

# Writing Proficiency in the Montana University System

Newsletter 30 August 2009

## Scores Correlate with College Selections

In early 2009, nearly 8,000 Montana students took the Montana University System Writing Assessment. Newsletter 29, mailed to participating schools in May and available on the Writing Proficiency website, reported statewide scores with frequency distributions at each score point, a graph showing gains made over nine testing years, and other information. This newsletter delves more deeply into the test data.

Students must score at least 3.5 in order to be fully admitted to a four-year program in the Montana University System or to be placed into College Writing 101. Otherwise, they are provisionally admitted until they earn a C- or better in a developmental composition course.

The graph below shows **percent, not number**, of students at each score point who indicated which type of post-secondary educational institution in Montana they plan to attend. In general, students who score below 3.5 plan to attend a two-year program, where several developmental courses are offered and where they can be admitted without provisions. For example, 62% of the students selecting Tribal College, 48% selecting College of Technology, 38% selecting Community College, and 22% selecting Four-year University scored below 3.5. The average scores also show a

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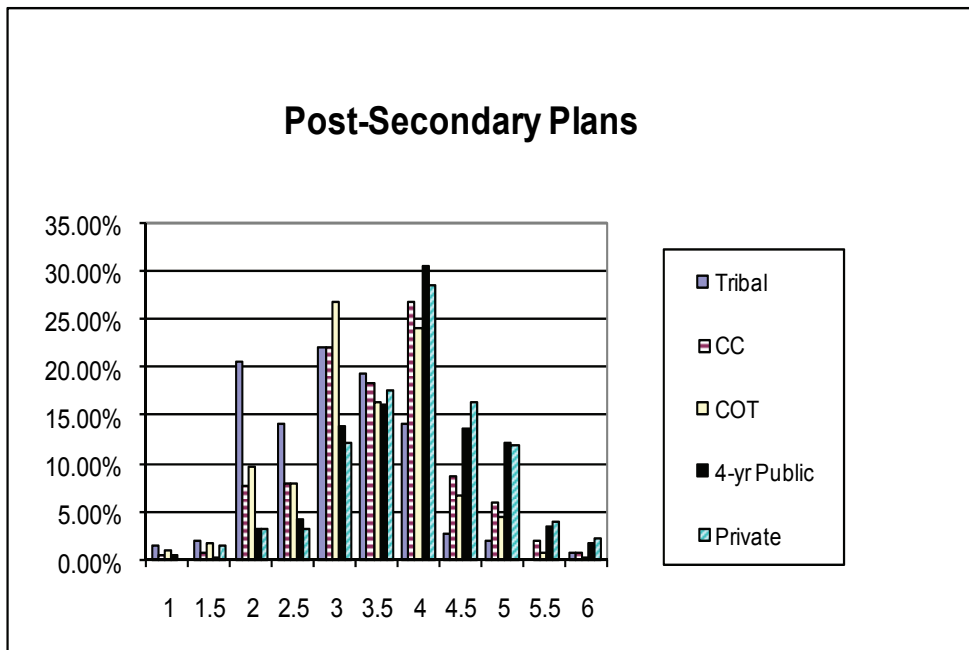
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<http://mus.edu/writingproficiency/index.asp>

