

Writing Proficiency in the Montana University System

Newsletter 32 May 2010

Percent of Scores Above Proficient Rise

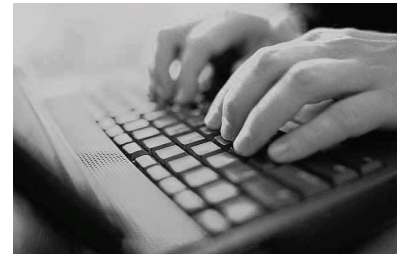
The 2010 average MUS Writing Assessment score was 3.8, the same as in 2009. However, the percentage of students earning scores of 5.5 and 6 increased to 5.2% from 4.6% in 2009 and the percentage of students scoring at the novice levels of 2 and below declined, from 6.5% in 2009 to 5.4% in 2010. In 2010, 7,581 students earned MUSWA scores and 135 high schools voluntarily participated in this testing program. A record number of 355 scorers convened in eight regional writing workshops.

The scoring rubric defines a “4” as proficient, and “3” as nearing proficiency. Essays with scores of 3.5 display enough attributes of “proficiency” to place students into college-level composition at the two- and four-year campuses of the Montana University System. In 2010, 73.5% of all students taking the MUSWA (including those with and without college plans) earned scores of 3.5 or above compared to 71% in 2009 and 57% in 2007.

The increase in proficient essays (see the bars for a score of “4” below), indicates that students are learning to “state and support a position on the issue defined in the prompt and develop it with some elaboration or relevant explanation; to organize in a generally clear manner; to control sentences, express ideas clearly, and to choose words appropriately; and to demonstrate a basic competency with language (see *rubric*).

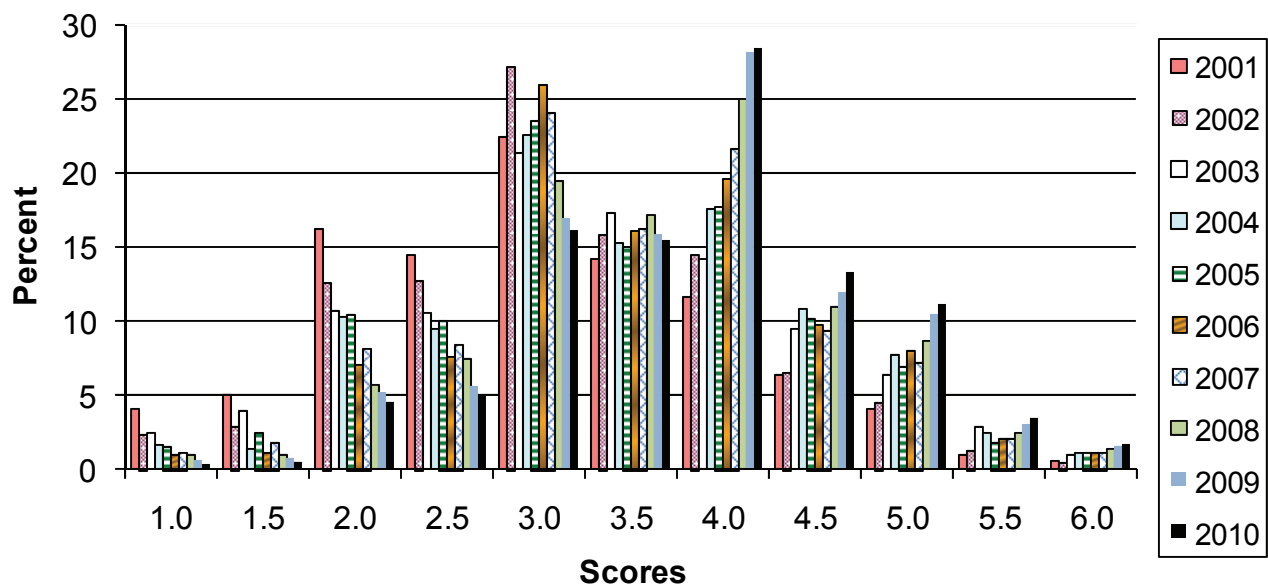
Montana University System
2500 Broadway
Helena, MT 59620-3201

