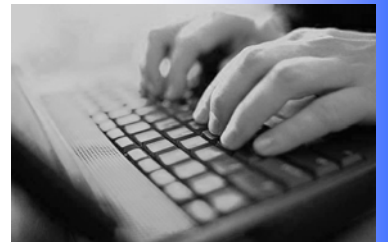


**FINDINGS FROM THE MONTANA
UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
WRITING ASSESSMENT:**

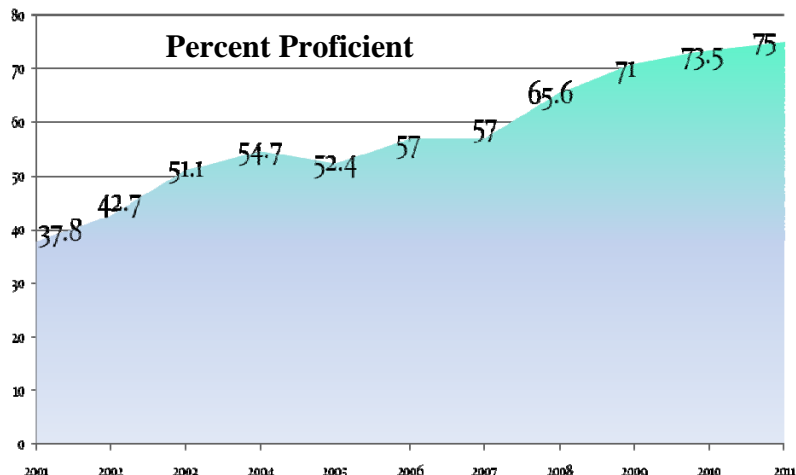
HOW STUDENT WRITING HAS EVOLVED



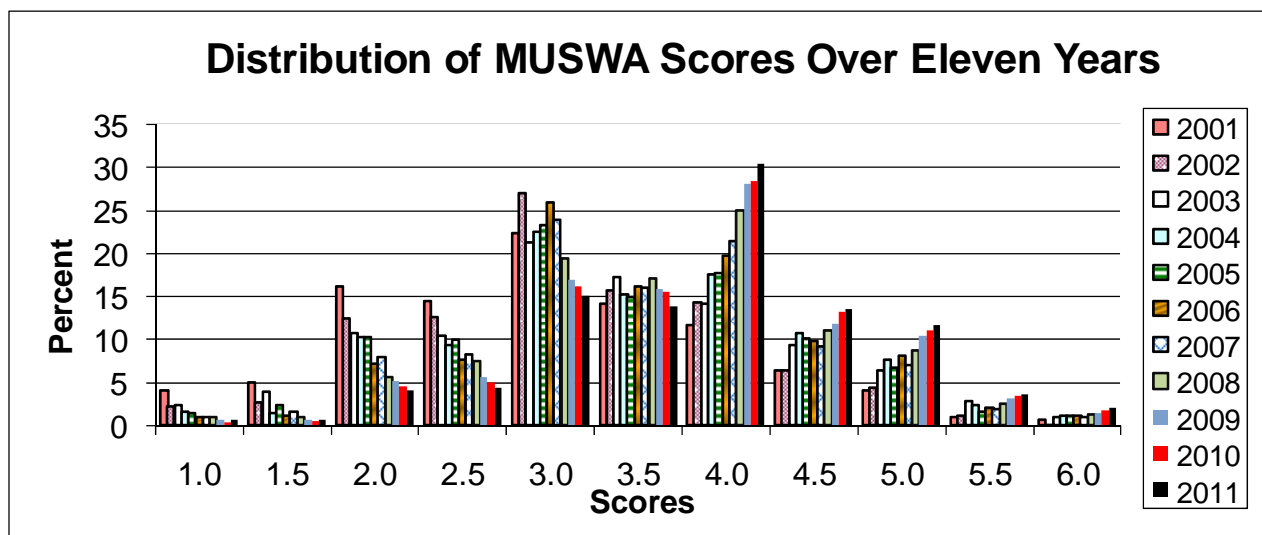
Jan Clinard, Ed.D.

