

Office of the Commission
of Higher Education
Montana University System
2500 Broadway
Helena, MT 59620-3101

Jan Clinard, Director Academic Initiatives
Phone: 406 444 0652
FAX: 406 444 1469
Email: jclinard@oche.montana.edu



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Visit our website :
[www.montana.edu/mus/Writing%
Proficiency/index.htm](http://www.montana.edu/mus/Writing%20Proficiency/index.htm)

Results for Additional Test Data Reported

The second field test of the Montana/ACT Writing Sample for Proficiency Admissions was administered to juniors and seniors in 70 high schools in March, 2002. 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. Each essay was scored at least twice and scores were sent to schools in May.

In addition to other data, Newsletter 8 reported gains of over 3% in student scores. In 2001, the mean score for 3365 tests was 3.0.

In 2002, the mean score for 3467 tests was 3.2.

Information regarding other correlations is reported in this newsletter. In order to infer these findings beyond the sample, it is necessary to have a random sample. Since schools participated in this field test voluntarily, and in some schools only selected classes wrote for the test, we must be cautious about making generalizations at this time. However this sample includes about one-third of all high school juniors in Montana, representing all school sizes and demographics.

Schools Invited to Participate in Field Test 2003

Help us improve student writing proficiency so that students who enter the Montana University System will be prepared to succeed.

Each fall, letters are sent to all of Montana's high schools, with invitations to join the field test. Schools should send perhaps one teacher for every 50 students tested to a scoring session.

Funding for this effort is minimal. Schools are responsible for costs related to the time that teachers devote to administering and collecting the tests and travel expenses for their teachers to participate in the training. Food and refreshments are provided to scorers. OPI Renewal Units are offered for these training/scoring sessions.

Costs for developing and printing the tests, ACT trainer time and travel, analyzing the test data and reporting results, website and professional development resources, and Steering Committee meetings are absorbed by OCHE and OPI.

Come
Score
With Us!

Data from 2002 Montana/ACT Writing Sample

Gender and Grade Level

With a mean score of 3.34, girls outperformed boys (2.99) on the Writing Sample. 50.4% of the test-takers were female and 49.6% were male.

Most of the test-takers were juniors (84.7%). The mean score of seniors (3.26) was slightly above that of juniors (3.16).

Ethnicity

For self-reported ethnicity, Caucasian had 2,679 members; "Prefer not to respond" had 286; American Indian/Alaskan Native 200; and "Other" 108. All other groups had 50 or fewer members. Although the scores of American Indian students remained below the state average in 2002, gains among these students were dramatic. In 2002, 52% of the American Indian students scored 2.5 or below, compared to 78% below 2.5 in 2001. Of the 8 reservation schools that participated

both years, 5 showed gains ranging from 2% to 16% in their writing sample scores.

Only 59 students reported that English is not their primary language. Their mean score was 2.47 as compared to 3.17 for students who indicated English is their primary language. For this item, 45 students did not respond. Their mean score was 2.85. Most students whose primary language is not English reported ethnicity as "other."

Writing Process

To determine how the use of writing process is correlated to scores on a timed writing, students were asked, "How often do you write more than one draft of a paper before it is graded by a teacher?" Their responses indicate that the more often students generate multiple drafts, the higher their mean scores on this writing sample. Of the students who earned 5.5 or 6.0 scores, 5% "never" write multiple drafts; 34% "sometimes," 43% "usually," and 18% "always" write multiple drafts. It appears that Montana's students are being taught to use the writing process, since only 8% of our

students "never" write more than one draft.

