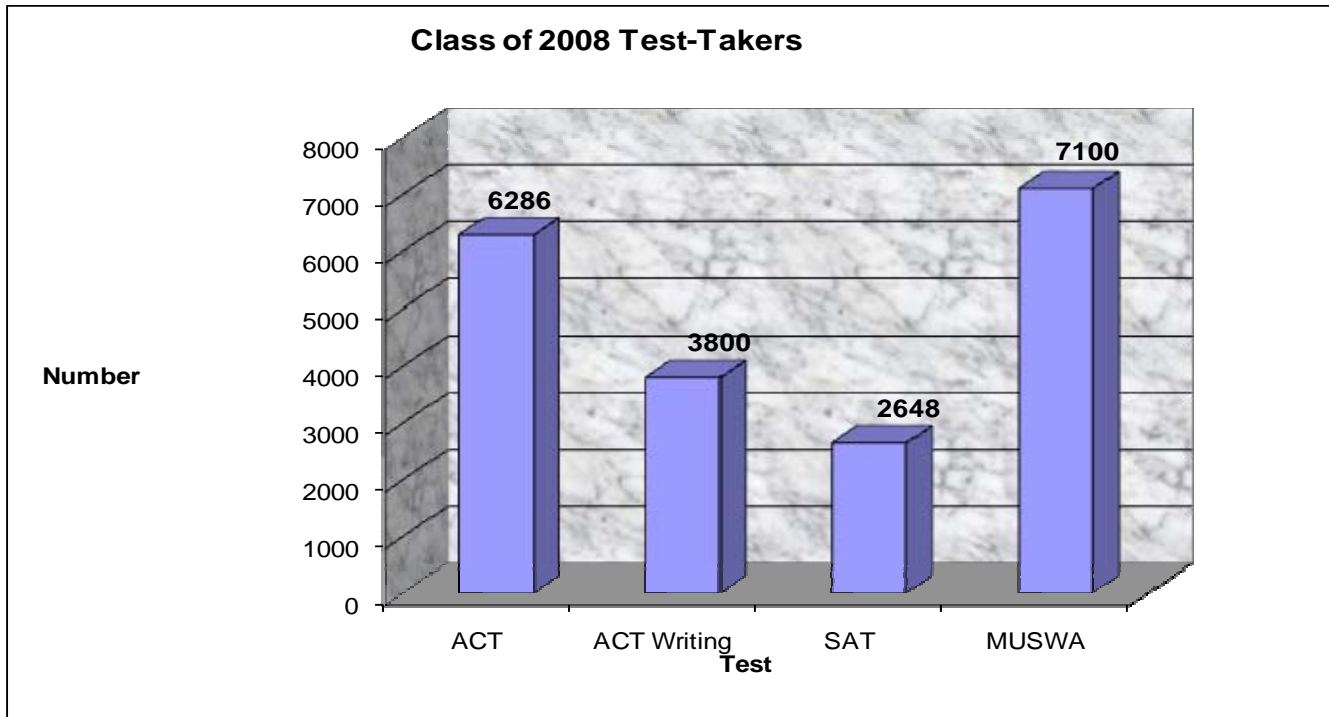
<http://mus.edu/writingproficiency/index.htm>

All newsletters are on the website.

Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education

Proficiency
Admissions

Over 60% of Montana's 11,202 Class of 2008 Took Entrance Exams



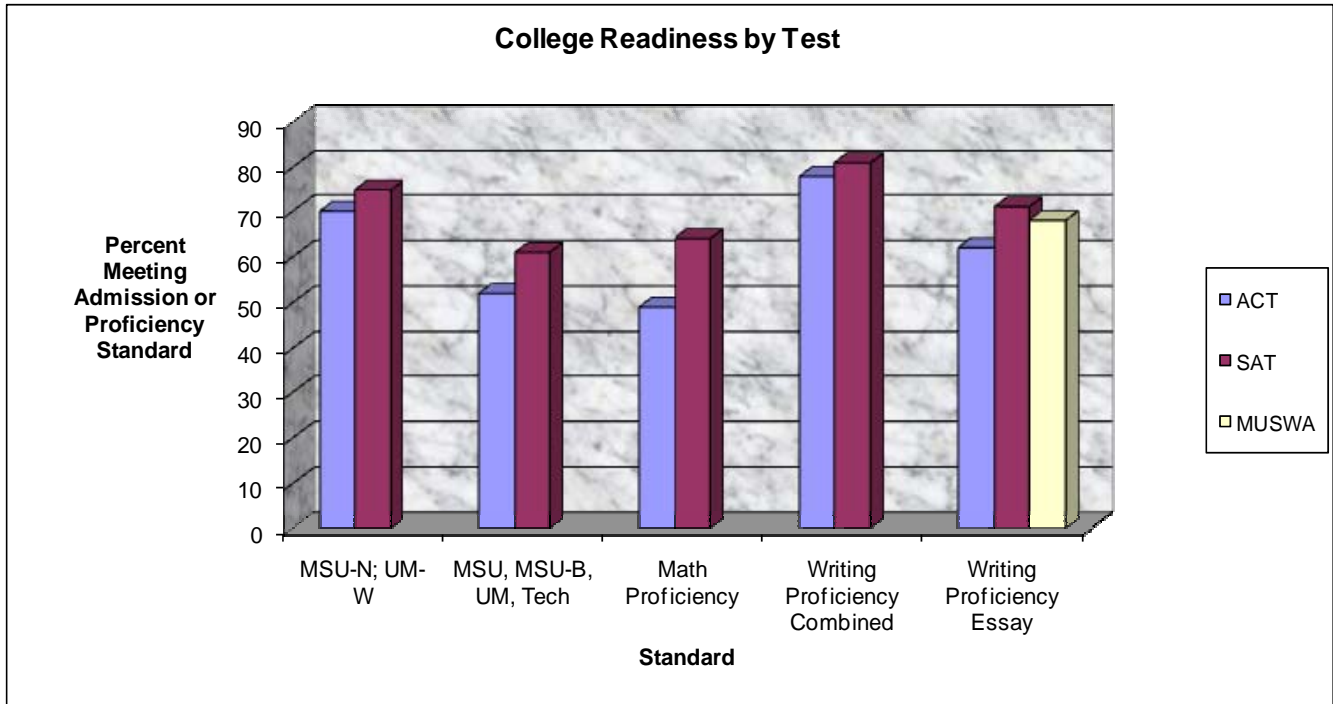
How does Montana's college continuation rate compare to the percent of students taking admissions exams?