**Average Score by Selected College Plans**

Tribal	CC	COT	4-yr	Private
2.96	3.53	3.34	3.90	3.94



**Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education**

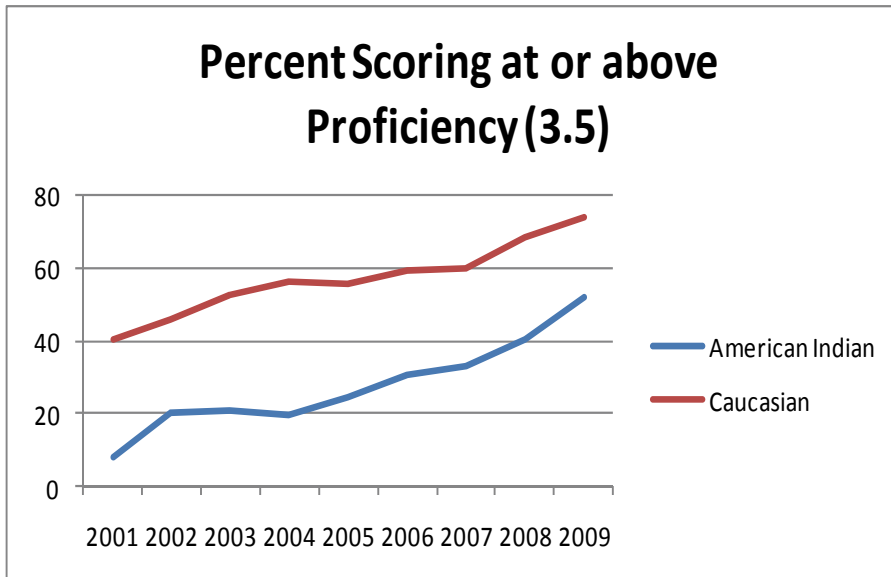
**Proficiency Admissions**

### American Indian Scores Continue to Improve

Score	2001		2002		2003		2004		2005		2006		2007		2008		2009	
	Indian	White	Indian	White	Indian	White	Indian	White	Indian	White	Indian	White	Indian	White	Indian	White	Indian	White
1	15.8	2.4	5.0	1.6	6.9	1.7	4.8	1.1	3.6	1.0	3.4	0.8	2.4	0.8	2.5	0.7	1.1	0.6
1.5	12.7	3.7	5.0	2.4	8.0	3.4	7.2	1.2	5.9	1.9	5.2	0.7	5.5	1.2	3.2	0.7	1.5	0.5
2	28.5	13.7	23.5	10.6	24.4	9.6	22.9	8.9	27.0	8.6	17.1	6.2	16.9	6.9	14.8	4.8	11.6	4.5
2.5	16.7	13.8	17.0	11.3	16.4	10.8	19.1	9.7	16.6	9.0	15.6	6.8	14.3	7.6	13.2	6.6	11.4	4.8
3	14.0	22.3	28.0	27.9	22.2	21.4	26.6	23.1	22.1	23.9	27.1	25.5	27.8	23.7	25.1	18.5	21.6	15.9
3.5	4.4	14.8	10.5	16.6	14.6	18.2	7.9	16.4	9.4	15.5	15.2	16.3	13.0	16.4	14.8	17.2	21.4	14.4
4	3.5	12.3	7.5	15.8	4.7	14.5	6.8	18.2	8.1	18.5	9.8	20.5	13.0	22.3	13.9	26.4	19.7	29.1
4.5	0.4	7.0	1.0	7.1	1.1	9.9	3.1	11.0	5.5	11.0	1.8	10.5	3.7	10.0	5.5	11.6	6.0	12.7
5		4.3	0.5	4.7	0.4	6.9	1.4	7.3	1.6	7.4	2.7	8.8	2.4	7.7	5.3	9.1	4.1	11.3
5.5		1.0	0.5	1.3		2.6	0.3	2.2		2.0	0.9	2.1	0.7	2.1	0.5	2.7	0.4	3.4
6		0.7	0.0	0.4		0.8		0.9		1.2	0.0	1.3	0.0	1.1	0.2	1.5	0.4	1.7
Number	228	2793	200	2679	275	3104	297	3984	307	5056	328	5940	454	6175	438	6124	534	6514
Mean					2.55		2.66		2.73		2.85		2.94		3.08		3.24	
% below	60.9	23.9	33.5	14.6	40.7	15.1	34.8	11.2	36.5	11.5	25.7	7.7	24.8	8.9	20.5	6.3	14.2	5.6
% above	3.9	25.3	9.5	29.3	6.2	34.6	11.6	39.6	15.2	40.1	15.2	43.1	19.8	43.2	25.4	51.3	30.6	58.2

### MUSWA Training Recognizes Diverse Approaches to Composing

Ethnicity is an important factor in analyzing test results. On the 2009 MUSWA, about 8% of the test-takers identified themselves as American Indian. In order to mitigate bias in scoring, training materials for scorers include sample papers that use narrative to persuade or less linear approaches to organization, yet still earn high ratings. These approaches to writing may be used more often in non-white cultures. American Indian students have made steady gains over the seven years of testing, in part because their teachers are committed to participating in training and scoring sessions, learning how they can better prepare all students for college writing.



### Gap May Be Closing

All students continue to show gains on the Montana University System Writing Assessment and their improved college readiness is beginning to reduce the remediation rate in Montana's colleges.

The improvement curve is even steeper for Montana's American Indian students, even though the number of AI students taking the MUSWA has more than doubled since 2001.