Teachers were asked a similar question: "How often do you read at least one draft of a student's paper before it is read for the final grade?" This data may indicate that teachers who "always" read a DRAFT paper may be those teachers who have lower-performing students. However, only 8 teachers

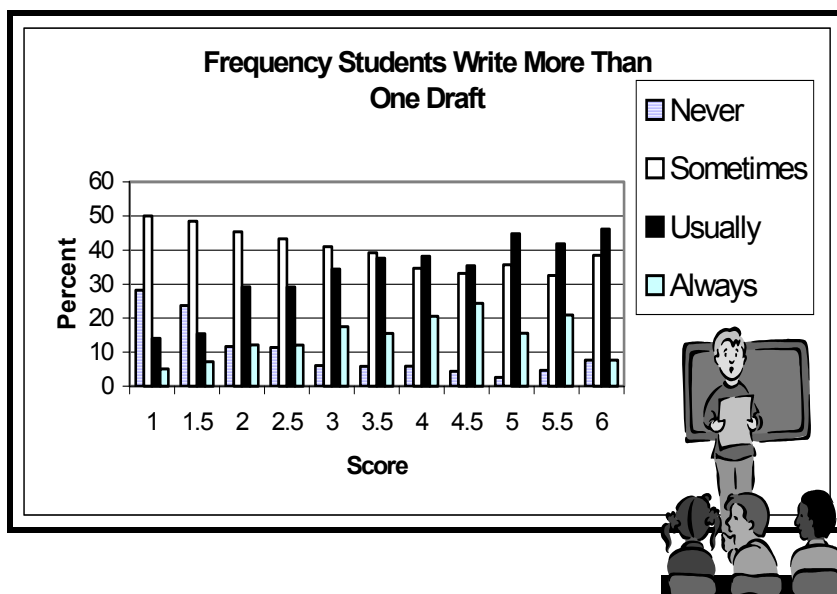
How often students write a draft	Average Score
Never	2.72
Sometimes	3.06
Usually	3.31
Always	3.36

How often teachers read at least one draft	Average Score
Never	3.19
Sometimes	3.26
Usually	3.14
Always	3.05

"never" read drafts, as compared to 81 "sometimes," 97 "usually," and 35 "always."

Handwritten and Word-Processed Essays

For 2002, the 2,442 students who handwrote their essays earned a mean score of 3.1 and the 961 students who used word-processors averaged 3.3. Students were asked how often they "write assignments using the computer for the first draft through the final draft." Of the total, only 12% "never" use the computer for the entire writing process and 16% "always" do. However, it appears that the more often students use com-

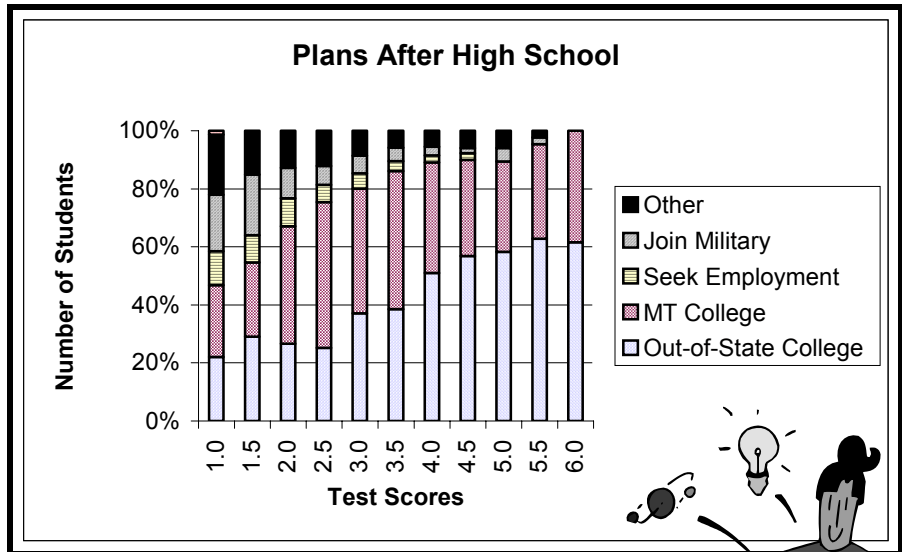


puters from draft to final, the better they are able to write a timed essay. The 433 students who “never” compose on a computer averaged 2.8; “sometimes,” 3.1; “usually, 3.2; and those who “always” use a computer throughout the writing process averaged 3.4.

