Using Your EXPLORE and PLAN Results

BY JESSIE SALISBURY, PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Montana GEAR UP schools have completed testing students with ACT’s EXPLORE test in the 8th grade and PLAN test in the 10th grade, and now results are coming in. Here are ideas to help make the most of the information provided in your school’s reports:

Teachers:
- **Question of the Day:** Look over the Item Response Summary Report in the results packet your school received and choose questions from the most missed responses in the relevant content area. Write these questions on the board as warm-up exercises at the beginning of class.
- **Practice:** Place content specific practice tests on desks before the start of class and have students answer as many questions as they can while waiting for the bell. Free sample tests can be found at www.actstudent.org/testprep/index.html.

Administrators:
- **Connecting College Readiness Standards to the Classroom** interpretive guides for EXPLORE and PLAN can be found at www.act.org/standard. These guides include “ideas for progress” that help teachers identify ways of enhancing students’ learning based on the scores received.
- **Curriculum Review Worksheets:** Use this process with teachers to focus on the skills and concepts that are emphasized in courses, to identify instructional needs, to consider the many ways in which teachers teach and students learn, and to reflect on how course goals fit into and work toward the school’s educational goals. These and other resources can be downloaded at www.act.org/standard/instruct/index.html.

Students and Parents:
- **Student Score Report:** On the back of the Student Score Report that each student receives are the student’s answers to each question. Make sure each student receives a copy of the test booklet so that they can go through their answers. Have students discuss the suggestions given for improving test scores with counselors, teachers, and parents, so they can work together to get the most from courses and be “college ready.”
- **World-of-Work Map:** The World-of-Work Map shows how occupations relate to each other based on work tasks. Each student receives a personalized report that suggests map regions and career areas to explore. Have students research different careers in the areas highlighted, and also in areas where they are interested but may not have scored particularly high. Here are some resources to consider when researching careers: www.actstudent.org/wwm/explore_world.html, MCIS at www.smartaboutcollege.org, or the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH) at www.bls.gov/oco.

College Goal Montana: Providing Free Help Completing the FAFSA

BY THE STUDENT ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION

As part of nonprofit Student Assistance Foundation’s (SAF) ongoing effort to bring free, one-on-one assistance to Montanans completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), students and parents are invited to attend Webinar sessions in 34 communities.

“We are excited to have the opportunity to expand the reach of the College Goal Montana event by using the Web as a tool,” said Rhonda Safford, statewide coordinator of the event. “We try to assist the greatest number of people possible through our 18 physical College Goal Montana sites, but by using Webinars, we will be able to connect with even more students and families to complete this important form.”

2011 marks the seventh year that SAF has organized this event geared to ensuring that no qualifying Montana student misses out on attaining student aid to help pay for his or her postsecondary education.

Students and parents who participate in the College Goal Montana Webinars will listen to a 30-minute presentation about the FAFSA, log on to www.fafsa.gov, and complete the form. Assistance will be provided by site hosts and subject matter experts via the Webinar chat function.

In many cases, the Webinars will be offered in association with parent/financial aid nights and will not necessarily take place on the same dates as the traditional College Goal Montana event. Students should check with their high school counselors and/or at SmartAboutCollege.org for more details.

Webinar participants will be entered to win one of four $500 scholarships. Those scholarships are in addition to the 18 scholarships marked for attendees at the College Goal Montana physical sites.

Last year marked the first time SAF offered College Goal Montana support through Webinars at four pilot sites. Safford

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Decoding the FAFSA

BY CORY CHENOWETH, FINANCIAL AID MANAGER

With January 1st looming right around the corner, it’s time to get serious about filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA is the form required by the Department of Education (DOE) to determine eligibility for federal student aid including grants and work-study. Additionally, FAFSA completion is required for other types of non-federal aid including many scholarships and the Montana American Indian Fee Waiver. Eighty percent of students who complete a FAFSA end up going to college, thus it is a GEAR UP goal to see ALL graduating seniors complete the FAFSA. Below are some tips to help students and their families through the process.

✓ Get a PIN. Both students and parents will need a PIN number to use as their electronic signature. This PIN will be used every year that the student attends college, so it will need to be kept in a safe place where it can be accessed later. Students and parents can get their PIN numbers immediately at www.pin.ed.gov.

✓ Complete the FAFSA early. In order to qualify for the maximum amount of financial aid, students and parents will need to complete the FAFSA before the priority deadline. Most schools in Montana have a posted priority deadline of March 1st (The University of Montana has a priority deadline of Feb. 15th). Please keep in mind that the college or university needs to receive the FAFSA information from the DOE by March 1st, so students and parents will want to have the FAFSA completed by February 15th. Additionally, if a student is contemplating attending an out-of-state college they may be expected to meet a FAFSA priority deadline of February 1st.

✓ Get prepared. In order to complete the FAFSA students and parents will need to have all of their completed/estimated tax information. Additionally students and parents will need to have their social security numbers as well as their PIN. For a full list of documents needed to complete the FAFSA visit: www.fafsa.ed.gov/FOTWWebApp/complete013.jsp.