The Evolution of Proficiency

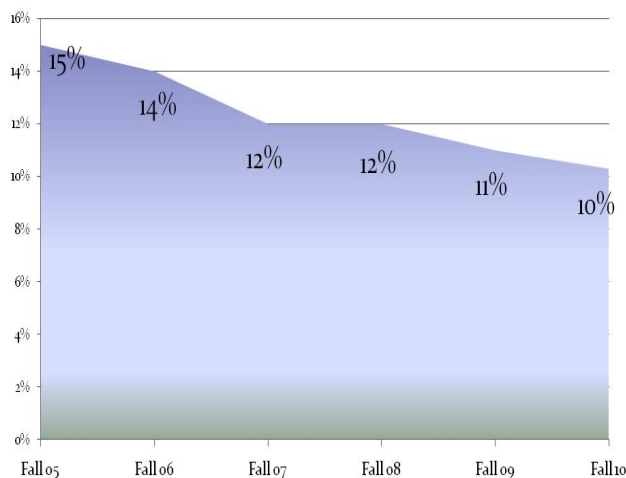
With each passing year, the percent of students scoring above the threshold for Proficiency (3.5) has increased. The graph to the right shows that 37.8% of about 3,300 students scored proficient in 2001, while 75% of nearly 7,800 students were proficient in 2011.



The graph below, showing the distribution of scores across all score points, illustrates the increasing number of students scoring above proficiency, while those at the novice and nearing proficient levels have declined.



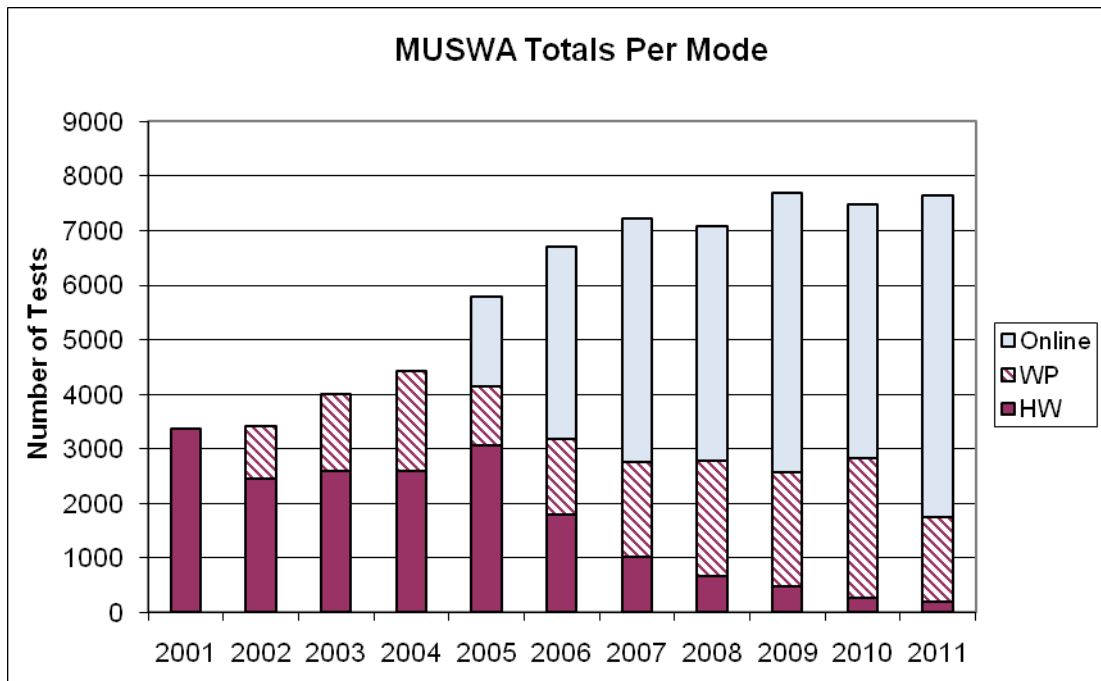
As Proficiency Increases, Remediation Declines



As one would expect, increasing the writing proficiency of high school students results in lower remediation rates.

These remediation rates are actual placements of students in developmental composition courses. Placement is determined by MUSWA scores, ACT, SAT, Compass, E-Write, and other campus measures.

The Evolution of Writing Modes



When the MUSWA was first administered under the guidance of ACT, all tests were handwritten. ACT still uses the handwritten mode.

In 2002, in response to requests from schools, MUSWA introduced the word-processed mode, in which students use computers and print essays in their classrooms or computer labs and insert them into number-coded testing booklets that use bubble-in student information sheets and scorer sheets.

In 2005, MUSWA introduced the online mode, in which teachers register their classes at the muswa.com website and students enter their demographic information using pull-down menus. Their essays are composed in a word-processing program, pasted into a text box, and submitted online. Essays are number-coded, emailed in batches, and printed at a central site to “mix” into scoring packets. Scores must enter the test code number on to the score sheet. These essays can be retrieved by student name and test number if questions arise about the scores.