Either ethnicity or the availability of computers may have an impact on the effect of using computers. For Caucasian students, the mean score on word-processed papers was slightly above the mean score for hand-written papers. Because only 18 American Indian students used word-processors, no conclusions can be drawn about that population. For comparison purposes, 29% of the Caucasian students and only 9% of the American Indian students used computers to write their tests.

Plans After High School

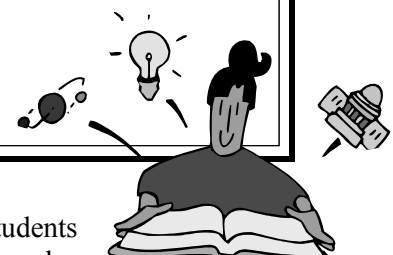
Students were asked about their plans after high school in two separate questions: 1) What do you plan to do after high school? 2) If you plan to attend college in Montana, where would you go as



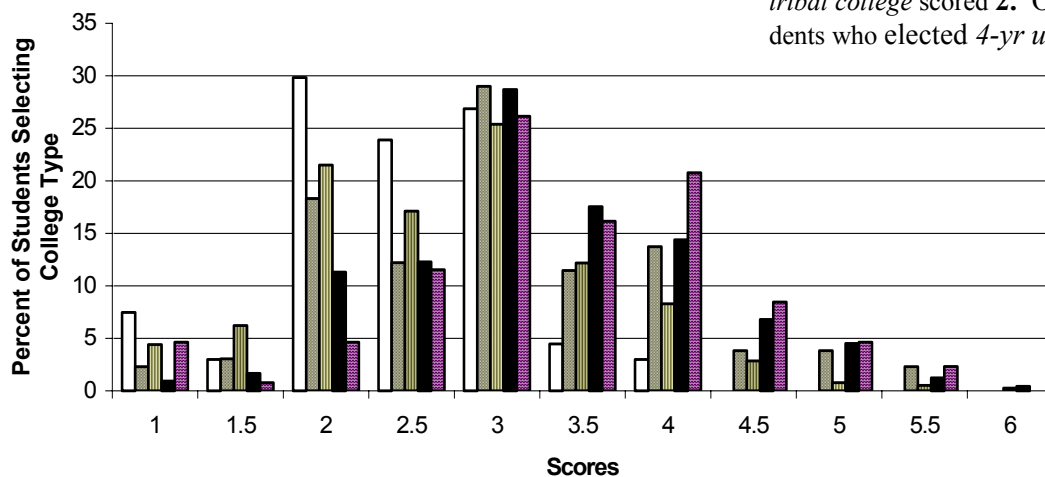
a first-year student?

Forty percent of the students indicated that they would attend a Montana college or university. In actuality, about 51.5% of all Montana high school graduates enter the Montana University System. In other categories, 37% selected higher education in another state; 5% will seek employment; 6% will join the military; 0.2% will stay at home; and 8% have other plans. The mean score of the 1423 students planning to attend college in Montana was 3.14, compared to a mean of 3.42 for 1331 students hoping to attend elsewhere.

Of the students who may seek higher education within Montana, 69% want to attend a four-year university. Their mean score was 3.2. Were a cut score set at 3.0, 26% of the students wishing to go to a Montana University would need to retake the test as seniors, change their plans, or submit a portfolio of their writing for admission. The graph below shows percentages. A total of 67 students selected tribal colleges, 131 community colleges, 386 colleges of technology, 1620 4-year universities, and 130 private colleges.



Distribution of Scores Based on Student Plans for Higher Education in Montana



Example: 30% of the students who selected *tribal college* scored **2**. Only 11% of the students who elected *4-yr university* scored **2**.