## Girls Outperform Boys in Writing on MUSWA, ACT, and SAT

In 2009, there was again an achievement gap of about .4 (similar to every year except 2004) between male and female writers. However, 2009 saw improvement for boys in several ways. In 2009, boys wrote 39% of the 6's; in 2008 36% of the 6's; in 2007, boys wrote 32% of the 6's. Twice as many boys wrote papers that were given 0's, meaning they could not be scored because they were off-topic or completely inappropriate. (In 2008, it was four times as many.) In 2009, 2.7% of the girls wrote papers in the 1-2 range, whereas 17% of the boys wrote 1's and 2's—indicating they are not nearly ready for college writing. Male students earned an average score of 3.57 (up from 3.44 in 2008), whereas females averaged 3.95 (up from 3.83 in 2008).

Score	Male		Female	
0	13	0.33%	6	0.16%
0.5	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
1	39	1.00%	8	0.21%
1.5	38	0.97%	16	0.41%
2	295	7.56%	108	2.80%
2.5	290	7.43%	138	3.58%
3	758	19.43%	553	14.34%
3.5	632	16.20%	602	15.61%
4	1033	26.48%	1142	29.61%
4.5	393	10.07%	531	13.77%
5	290	7.43%	517	13.40%
5.5	73	1.87%	164	4.25%
6	47	1.20%	72	1.87%
Total	3901	100.00%	3857	100.00%

This trend showing girls more likely to be prepared for college composition than boys can be found in other measures, as well. For the class of 2009, girls outperformed boys in English (21.7 vs. 20.6) and reading (22.8 vs. 22.5) on the ACT. Boys edged out girls in math (22.4 vs. 21.2 and science 22.2 vs. 21.3), resulting in composite scores of 21.9 for females and 22.1 for males. A total of 5,960 Montana students in the class of 2009 took the ACT, with 469 more girls taking the ACT than did boys.

For the graduating class of 2009, 1,592 males and 2,079 females took the Optional ACT Writing Test. Girls had an average essay score of 7.3 and boys had an average essay score of 6.7. These scores are equivalent to 3.6 and a 3.4 on the MUSWA. The Writing Proficiency

Policy also sets a combined writing score of 18 as the threshold for full admission. On the combined score, the girls' average was 21.5 and boys averaged 20.1.

For the class of 2009, boys averaged 511 and girls averaged 526 on the combined writing portion of the SAT, taken by 871 males and 1,056 females. The average essay score for boys was 7.2 and for girls was 7.5. Policy 301.16 requires either a combined score of 440 or an essay score of 7 for placement into college composition.

Members of the Writing Proficiency Steering Committee suggest that more nonfiction reading and writing may help improve writing scores of male students. Teachers interested in researching this topic further are encouraged to contact Jan Clinard (jclinard@montana.edu) for test samples, data, and ideas for graduate research.

## ESL Students Score Below State Average

Only 133 students indicated that English is not their primary language. The chart to the right shows the distribution of their scores in comparison to students whose primary language is English. On average, ESL students scored 3.27, compared to the state average of 3.76. However, 12.8% of those students were able to write high-level essays (above 4), compared to only 8.4% in 2008.

Score	English		ESL	
0	18	0.24%	1	0.75%
1	46	0.60%	1	0.75%
1.5	51	0.67%	3	2.26%
2	388	5.09%	13	9.77%
2.5	409	5.37%	19	14.29%
3	1276	16.74%	35	26.32%
3.5	1215	15.94%	19	14.29%
4	2151	28.22%	25	18.80%
4.5	916	12.02%	5	3.76%
5	798	10.47%	9	6.77%
5.5	236	3.10%	2	1.50%
6	118	1.55%	1	0.75%
	7622	100.00%	133	100.00%

## Inter-rater Reliability Analyzed

This table shows that for 61.4% of the essays, both scorers were in perfect agreement with the score and that only 1.5% required a third reader, called the resolver. These figures translate into an inter-rater reliability coefficient of .873, using Cronbach’s Alpha, compared to .872 in 2008 and .873 in 2007. This reliability data is considered high among performance assessments of this nature. Many scorers feel that sometimes the “correct score” lies between two whole-number score points and are satisfied with a final score of 3.5, for example, which represents two adjacent scores.

Inter-rater Reliability		
Rater Scoring	#	%
Perfect	4755	61.4%
Adjacent	2875	37.1%
Discrepant	113	1.5%
Grand Total	7743	100.0%

Another set of statistics, of particular interest to trainers, are tables that disaggregate data by scoring site and show how many tests were scored at each site. For 2009, the percent of scores with perfect agreement as figured by site ranged from 58.02% to 63.19%.