Year	HW	WP	Online	Mean
2001	3365			3.0
2002	2442	961		3.2
2003	2583	1417		3.3
2004	2573	1848		3.4
2005	3060	1076	1642	3.4
2006	1783	1378	3543	3.5
2007	1013	1737	4453	3.5
2008	647	2114	4303	3.6
2009	472	2084	5137	3.8
2010	243	2567	4654	3.8
2011	181	1555	5905	3.9

The Evolution of Writing Prompts

When the MUSWA was introduced in 2001, the Writing Proficiency Steering Committee selected 3 prompts from a bank of 25 prompts from ACT. One such prompt was:

Imagine that your local School Board is considering a policy to have all schools in the district meet year-round with several three-four week breaks or to continue the current academic school year, which begins in the fall and ends in the spring. Write a letter to the School Board in which you argue for one of these options, explaining how your choice will affect students' learning and life outside of school.

Many teachers declared all three prompts “boring” and in December of 2001, ACT conducted a prompt-writing workshop in Helena, in which teachers wrote about 30 prompts, 16 of which were tested in 2002. One that tested well was:

The School Board is considering ways to encourage students to earn enough credits to graduate from high school. One option is to allow students to take high-interest courses on the Internet. The other is to establish a tutoring center where students can get individual help with difficult classes. Write a letter.....explaining why you think your choice is more likely to encourage students to earn enough credits to graduate.

Until 2004, when ACT introduced its own Optional Writing Test for the ACT, scoring workshops were conducted by ACT trainers and Dr. Jan Clinard. In 2004, the “Training of Trainers” model was introduced. This model depends on Trainers to select new anchor and practice essays from one-two new prompts each year, replacing the “retired” samples. By 2006, the prompts with a different flavor were being introduced to include a “third” option, allowing students to respond more creatively:

Imagine that each spring, your schools' junior class selects a “guiding principle” for all students to follow the next year. Seniors are then responsible for modeling and promoting behaviors that follow the principle. So far, your class has proposed two ideas: 1) Respect yourself, your classmates, and teachers; and 2) Balance schoolwork, friends, and family. Select one of these or suggest your own and write a letter to the Junior Class President explaining why this guiding principle would prevent problems your school experienced this year and make the coming school year better for all students and teachers.

For 2011, with the Common Core State Standards looming, a new prompt was introduced that used the language (in bold) found in the Common Core. This prompt has not been released as yet. It includes this language:

*Some students argue that and some make the **opposite claim**. Write an opinion piece for your school (or community) newspaper....arguing 1).....; or 2).....or 3)—a nuanced solution. Use specific subjects, examples, and/or experiences to **support your reasoning and provide evidence of your claim**....*

For 2012, we are considering moving yet further into skills stressed by Common Core: *Conduct short as well as more sustained research to answer a question....Gather relevant information from authoritative print and digital sources....Integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism...and following a standard format for citation.* Because students are already testing online, a few have plagiarized from the Internet and a few have found a quote or statistic, followed by a citation. We may field-test a prompt that encourages the use of one citation and introduce a rubric that facilitates scoring this new feature.

The Evolution of Writing Workshops

Changes were made as follows:

2001-2003: Train with ACT

- “The Qualifying Set” and re-training for those who did not score well
- Strict adherence to addressing the prompt
- No third option or combination solutions
- Three workshop sites (2001) to five sites (2003)
- 97-120 scorers

2004: Add Training of Trainers

- Switch to “Calibration” set
- Six scoring sites
- 23 Trainers; 175 Scorers
- Addition of Strength and Weakness data to reports

2005-2006: Develop Online Tests

- New score sheets require scorers to bubble-in test numbers
- Switch to word-processed and online tests as dominate mode in training sets
- Stop sorting essays by prompt for scoring

2007: Expand to Eight Scoring Sites

- Dissertation on Pre-writing published, showing that pre-writing increased scores
- 45 trainers; 320 scorers

2008: Add Consensus Set to Workshops

- Add “Consensus Set” to training that requires all members of a table to agree on a group of essay scores—arguing to reach consensus
- Scaffold training from the pre-selected, pre-scored anchor method of training
- Change name of sessions from “scoring” to “writing workshop”