Instructional and School Factors

Teachers were also asked questions about their district, classroom and instruction. The 1,624 students in schools with formal writing assessments earned an average score of 3.22, while those 1,723 students without a formal assessment scored 3.14.

The difference was much greater in 2001: 47% of the test takers who reported no writing assessment scored 2.5 or below compared to only 35% of those with a formal writing assessment scoring 2.5 or below. For 2002, with or without an assessment, about 30% of the students scored 2.5 or below.

The largest difference occurs at a higher cut score: 69.8% of the test takers who reported no writing assessment scored 3.5 or below; but 75.5% of those with assessments scored 3.5 or below.

The difference between districts with and without formal writing assessments may have decreased in 2002 in part because the Montana/ACT Writing Sample could help emphasize the importance of writing, serving the purpose of a district Writing Assessment.

Summary of Findings

Findings from the 2002 Montana Writing Assessment reinforce that good instructional practices help students perform better on a timed writing. Most students who always write more than one draft of an assignment scored better on this assessment. Teachers of the best writers, "sometimes" read at least one draft and tend to assign the analytic mode, which is the most commonly-assigned writing genre. Students accustomed to

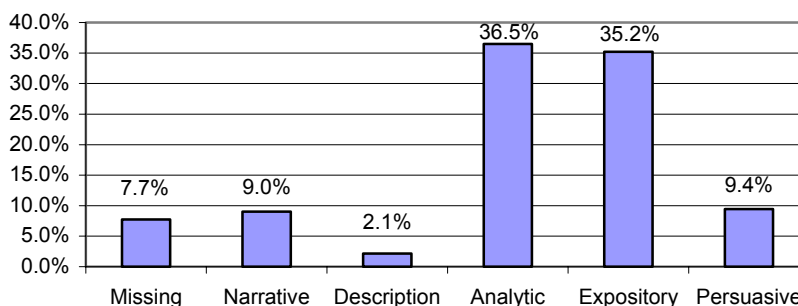
Class Size	Average Score	# of Teachers	# of Students
Missing	2.87	16	230
1-7	3.17	13	56
8-14	2.96	47	496
15-20	3.17	72	1171
21-26	3.27	58	995
27-32	3.25	25	565

Most students are in English classes with 15-20 students. Larger class sizes, however, do not appear to affect scores negatively.

Type of Writing	Average Score	# of Teachers	# of Students
Missing	2.97	18	274
Narrative	2.74	21	316
Description	2.91	5	59
Analytic	3.32	85	1395
Expository	3.12	82	1169
Persuasive	3.22	22	324

Students whose teachers "most often" assign analytic writing, earned the highest scores on this assessment and those whose teachers most often assigned narrative earned the lowest scores.

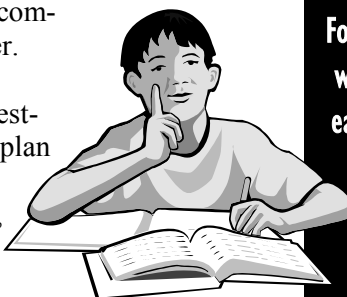
Percent of Teachers "Most Often" Assigning Each Type of Writing



Analytic and expository writing are the most common types of writing, most often assigned by 71.7% of the teachers polled.

composing on a computer write better.

Finally, the highest-scoring students plan to attend four-year universities, particularly those in other states.



For 2002, the 2,442 students who handwrote their essays earned a mean score of 3.1 and the 961 students who used word processors averaged 3.3

Excerpts from “Crossing the Divide” A Survey of the High School Activities That Best Prepared Students to Write in College” by Doug Enders (The Clearing House, Nov. 2001)

“Educators today propose a dizzying number of curricula and educational models to help prepare students to write successfully at the college level. Recent reports on national education, however, point out that the writing skills of the vast majority of high school students are less than proficient. For example as was reported in *Education U.S.A.(1999)*, the National Assessment of Educational Progress suggests that 57 percent of twelfth graders write only at basic levels, and 22 percent cannot even meet basic standards. Given that fact, it seems that either the ideas of educators have not worked or they are not being carried out effectively in the classroom. With so many people making claims, maybe we do not know to whom we should listen. Why not ask the students themselves to appraise their preparation to write in college and suggest what changes need to be made?”