✓ Dependent or Independent. Students who will be graduating from high school this year will be considered dependent unless they can answer “yes” to any of the following questions:
  ● Do you have children who will receive more than half of their support from you between July 1, 2011 and June 30, 2012?
  ● Do you have dependents (other than your children or spouse) who live with you and who receive more than half of their support from you, now and through June 30, 2012?
  ● As of today, are you married?
  ● At any time since you turned age 13, were both your parents deceased, were you in foster care, or were you a dependent or ward of the court?
  ● Are you or were you an emancipated minor as determined by a court in your state of legal residence?
  ● Are you or were you in legal guardianship as determined by a court in your state of legal residence?

✓ Who is my FAFSA parent? If parents are divorced, students should use the information of the parent they live with most of the time. If that parent is remarried, then the student must also include financial information for the step-parent.

✓ Estimates are okay. Ideally students and parents should use their completed tax returns to fill out the FAFSA. In order to meet deadlines, however, this may not be possible. Parents may use estimates, and then go back and make corrections after the once the tax return is completed. However, awards will not be finalized until exact information for the current year is submitted.

✓ Special circumstances. If a student has a special circumstance, such as a dependency override, please instruct them to contact the financial aid office of the school they plan on attending, and the school will be able to walk the student through the process.

GEAR UP Spotlight: St. Ignatius Students get GEARed Up!

BY ALAN PULE, GEAR UP LIAISON

On Thursday, November 4, St. Ignatius High School students gathered in the gym for a pre-orientation to the high school Fall Career Day. The Shift Happens 3.0 video was played, and it brought to light many issues that the students were unaware of. There were many gasps and “O.M.G.’s” from the audience. The video was intended to get students thinking about their futures and what options they have. After the video the students proceeded to the arena scheduling area and, with help from their advisors, created a schedule for the day, packing in speakers and presentations.

On November 17, 2010, students arrived at school full of career day awareness. They were armed with the preparation and knowledge they would need to gather as much information about their future career options as possible. After a short time in their advisory group, they were unleashed to experience all the action that the student System of Achieving Reality (SOAR) committee, School-To-Work coordinator, and GEAR UP team had prepared for them.

Culinary Arts was the most popular career area, followed by Athletic Training, Education, and Wildlife. Each student was required to attend one career and college session with high school counselor, Leah Springer, and one session in the gym to explore the colleges, armed forces, and job service. In the gym, students completed a college comparison worksheet using the representatives and speakers present to gather information, and they participated in nine different sessions during the day. The students debriefed the career day in their advisories the following Friday and will continue to learn about college and career options in multiple upcoming advisories.

St. Ignatius Middle School students also had the opportunity to explore the high school gym in the afternoon after a financial aid presentation during their morning science class. Middle school students completed a college comparison worksheet, looking at three different options presented in the gym. They gathered information before heading off to prepare for their 1st quarter awards assembly.

With another successful career day in the books, the students are looking forward to the Real Life Fair next year.
Teachers and students alike at Browning High School are seeing the benefits of using Cornell Notes, thanks to the addition of the AVID program. The cornell method provides a systematic format for condensing and organizing notes. Many 9th grade students involved with AVID learned the process for taking Cornell Notes from their eighth grade AVID teacher and continue to use them in high school.

“The process of taking Cornell Notes is fairly easy,” said Whitney Morris. “You simply divide your notebook paper into two sections, using the right hand side for taking notes and the left hand side to formulate questions on your notes. At the bottom of the page, you save a small section for summarizing what you have learned.” Whitney joined the AVID program in Middle School.

Joni Murray said she finds reviewing her notes and highlighting important details helps her perform better on upcoming tests, especially midterm or final tests. She added that this entire process helps her remember information for longer periods of time.

Joe Tailfeathers, who has also been in AVID for two years, says that using Cornell Notes helps him to stay organized. He commented that taking ‘regular’ notes was difficult for him as he had to later search for the information that he needed. “I’ve been using Cornell Notes for two years now and I use them in most of my classes. I can easily find the details now in my notes when I need to review for a test.”

Shanell Horn has been using the Cornell note taking system for two years also. Her mother, Helen, says she credits AVID, the Cornell Note taking system, and the AVID binder with her daughter’s academic success in both middle school and high school.

Danielle Antelope is new to the AVID program. She was curious about the notes her friends in the AVID program were using last year, so she watched them and caught on to using the Cornell system. Danielle says she believes any student can learn to take Cornell Notes and that they will definitely benefit from knowing the process.

Afred Crow Shoe a new AVID recruit learned to take Cornell Notes from both his eighth grade and high school AVID teachers, who modeled the strategy using either smart boards or white boards. “I use Cornell Notes now to study for tests and I know they help me score better on my tests.”