In 2006, 58% of Montana's high school graduates went directly to college, which is very close to the 60% of Montana's test-takers. Of the 7,100 MUSWA test-takers, 30% indicated that they plan to attend college out of state. About 34% of Montana's high school graduates attend college in the MUS, and that percent rises to 38% if community and tribal colleges are included.

Why do so many high school students take the MUSWA when ACT and SAT now offer writing assessments?

The MUSWA is the writing assessment of choice for most of Montana's high schools because it provides a number of benefits to the students, teachers, and schools:

1. Students can select from two different prompts, can write for up to 40 minutes, and have the option of word-processing their essays. ACT and SAT offer none of these features.
2. Students who earn the highest scores receive *Letters of Recognition* for their scholarship and college application files.
3. Teachers can participate in intensive professional development in writing instruction and assessment each spring, learning how they can better prepare their students for college writing and interacting with teachers and college instructors from their regions.
4. Teachers can earn college credits or OPI Renewal Units for participation in the professional development activities related to the MUSWA.
5. Participating schools can use Webwriters (funded by SAF) for student instruction and the submission of practice essays.
6. Schools get feedback on the writing proficiency of all their students, including information on their strengths and weaknesses, comparisons with state data, and feedback on school improvement gains.



Depending on the Measure, Between 49% to 81% of the Montana's Students tested College Ready

The first column above, shows the percent of students who earned composite scores of at least 20 on the ACT or 1440 on the SAT, the minimum test scores threshold for entry into MSU Northern or UM Western. The second column shows the percent of students who earned at least 22 on the ACT or 1540 on the SAT, thresholds for the other four-year campuses. Next, is the percent of students who met the mathematics threshold. The Writing Proficiency "Combined" shows the percent of students meeting the threshold on the ACT or SAT Writing Score, combining multiple choice with the essay. Finally, are the percentages of students whose essays alone indicate they are ready for college-level composition.

Montana's averages look pretty good. Why, then, do approximately 1/3 of entering freshmen require some form of remediation?

Their averages are very near the thresholds for placement into college-level mathematics. Their average on the math portion of the ACT was 21.8, but a 22 is required for placement into college-level math. Based simply on the ACT score, only 49% of these students would place into college-level math. After taking additional coursework as seniors and another placement exam on campus (if they score near the threshold), 37% of the incoming freshman from Montana's high schools are placed into developmental math courses.

Their averages are above the thresholds for placement into college-level composition. Their average on the composite score of the ACT was 21.2 (the threshold score is 18) and on the essay alone, the average was 7.2 (the threshold is 7). As a result, 12.4% of these students are placed into developmental composition.

How do states leverage entrance exams to increase college preparation rates and preparation?

In Montana, as in other states, data showing how taking rigorous high school coursework leads to higher test scores and higher college continuation rates, has been used to promote a rigorous core. Montana's Office of Public Instruction has just published "Are You Ready for Success?" Many states have increased their graduation requirements to match their college entrance standards or to set a rigorous core for all students.

The MUSWA tells students early if they're ready for college writing. In addition, a number of states now pay for a college entrance exam for all high school juniors and as a result, have seen their college-going rates increase. In Colorado, after requiring that all students take the ACT, enrollment in the state's two- and four-year campuses increased 34.4% between 2001 and 2003. Illinois, another ACT state adoption, saw college enrollment increase 24% between 2001 and 2002.