Doug Enders surveyed 315 freshman composition students at the University of Toledo and Indiana State University about their writing in high school and college. For “Crossing the Divide,” Enders focused on the question “What high school activities helped prepare you to write papers in college?” In the survey, students addressed roughly four aspects of their high school writing experience that affected their level of preparation: writing practice, types of assignments, evaluation, and editing and revision.

...Writing Practice

Over a third of Enders’ students identified writing as the activity that best prepared them for college.

“As might be expected, some of those students who did take Advanced Placement English classes in high school credited those classes with preparing them for writing in college. Several other students also acknowledge that writing for speech and creative writing classes, the school newspaper, or the student council helped increase their awareness of how to communicate clearly to an audience...

“These students’ responses point out what we all know: there is no better way to learn how to write than to write as frequently as possible. Teachers and students can talk about writing till they are blue in the face, but ultimately students simply need frequent opportunities to practice their writing.”

...Types of Assignments

“In addition to the amount of general writing practice they had, students indicated that the types of writing assignments they faced in high school may have helped determine their level of preparation in college writing...

“...Teaching students to write summaries and reports is necessary—for those genres are widely used in college—but students need to be challenged by writing assignments that ask them to think critically and develop their own ideas rather than repeat the ideas of others. Students who were accustomed only to mechanical reporting or summarizing information in high school felt unprepared when college assignments asked them to develop, analyze, and interpret their own ideas and those of others. .

“...Students’ inexperience in developing, analyzing, and interpreting their ideas sometimes led them to voice their frustration in the survey.”

...Evaluation

“Students’ also pointed out that being evaluated clearly and thoroughly is essential college preparation. Often, students found their teachers’ evaluations of their writing unclear or lacking in substance...

Enders’ other students recognized the problems unclear evaluations caused. ...Besides confusion, one of the outcomes of receiving little or unclear feedback, especially when coupled with easy grades, was that students would fake their way through an assignment.

“...On the more positive side, however, the survey suggests that many students appreciated their work receiving greater scrutiny and feedback.

“...Grading student writing thoroughly is extraordinarily time-consuming, and as these students suggested, if our feedback isn’t clear, we have wasted precious time and effort.”

...Editing and Revision

“Students acknowledge that lessons in editing and revision were important preparation for writing in college. A distinction needs to be made here between these two terms, which are not synonymous. Editing as used here, refers to the practice of addressing problems of wordiness, unclear language, and errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling within a text. Revision, on the other hand, refers to the process of rethinking, clarifying, developing, and reorganizing an author’s ideas and purpose. Revision deals with global issues rather than the local problems that editing

tackles.

“Not surprisingly, students discussed editing far more often than they did revision... Moreover, the results of the survey revealed that students had little or no previous practice in eliminating wordiness from their writing.

“...As mentioned, students acknowledged that they were seldom offered opportunities to revise their work in high school. As a result, many of them were left ill-prepared to revise their work in college.”

...Collaborative Efforts May Help

“The most disturbing response to the survey came from 25 percent of the students who claimed that “nothing” in high school prepared them for writing in college.

“...The students’ responses may point to the fact that their high school teachers might not have stressed the connections between their high school classes and those that they would encounter in college, or that college instructors didn’t stress the same connections.”

Despite this situation, Enders applauds “current collaborative efforts between high school and college writing instructors addressing such issues to the benefit of student writers entering college.”

...Conclusion

Given the discouraging scores of incoming college freshman on writing competencies, it is apparent that we must better prepare future students to write successfully in college.

The Montana Writing Proficiency Initiative seeks to improve teaching and assessment at the secondary level by establishing uniform standards for teachers to use as guides in evaluating student writing and to provide students with a better understanding of what they can expect when entering the higher education system.