Missoula hosted more scorers than other sites, in part because many pre-service teachers enrolled in the University of Montana consider this training essential to their preparation as teachers of writing.

Location	tests	scorers
Kalispell	1040	41
Missoula	1535	75
Great Falls	929	39
Helena	1494	44
Billings	1153	50
Miles City	334	17
Glasgow	592	25
Bozeman	622	26
Total	7699	317

Accuracy in scoring is also checked by printing a random sample of tests twice and sending them to two different scoring sites. Where there is a difference, the higher score is reported to the student. The few tests that are found to have discrepant scores are then reprinted for trainers to analyze and use to improve scoring accuracy in the following year.

### Prompts Analyzed for Consistency and Fairness

	Prompt 1	Prompt 2	Prompt 3	Prompt 4	Prompt 5	Prompt 6
Perfect	914	815	858	659	887	550
Adjacent	571	493	550	432	481	311
Discrepant	23	14	11	17	36	14
Grand Total	1508	1322	1419	1108	1404	875
Perfect	60.61%	61.65%	60.47%	59.48%	63.18%	62.86%
Adjacent	37.86%	37.29%	38.76%	38.99%	34.26%	35.54%
Discrepant	1.53%	1.06%	0.78%	1.53%	2.56%	1.60%

Each year, prompts are rated based on how often they are chosen by students, their inter-rater reliability, average scores, and the distribution of solutions that students defend. The prompts are paired, then distributed as evenly as possible to students. This chart shows that prompt #1 was somewhat more popular than

#2 (53% vs. 47%); prompt #3 more popular than #4 (56% vs. 44%); and prompt #5 much more popular than #6 (61% vs. 39%). Prompts #4 and #6 were new to the 2009 test. However, prompt #6, which was chosen by the fewest students, had the highest average score (3.91) and prompt #1, which was chosen most often, had the lowest average score (3.66). The chart above also shows inter-rater reliability by prompt.

In terms of options (first or second solution to the problem, or a third solution invented by the writer), the prompt with the most balance among three options was prompt #4 (45%, 31%, and 24%) and Prompt #3 generated the fewest invented solutions (5.7%), with 37.6% taking the first option and 56.6% defending the second option. This data will help determine which 2009 prompt(s) to retire in 2010.

## Scorers Rate Writing Assessment Workshops Highly; But Some Want Abbreviated Sessions for Experienced Scorers

At the close of each Writing Assessment Workshop, scorers are asked to rate the workshops on several factors by responding to a series of statements:

### **This workshop helps me prepare students for college writing and/or other writing assessments.**

99% of the respondents agreed with this statement. Comments included the following:

- Since I have become a scorer, I have used my knowledge to help my students become better writers.
- It gave me a clear picture of expectations.
- I get a greater sense of the scope of abilities and I'm able to formulate more informed goals for my students.
- You almost "become" the rubric in those 2 days.
- It clarifies our weaknesses.

### **I think the prompts generated useful pieces of writing and were fair and unbiased.**

99% of the respondents agreed with this statement and commented as follows:

- They were all relevant to today's kids.
- Students had strong feelings.
- Some prompts are boring.
- They draw upon a student's background knowledge.

### **With some exceptions, I think students took this test seriously.**

98% agreed with this statement and wrote comments such as these:

- Almost every test I scored had a serious answer.

- It was easy to tell if a student was very adept but did not stay serious about the topic.
- I was very impressed by the way students were on topic.
- Low-scoring papers were not because of lack of effort.
- I was actually surprised by how serious even my goof-offs were.

### **I believe that I can score tests reliably with this rubric.**

96% agreed with this statement, writing comments such as:

- Each year I gain confidence, but I can see why retraining is so important.
- The more I work with it, the more I like it.
- The rubric, yes, but not some annotations.
- The rubric addresses all areas, but allows for individual biases.
- I would like to see more clarity between a 3 and a 4.
- It was fair and accurate.

### **Pacing of the training was appropriate.**

90% agreed with this statement. Comments included these:

- Training time was just right.
- We did not get a chance to finish our discussions.
- The pace of the first day was too fast. The second day was great.
- We might have a separate session for experienced scorers.
- A bit rushed!
- Wish it could be shorter!
- I appreciated the constant anchor exercises.

Note: Although some experienced scorers become frustrated with 45 minutes of overview and three hours of anchor papers and practice sets on day one, new scorers complain that this portion of the training goes too fast. Almost everyone likes the consensus sets, scheduled for about an hour on the first afternoon. However, experienced scorers are valuable to the discussions of the anchor, practice, and consensus sets. Excusing experienced scorers from the first part of training could negatively affect the group dynamics at each scoring table and disrupt travel plans for some.