Another skill that students learn when using Cornell Notes is how to incorporate abbreviations to make note taking easier. Claudia Birdtail says that she has learned new abbreviations from other students using the process. She said she even discovered that some of the abbreviations she uses when texting can be transferred to taking notes. Claudia hopes to attend Gonzaga University and says she is going to spend the next four years learning all of the good study skill strategies that she can, and that is what motivated her to be a part of AVID.

Colton Weekes joined the AVID program this year and sees the long-term benefits of the Cornell Note taking system, “I think Cornell Notes work great, especially in Math! I know that when I go to college I am going to use Cornell Notes in every class because professors primarily lecture. I am glad I am learning about them now and can practice them for four years before I do go to college.”

High School Math: Is it challenging and is it preparing students?

Survey Says...

In the 2009-2010 student survey, high school students were asked how prepared they thought they were for math in college in addition to how challenging math was in their school. The chart to the left illustrates how prepared for college math students think they are (not at all or not that prepared, somewhat prepared, very prepared) by how challenging they think the math classes in their high school are (very challenging, somewhat challenging, not that challenging, or not challenging). For example, out of the 488 high school students who indicated that they were not at all or not that prepared for math in college, 2 percent found their high school math to be very challenging; 8 percent found their high school math to be somewhat challenging; 36 percent found their high school math to be not that challenging; and 53 percent found their high school math to be not challenging.
Montana GEAR UP Reminders & Upcoming Events

December 1: Governor’s “Best and Brightest” and MUS Honor Scholarship registration window opens. For more information visit www.scholarship.mt.gov or call 1-800-537-7508. Applications must be postmarked by March 15th.

December 10: Montana GEAR UP Poster Contest entries due to GEAR UP Liaisons.

December 13: Parent survey closes. Please mail surveys to Education Northwest in pre-paid envelope.

December 17: Poster Contest entries due to Montana GEAR UP. Mail posters to Jessie Salisbury at PO Box 203201, Helena, MT 59620-3201.

January 14: Educator survey ready online.

January 25: Student survey closes.

January 25-26: Winter Liaison’s Meeting, Red Lion Colonial, Helena. Please call 1-800-422-1002 to reserve your room in the Montana GEAR UP block at a rate of $77.00/night + tax.

College Goal Montana (continued)
said 105 students and families attended those sessions — 49 students completed their FAFSAs. “We’re pleased at the response we received to the program last year and look forward to seeing this effort really take off in Montana communities,” Safford said.

For more information about College Goal Montana sites and Webinar locations, dates and times, visit www.SmartAboutCollege.org or call (877) COLG4ME (265-4463).

GEAR UP Spotlight: St. Regis Students Become Teachers

BY JESS TUCHSCHERER, GEAR UP LIAISON

Believe it or not, high school students at Saint Regis have been acting like teachers lately! Students enrolled in the elective The Montana Project, co-taught by the English and History Departments, researched Native American tribes from Montana as well as from around the United States. Students then acted as docents as they taught visiting elementary and junior high classes about Native American history, folklore, diet, farming, hunting, clothing and storytelling. To assist the project visually, floor to ceiling murals depicting each tribe lined the hallway. As students presented and taught their younger peers, they were able to represent evidence of their research visually. The project was an enormous success as both tutors and mentors were able to benefit from an incredible learning environment.

For many of our students, acting as docents provided a unique opportunity to teach younger siblings. Freshman Keenan Ewalt was able to mentor both of his younger brothers, “I really enjoyed teaching my brothers because I know that they look up to me. It’s important to me and to my family that they do well in school.” Keenan also admitted that at first he was “nervous about teaching and presenting in front of such a big audience, but after the first couple of presentations it got a lot easier and was actually pretty fun.”

Not only did the project enable students to become involved in their own learning process, it served as preparation for postsecondary studies. Students were reminded that research, analysis and presentations will be required for both high school and college level studies. Likewise, students were informed that college professors and college level classes require students to lead class discussions. Reflecting on the project, most students admitted that having to teach the material was a great strategy that helped them learn and retain the information. Students also admitted that they would be better prepared to lead discussions and were more confident with public speaking and presentations.

Decoding the FAFSA (continued)

Complete the FAFSA in its entirety. Over half of all FAFSAs that are started are never completed. Encourage all GEAR UP counselors and liaisons to require students to show them a copy of the first page of their Student Aid Report to ensure that students completed the FAFSA in its entirety.

College Goal Montana (CGM). If parents and students would like assistance from a professional in filling out the FAFSA, plan on attending a College Goal Montana session. These are held across the state on February 9th and February 13th. Visit www.SmartAboutCollege.org to find a CGM site near you.

For financial aid questions contact Cory Chenoweth at cchenoweth@montana.edu or 406-444-0350, or the campus financial aid office where you plan to enroll.

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Our mission: Montana GEAR UP believes that postsecondary education is possible for all Montana students, regardless of economic background, and strives to empower them to realize that ambition. Montana GEAR UP brings this message to middle and high schools, students, their parents, and the community through early college and career awareness activities, scholarships, financial aid information, and improved academic support to raise the expectations and achievement of all.