

- New Prompts Developed
- Computer-Administered Version Planned
- Student Tutorial Website Funded by SAF
- Training/Scoring Dates Set

2002 Test Window Scheduled for March 11-29

The 2002 Montana/ACT Writing Sample testing window will coincide with the ITED window: March 11-29. Schools are asked to test all students on one day during that window.

The Montana/ACT prompts and scoring rubric were developed for a 40-minute timed essay. However, the committee is interested in data about the effect of time on a writing sample. Schools have the option of allowing students to test in a 70-minute block. For the 40-minute essay, schools with less than 60 minutes in a period should plan to schedule 15 minutes prior to the test date for students to bubble-in data.

On December 17, about 20 teachers from various schools throughout Montana worked with ACT's Rosanne Cook to write new prompts. Nearly 30 prompts were drafted, then revised by ACT test specialists. Then, the prompts were sent to seven Montana bias-reviewers representing the ethnicities and school sizes in the state. The Steering Committee will also review the prompts before they are finally selected.

In addition to new prompts, the 2002 test will offer schools the opportunity to use computers. Students will be able to compose their essays on computers, if the school can guarantee that all students will be able to test on one day and that they can delete files as soon as they have been submitted electronically or printed.

Training/scoring will be scheduled between April 22 and April 27 at three sites in Montana, Billings, Great Falls, and

Missoula. One of the sites will be scheduled for a Friday-Saturday, due to the travel arrangements necessary for the ACT Trainer, Rosanne Cook.

The Board of Regents and the Commissioner of Higher Education applaud schools that volunteer students and teachers to improve teaching and learning in Montana. The data that will be collected during the field test will help high schools design curriculum that is aligned to K-12 standards and to the needs of college-going students. In addition, the collaboration with higher education helps instructors and professors in the universities and colleges understand the challenges of teaching writing in the K-12 setting.

Teachers and administrators throughout Montana can help ensure that good data is collected during this test-design phase by doing the following:

- Encourage students to take a serious approach to the field test;
- Plan to participate in training and scoring as part of professional development plans;
- Approach the field test as both research and an effort to improve student writing;
- Assist the effort by providing district support to teachers who wish to score essays; and
- Provide honest input, giving constructive advice as the test is fine-tuned.

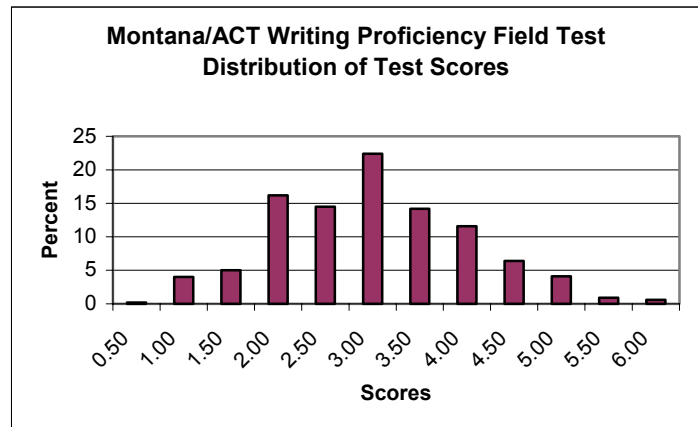
2001 Field Test to Provide Baseline Data

In July 2000, the Montana Board of Regents moved to begin implementing proficiency-based admissions standards in writing for the Montana University System. Among the proposed measures for assessing proficiency in writing was a Montana-adapted and scored ACT Writing Sample. The first field test was administered to 3,800 juniors and seniors in 73 high schools in early April 2001.

The graph above summarizes test results. All tests and prompts were scored using the same criteria, a holistic scoring rubric developed by ACT and modified by the project's Steering Committee to reflect the Montana K-12 Writing Standards. Training for scoring was conducted by ACT for one day at each of three sites, followed by about six hours of scoring. Each essay was scored at least twice. With a mean score of 3.0 on a 6-point scale, scores reflected the typical normal curve. These scores can provide baseline information as field tests are continued in 2002 and 2003.

Research must be conducted in order to establish recommendations for a cut score. ACT suggests that Steering Committee members:

1. Examine the rubric to make an initial determination as to which score point best represents the

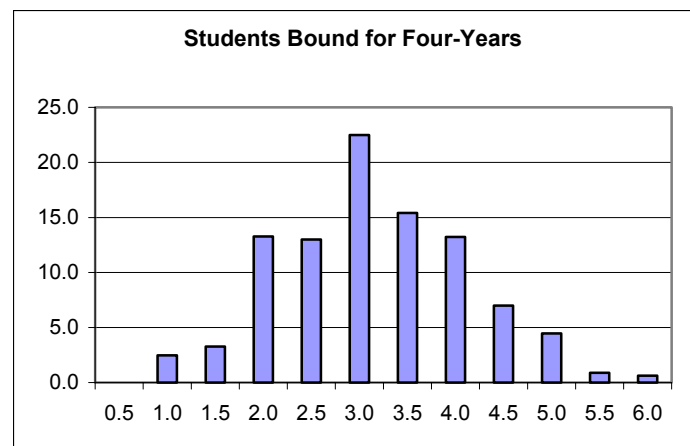


expectations of university faculty.