Experienced scorers are urged to become trainers, so that their experience can be used as an asset. Concrete ideas about how best to use experienced scorers, while not rushing the training for new scorers are welcomed! Send ideas to: (jclinard@montana.edu).

### **Although it's hard work, I had the right number of papers and amount of time to score accurately.**

98% of the respondents agreed, commenting:

- I did not feel rushed to score well.
- Just as long as the others would be quiet when we're trying to score!
- Scoring seemed really easy this year.
- As I gain experience, it will go faster.
- It was fun, but now I know what students mean by "I worked so hard my brow hurts."

### Nation Shines Spotlight on College Readiness

Teachers and administrators who have been working with the Montana University System to improve the Writing and Math Proficiency of their students are probably not surprised when they read articles about the importance of aligning high school curriculum with college readiness standards. The latest studies show that college and work readiness are almost identical. In fact, ACT's 2009 Fall Educator Workshops have been renamed "College and Career Readiness Workshops" (Scheduled nine to noon at MSU Billings September 17 and in Kalispell at Glacier High School on September 23).

Setting Up Success in Developmental Education (Achieving the Dream/ Jobs for the Future, June 2009) suggests Preventive Strategies such as "defining and aligning college-readiness standards and expectations and providing opportunities for students to meet those standards before enrolling in college." According to this publication, "There is a growing interest in administering college-readiness placement tests to high school juniors and seniors prior to high school graduation to determine if they are on track to be ready for college or if remediation is needed to avoid being placed in developmental education." The California State University System's Early Assessment Program administers a state test to high school students before their senior year, giving them time to address deficiencies before graduation.

Although Montana doesn't make the national press, high schools that participate in the MUSWA are able to clearly define the necessary college writing skills to students and encourage them to retake the MUSWA if they plan to go to college and have scores below 3.5. Some schools target instruction for those students so that their writing will improve.

Texas mandates an assessment of incoming students using a statewide system that can help diagnose academic needs as well as track progress over time. Although Montana's Writing Proficiency Policy allows the use of ACT, SAT, and AP, the MUSWA is now very close to a statewide test. Tracking the progress of students after leaving high school should be our next step. Texas is also lauded for the systematic placement of students into appropriate courses. Montana's Composition Placement Policy achieves that, but a Mathematics Placement Policy is needed.

The Montana Office of Public Instruction has recently signed on with the National Governors' Association to develop Common Core Standards for college readiness. Accompanying this movement are new grant opportunities, such as "Race to the Top," which insists that states "develop and implement common, high quality assessments" aligned with standards that build toward college and career readiness by the time of high school graduation.

With OPI's new Communication Arts Curriculum Specialist, Kristine Goyins, and the many opportunities to collaborate on standards and assessment throughout the state, the time may be ripe for moving MUSWA into the national spotlight.

### 2010 Testing Window and Writing Workshop Dates Set

Schools may plan ahead to a **testing window of February 1-26 for the 2010 MUSWA**. Schools should schedule a regular testing date, as well as one day for make-up tests within this window

Scoring workshops will follow this schedule:

- March 8-9 Kalispell
- March 10-11 Missoula
- March 15-16 Billings
- March 16-17 Miles City
- March 18-19 Glasgow
- March 22-23 Great Falls
- March 24-25 Helena
- March 29-30 Bozeman

Please mark your calendars with these dates. You are not obligated to attend the training nearest you, nor must all personnel from a single school district attend the same workshop. Teachers from all grade levels and subject areas are encouraged to attend.

As a rule of thumb, large schools should send at least one scorer for every 40 essays they submit. In 2009, 7,800 essays were scored by 317 people, averaging about 25 essays per scorer. Because the colleges and universities contribute scorers, school districts do not need to send one scorer for every 25 essays. Essays are read twice. Therefore, each participant scored about 50 essays.

College credit may be earned (with an outside assignment) and OPI renewal units are available.

### **Kristine Goyins Joins OPI As Communication Arts Curriculum Specialist**

Greetings from OPI!

I would like to introduce myself, Kris Goyins, the new Communication Arts Curriculum Specialist at the Montana Office of Public Instruction. I am honored to be holding the job title once held by Dr. Claudette Morton and Dr. Jan Clinard. I joined OPI in early winter and have been working full time since June after fulfilling my teaching contract with the Elliston School in Elliston, Montana. I am thankful for this opportunity to help assist teachers with implementing standards-based education in their classrooms.

