

The Montana University System Writing Assessment – MUSWA

MUSWA began in 2000, when the Montana Board of Regents (BOR) directed the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) to study college composition readiness issues among Montana's high school students. Since then, MUSWA has grown to the most widely-used admissions/placement exam in the Montana University System. Each year, 140 Montana high schools administer the test, 300-375 K-12 and higher education staff members participate in workshops, and a tremendous amount of data about writing practices is collected, analyzed, and reported.

The success of MUSWA is unquestionable: from 38% proficiency in 2001 to 75% proficiency in 2011 and from 15% composition remediation in 2004 to 10% in 2010. Directed from the Commissioner's Office, MUSWA grew as a collaborative testing instrument and series of professional development events involving school districts, colleges and universities, and state agencies.



Why is it so important to sustain MUSWA?

Montana's School Districts rely on MUSWA as part of their longitudinal data on readiness.

MUSWA has developed a "competitive" writing culture that is important to teachers and students.

Scores can be used for placement when students enter two-year colleges.

MUSWA allows students more time to write and to word process than ACT or SAT essays, which must be handwritten in 30 minutes or less.

Teachers who score believe the experience helps them prepare students for college writing, develop ties with the University System, and "recalibrate" their own grading practices on a yearly basis.

MUSWA provides practice for students applying to colleges that require ACT or SAT scores and for schools designing curriculum for the transition to college.

A New Address for the Montana University System Writing Assessment

After the 2011 testing cycle, the MUSWA office will be located at The University of Montana Helena, 1115 North Roberts Street, Helena, MT 59601. Direct mailings of letters, prompts, and awards will come from that address. Centrally located, with easy access to state agencies, the college can provide meeting rooms, office space, and access to students and instructors.

UM-Helena is committed to ensuring student success, connecting the community, creating access to higher education, and improving college readiness.



Sustaining What Works in MUSWA for 2012 and 2013

Dr. Jan Clinard will continue to direct administration of the testing program and oversight of all professional development sites.

Apperson Data Management will continue to mail test booklets directly and maintain www.muswa.com.

Schools will register to test and download their results from www.muswa.com.

Trusted MUSWA leaders, Dr. Beverly Ann Chin (UM-Missoula), Dr. Kathy Holt (MSU-Billings), and Dr. Art Bangert (MSU-Bozeman) will continue to organize workshops in their regions.

Site leaders and trainers will continue to assist with the planning of additional regional workshops in Miles City, Great Falls, Glasgow, Kalispell, and Helena.

Graduate courses for trainers and scorers will be offered through The University of Montana Missoula and Montana State University Billings. Participants will be able to register for either course from any site.

Data from the tests, including mean scores and distributions, correlations with student plans, and workshop analyses will be shared through newsletters and presentations.

Individual student scores, as well as strength and weakness data will be made available to students and parents, teachers, each school, and college admissions offices.