2. Survey university faculty.
3. Examine anchor papers to determine whether the papers at the score point under consideration represent the desired skills of beginning college students.
4. Examine student scores each year to see how many students score at the projected score point.
5. Follow students in Montana colleges and universities to see how students at each score point performed in college writing

The graph below, labeled "Students Bound for Four-Years," shows the scores of students who indicated that they plan to attend a four-year higher education institution. This kind of data will be useful as the committee studies issues surrounding possible cut scores.

Teachers and professors involved with this initiative are confident that as students practice the persuasive essay and teachers learn more about the test, scores will improve.



The mean score of all Montana students was 3.0.

Training and Scoring Dates and Sites Set

ACT's Rosanne Cook will return to Montana to provide training in the Montana/ACT Holistic Scoring Rubric and to help oversee the scoring of the 2002 essays. As in 2001, scorers will be trained by practice-scoring sets of Montana-written essays on the first of two days. Scorers who were trained last year are encouraged to volunteer as table leaders. Please e-mail jclinard@oche.montana.edu to volunteer.

Individual schools are responsible for travel expenses of their staff members and substitute teacher costs. 15 OPI renewal units will be available.

Billings:

April 22 - April 23

MSU-B Education: CEHS 122
Time: 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Approximate Number of Participants: 40

For Hotel Reservations, call the Howard Johnson Express Inn, 27th St. So. 406-248-4856 (You must reserve room two weeks prior to April 21)

Great Falls:

April 24 - April 25

MSU College of Technology-
Great Falls "Heritage Hall"
Time: 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Approximate Number of Participants: 40

For Hotel Reservations, call the Townhouse Inn of Great Falls 1411 Tenth Ave. South 406-761-4600 (You must reserve room two weeks prior to April 23)

Missoula:

April 26 - April 27 (Saturday)

Best Western Grant Creek Inn
5280 Grant Creek Rd.
(Reserve St. Corridor)
406-543-0700
Time: 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Approximate Number of Participants: 45

For Hotel Reservations, call the Grant Creek Inn 406-543-0700 (You must reserve room two weeks prior to April 25)

"To catch the reader's attention, place an interesting sentence or quote from the story here."

Computer-Generated Testing To Be Field-Tested in 2002

Seventeen schools have volunteered to allow their students to write the Montana/ACT essay using computers. Depending upon the capacity of each school's computer lab, submission of the essays can be carried out either by printing the essays at the end of the testing period or after the testing period or by

submitting the essays electronically to Webwriters@msugf.edu. Those essays submitted electronically will be printed out at MSU-GF and sent to ACT.

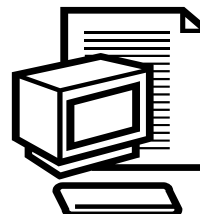
In 2003, it may be possible for students to complete the demographic data sheets electronically, completely eliminating the need for paper. However, for

the 2002 Field Test, students will be asked to complete the demographic data and questionnaire on the scan sheets. Their computer-generated tests will be inserted into their test booklets either at the school site where they are printed or at MSU-GF if they are submitted electronically.

WEBWRITERS Provides Practice Opportunity

MSU Great Falls hosts a new student tutorial website at <http://webwriters.msugf.edu>. This site's interactive component is opened to schools with teachers who have volunteered to be web-scorers. However, any student can explore the sample essays, descriptions of scor-

ing protocol, and lessons on how to write persuasive essays. The site is funded by the Student Assistance Foundation.



For more information about the project, go to: <http://www.montana.edu/mus/Writing%20Proficiency/index.htm>.

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Visit Our Writing Proficiency
Website: www.montana.edu/mus/Writing%20Proficiency/index.htm

Field Test Designed to Gather Data

In addition to writing the essay test, students provide information about ethnicity, class size, school size, district writing assessments, and post-secondary plans. Teachers also answer questions about the test and their schools' writing curriculum. As a result, information is gathered to address the following research questions:

Test Administration

- ✓ Which prompts yield the most consistent scores?
- ✓ What is the appropriate cut score?
 - High school versus college freshman scores
 - Post-secondary predictions
 - Correlation with freshman GPA

School Data

- ✓ How are scores influenced by the use of a district writing assessment?
- ✓ Are scores influenced by class size?
- ✓ Are scores influenced by school size?

Student Data

- ✓ Do scores from seniors differ from those of juniors?
- ✓ Do scores differ based on postsecondary plans?
- ✓ Do scores differ based on gender or ethnicity?

Teacher Perceptions

In addition to information from the teacher questionnaire, the scoring process itself yields information about teacher and scorer perceptions about the test and scoring procedures.

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