Through joint efforts of K-12 and higher education and by familiarizing one another with high school and college writing assignments, grading procedures, and goals and expectations for student writers, we hope to decrease the number of students from high schools in Montana who require remediation to write in colleges or universities.

After two years of field-testing, results show improvement in the quality of writing submitted by the students and provide information that may help teachers plan instruction in writing.



Webwrite! Webscore! Webcoach!



Webwriters will continue next year with the expectation that students can begin submitting practice essays as early as October. During the short time that Webwriters operated January 2002 - March 2002, there were 916 visits to the Web site. A total of 102 essays were submitted. Tim Paul of Montana State

University Great Falls College of Technology is the webmaster. Hilve Firek, doctoral student at The University of Montana developed many of the teacher and student help pages. Twenty webscorers were trained to score online. According to Sue Brown, Flathead High School English Department Chair, "Students were much better prepared for the test this year because they had studied this website." In fact, FHS's scores were up .5 points in 2002.

The *Student Assistance Foundation of Montana* will again sponsor Webwriters for the 2002-2003 school year. Because of concern that Webwriters would be overwhelmed with student essays last year, submissions were limited. For 2002-2003:

1. Participating high schools are asked to include a link to Webwriters on their school websites;
2. Students from any school participating in the Montana/ACT Writing Field Test may submit essays;
3. Students from any school with a contracted Webscorer may submit essays;
4. Students may use the website at the beginning of the school year; and
5. OCHE will advertise Webwriters more aggressively.

Webscorers can earn \$5 each for the first five essays scored and \$3 each thereafter. See the Writing Proficiency Website for a contract.



New for 2002-2003 will be the addition of writing coaches. Students may apply for a writing coach, then send writings of any genre (with a page limit) to Webwriters, the coach for feedback and re-write and to develop an online "relationship" with the coach. Web coaches will be promoted especially at low-scoring schools and those schools with American Indian students. Coaches will be paid \$10 per hour, or a minimum of \$5 for each writing sample to which they respond. Interested coaches should contact Jan Clinard, 444-0652.

Writing Proficiency Steering Committee

Betsy Bach 243-4251
Assistant Provost, Academic Affairs
The University of Montana
32 Campus Drive
Missoula MT 59801
BachBW@mso.umt.edu

Beverly Ann Chin 243-2463
Department of English
The University of Montana
32 Campus Drive
bchin@selway.umt.edu

Frank Matule 243-2362
Director of Admissions
The University of Montana
32 Campus Drive
Missoula MT 59812
fmatule@mso.umt.edu

Jocelyn Siler 243-4204
Department of English
The University of Montana
32 Campus Drive
Missoula MT 59812-1013
jfsiler@ism.net

Kathy Holt 657-2337
College of Education CAFÉ Office
Montana State University – Billings
Billings MT 59101-0252
kholt@msubillings.edu

Marsha Davis 444-0793
Title I Improvement
Office of Public Instruction
1227 11th Avenue, 2nd Floor
Helena MT 59620-2501
msdavis@state.mt.us

Bruce Messinger 447-8510
Superintendent
Helena Public Schools
55 South Rodney
Helena MT 59601
bmessinger@helena.k12.mt.us

Phil Gaines 994-5194
English Department
Montana State University
PO Box 172440
Bozeman MT 59717-2300
gaines@english.montana.edu

Steve Tull 822-4737
Superior K-12 Schools
PO Box 400
Superior MT 59872
stull@bigsky.net

Greg Hirst 653-1200
Wolf Point High School
211 Dawson
Wolf Point MT 59201
greggh@wolfpoint.k12.mt.us

Jackie Mink 453-3680
500 Deer Drive
Great Falls MT 59404
rjmink@home.com

Mary Moe 771-4310
Dean
MSU GF College of Technology
PO Box 6010
Great Falls MT 59406-6010
mmoe@msugf.edu