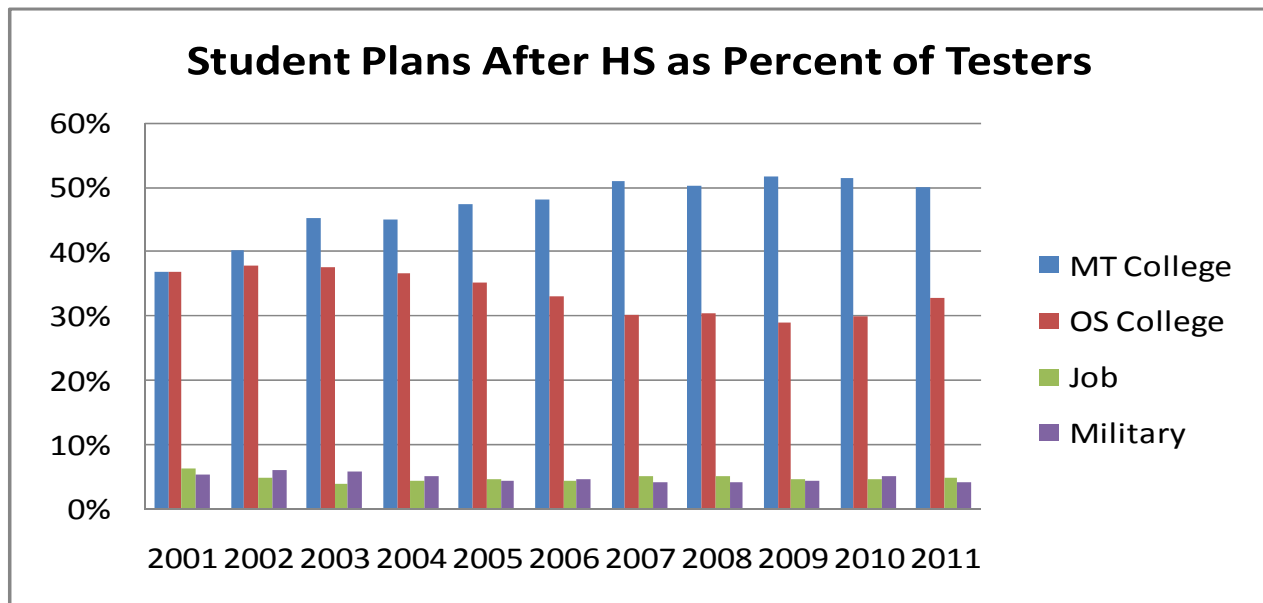
2009-2011: Include the AHA! Essay

- Intentionally select an essay designed to generate controversy
- 50 trainers; 370 scorers

MUSWA itself has evolved from a test whose primary purpose was to measure the college readiness of Montana’s high school students to a program that uses samples of student writing to provide a vehicle for collaboration and conversation across levels and among schools whose purpose is to improve college readiness. Prompts, training materials, and even the section of training called “consensus” are generated from the participants.

Moving MUSWA from a state bureaucracy to a campus completes the evolution.

The Evolution of Aspiration



Every year, students are asked what they plan to do after leaving high school. In 2011, 84% of these juniors mark that they plan to attend college, either in Montana or out of state. In 2011, 32 students indicated they planned to stay home, and another 525 marked “other.”

The graph above shows the percent of students who selected plans to “1) continue my education at a college or university in Montana,” 2) “continue my education at a college or university in another state,” 3) “seek employment after I leave high school,” or 4) “join the military after I leave high school.”

The table below shows the number of students who selected each of those plans. Because the number of students testing has increased significantly, particularly between 2001 and 2005, the percentages in the graph reveal a more accurate picture of the evolving aspirations of these students.

Some may argue that the increase in the percent of students aspiring to go to another state may be a result of a worsening economy. However, that trend begins in 2004, when the economy is still robust. MUSWA has promoted the Montana University System.

Another question may be why did 2011 witness an increase in out-of-state plans? In 2009, 29% selected out-of-state, and in 2011, 33% selected out-of-state. The highest percent of out-of-state selections were in 2002 and 2003, at 38%.

“Join the military” was at the highest rates (6%) in 2002 and 2003 and lowest rate in (4%) in 2001 and 2005 through 2009.

	MT College	OS College	Job	Military	Total
Year					
2001	1241	1237	206	179	3365
2002	1392	1308	166	209	3467
2003	1810	1504	154	231	4000
2004	2118	1729	205	236	4714
2005	2825	2105	276	256	5969
2006	3319	2280	304	307	6908
2007	3714	2199	365	292	7270
2008	3579	2162	362	295	7114
2009	4018	2253	358	326	7753
2010	3893	2267	338	385	7563
2011	3844	2517	375	312	7685