Please be looking forward to the new Montana Communication Arts Content Standards. A talented group of Montana's educators gathered in Helena over four separate weekends between January and April to work on revising and drafting new standards for Montana's students. The draft has gone through many reviews and revisions, and will begin the adoption process by the Montana Board of Public Education in the fall.

I want to take this time to thank all of the members of the revision team. Their hard work, dedication, and expertise have created a framework of measurable standards and benchmarks that more effectively guide local curriculum and instruction. The standards and benchmarks encourage school districts and teachers to focus on critical areas of learning to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A recent development in education on the national front is the introduction of the common core standards movement. At this point, Gov. Brian Schweitzer and Superintendent Denise Juneau have agreed to participate in the development of the common core standards in mathematics and reading/language arts with no commitment to adopt the standards. I encourage you to visit the OPI Web site <http://www.opi.mt.gov/>, and from the home page click on "National Common Core State Standards Initiative" for a full update on Montana's involvement in this process.

I look forward to meeting and working with educators across the state. If I can be of any assistance please contact me by telephone, (406) 444-0729, or by e-mail, [kgoyins@mt.gov](mailto:kgoyins@mt.gov).

Have a wonderful 2009-10 school year!

### **Writing Proficiency Steering Committee Considers Future Planning**

The Writing Proficiency Steering Committee met in Helena on September 8 to study 2009 test results, other writing assessments, including the Title II Writing Instruction Now program, new content standards, and plans for the coming years. Among those upcoming plans are the following:

- Providing test data to schools at a secure online website rather than through the mail;
- Inviting Adult Basic Education instructors to Writing Assessment Workshops;
- Updating the Guidebook with a newer prompt and sample papers;
- Collaborating with OPI for training and scoring, as well as data-sharing activities; and
- Developing a five-year plan for the Montana University System Writing Assessment.

During the MEA/MFT Educator's Conference, Jan Clinard, Jon Moore of Shepherd, Laura Brayko of North Star, and Jean O'Connor will present a session on the Montana University System Writing Assessment. **Deconstructing the MUSWA**, (Thursday 10/15/2009, 9:00AM - 9:50AM, Senior High School 208) will review 2009 results, trends, and how teachers prepare students for the test and use data from score results for school improvement.

## Teachers of Writing Can Earn Three Graduate Credits Online

Funded in part by Title II: Improving Teacher Quality, the course **EDCI 588-52: High School Writing Strategies** is offered during the fall 2009 semester online, via WebCT. This course is designed to provide practicing high school teachers with an opportunity to collaborate with university writing instructors and other high school teachers from across the state.

The intent of this course is to support practicing teacher's efforts to improve their students' writing skills by piloting a variety of writing strategies with their students and reflecting upon their experiences. The major course goal is to assist teachers in their efforts to develop a cadre of effective instructional strategies that will improve the writing skills of their students.

Topics such as the following will be covered: (1) assessing writing Strengths and Weaknesses and targeting areas for improvement; (2) strategies for increasing student comfort with writing; (3) designing and implementing prewriting strategies; (4) teaching writing across a variety of genres; (5) promoting writing that reflects critical thinking; (5) using the Montana Holistic Scoring Rubric to assess persuasive writing skills; (6) and implementing other writing strategies identified by practicing teachers enrolled in the course.

**Course Requirements:** Engage in weekly discussions hosted in WebCT, and (2) submit several reflection papers related to the writing strategies implemented and (3) completing a course project. Projects will consist of creating a comprehensive writing intervention and evaluating its effectiveness.

**Computer Requirements:** (1) Computer running Windows 2000 or newer or Mac OS X or higher (2) CD-ROM drive and (3) Internet access

**Grading Criteria:** Grades are Pass/Fail and are based on completing the requirements listed above.

**Dates:** September 14 - December 4, 2009

**Montana State University Instructor:** Kaci Shober

**Prerequisites:** Bachelor's degree and teacher certification.

**Cost:** If your school district is participating in the Montana University System Writing Assessment, the cost is \$35. For all other participants, the cost is \$234.80.

**Please register as soon as possible!**

**Register Online** at <http://btc.montana.edu/courses/asp/online.aspx#EDCI>.

**For More Information:** Contact instructor, Kacie Shober, [bkshober@msn.com](mailto:bkshober@msn.com) or 406-587-1647.