After schools register for the 2009 Writing Assessment, their school names and codes are sent to MSU Great Falls to be uploaded on the pull-down menu of the Webwriters website. Schools can expect a delay of several days. Please remember that the number of webscorers is limited.

The Montana University System appreciates the generosity of the Student Assistance Foundation, which funds Webwriters.

How the MUS Implements Policy and Connects with K-12 to Promote College-Readiness

The annual cost of remediation (courses that prepare students for entry-level college work) is \$8 million in the Montana University System (excluding community and tribal colleges). Each year, of the 3,500 students who graduate from a Montana high school and enter the MUS, about 35% must begin with at least one “developmental” class that does not count toward a college degree. Over the past decade, the MUS has convened P-20 committees to implement policies and programs that address this issue, with minimal state funding. Some have opposed these efforts, believing that preparing all students for college is overly-ambitious and unnecessary in an economy with so many low-paying jobs.

Nonetheless, the majority of Montana’s school district leaders embrace the concept that every student should graduate college-ready or prepared for family-sustaining work. Many high schools have raised their graduation standards above the state minimum to match college admissions standards. As a key indicator of how well they are preparing students, the majority of Montana’s high schools participate voluntarily and at their own expense in the MUS Writing Proficiency Initiative. Each year, the MUSWA (Montana University System Writing Assessment) is administered to nearly 8,000 high school juniors and scored by over 300 college and K-12 staff members and pre-service teachers in eight regional workshops where P-20 connects through pointed conversations about what it means to be college-ready. Students know as juniors if they will be placed into developmental or college-level composition and have their senior year to improve writing skills. High school teachers know what skills their students must have acquired for college success. Pre-service teachers sample the instructional issues they will face. Colleges now see reduced remediation rates in composition.

The MUS approach to improving college-readiness in writing includes:

- a Writing Proficiency Policy that sets a clear standard defining college-readiness using five measures (ACT, SAT, MUSWA, AP and IB);
- 18 full days of professional development for high school teachers each year;
- websites, publications, and conference presentations; and
- detailed data for high schools, colleges, and students about writing skills.

For mathematics, booklets, posters, and leaflets were published, a policy based on ACT and SAT benchmarks for readiness adopted, and a “rigorous core” advocated. This work has also yielded positive results. As the mathematics standard’s proficiency levels have increased, more students are entering the MUS prepared for college algebra.

To ensure alignment and consistency in admissions, placement, and remediation practices across the system, the Board of Regents has also adopted rules for Provisional Admission and Developmental Education. The MUS webpage on College Readiness (<http://mus.edu/collegeprep.asp>) describes this work in detail and contains links to these aligned Board of Regents policies:

- 301.15 Mathematics Proficiency
- 301.16 Writing Proficiency
- 301.17 Composition Placement
- 301.18 Developmental Education

2009 Writing Assessment Workshops

Training and scoring for the Montana University Writing Assessment provides a rewarding professional development opportunity for the writing teachers of Montana, from K-12 and college levels. Several convenient sites are hosting these events and trainers from local schools and colleges serve as leaders. Evaluations from previous workshops often include statements such as “the best professional development ever” and “I wouldn’t miss this!”

Beginning at 8:15 a.m. on the first day, participants learn to use the rubric by scoring several sets of essays. Scorers end the first day by completing a “calibration” set to ensure that they can use the rubric accurately. After a short review on day two, each participant scores about 80 essays, ending by around 3:30 p.m., depending on the pace of scoring. Scorers work at tables, developing new friendships, picking up tips on teaching writing, and coming to consensus about proficiency levels of the writers. Breakfast snacks and lunch are provided on both days. Participants should expect each day to begin at 8:15 and end between 3:15 and 4:00 p.m.

Each school must cover travel and substitute teacher costs for its teachers. There is no registration fee. College credit is available for a small processing fee and OPI renewal units are available at no cost. Participants are responsible for arranging their own lodging. Scorers are not obligated to attend the closest site or the same site as school colleagues.

Please FAX this registration form to Jan Clinard (406) 444-1469 as soon as possible, but at least by February 27. Or, you may call 444-0652 or e-mail jclinard@montana.edu with this information.

From: _____
Name of School or Institution

Please circle the date and site you will and staff members will attend.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Monday and Tuesday, March 9-10 | Helena: The Colonial Inn |
| Monday and Tuesday, March 16-17 | Kalispell: Glacier High School |
| Wednesday and Thursday, March 18-19 | Missoula: Hilton Garden Inn |
| Monday and Tuesday, March 23-24 | Billings: MSU-Billings, SUB Lewis and Clark Room |
| Tuesday and Wednesday, March 24-25 | Miles City: Miles Community College |
| Thursday and Friday, March 26-27 | Bozeman: Hilton Garden Inn |
| Monday and Tuesday, March 30-31 | Glasgow: Cottonwood Inn |
| Wednesday and Thursday, April 1-2 | Great Falls: MSU-GF COT, Heritage Hall |

Participant’s (Scorer’s) Names	E-Mail Address
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____
6. _____	_____