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



Website:
<http://mus.edu/writingproficiency/index.asp>

Distribution of MUSWA Scores Over Ten Years



Data Table for Graph on Page One

Percent of Students At Each Score Point

Scores	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
1.0	4.0	2.2	2.4	1.6	1.5	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.6	0.4
1.5	5.0	2.8	3.9	1.4	2.4	1.1	1.7	1.0	0.7	0.5
2.0	16.2	12.5	10.7	10.3	10.3	7.1	8.0	5.7	5.2	4.5
2.5	14.5	12.7	10.5	9.4	10.0	7.7	8.3	7.5	5.6	5.0
3.0	22.4	27.1	21.3	22.5	23.4	26.0	24.0	19.4	16.9	16.1
3.5	14.2	15.8	17.3	15.2	15.0	16.1	16.1	17.1	15.9	15.5
4.0	11.6	14.4	14.2	17.5	17.7	19.7	21.5	25.0	28.1	28.4
4.5	6.4	6.5	9.4	10.8	10.1	9.8	9.3	11.0	11.9	13.3
5.0	4.1	4.4	6.4	7.7	6.8	8.1	7.1	8.7	10.5	11.1
5.5	0.9	1.2	2.9	2.4	1.7	2.1	2.0	2.5	3.1	3.5
6.0	0.6	0.4	0.9	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.0	1.3	1.5	1.7
Number	3365	3467	3465	4714	5458	6910	7270	7114	7753	7563

The Mystery of the Missing Scores

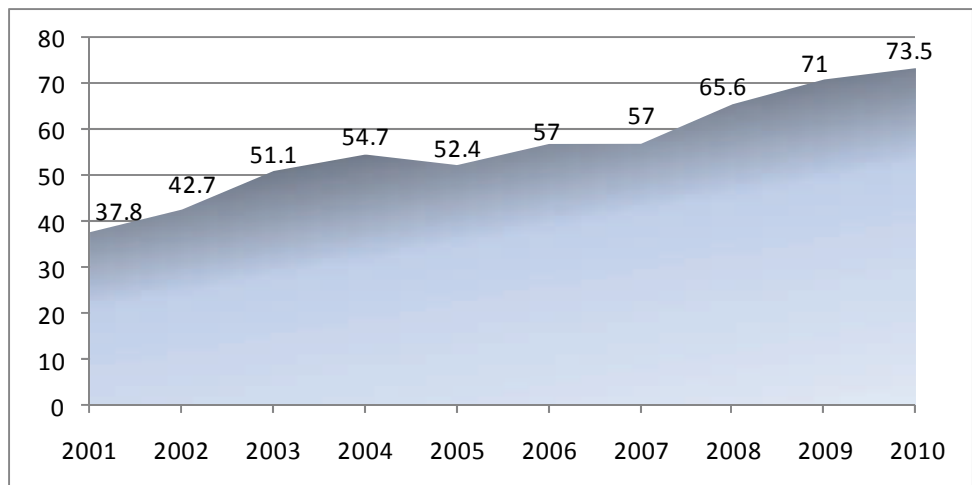
Every year, a few students who thought they took the MUSWA have no score returned. For the online test, this year’s new tracking method allowed us to pinpoint students, during the testing window, who failed to click the “submit” button, exiting the test site without uploading the essay. We “found” several tests from students who failed to “select” the prompt on their pull-down menu, holding the essay up in cyberspace. We believe that all online tests were found. Then, there were 18 students statewide with the “0” score based on the essay being off topic, inappropriate, or plagiarized. Another 12 were a case of no test found in the booklet or no score sheet scanned. Considering all the sheets of paper, all the scoring sites, all the scorers, and all the rush, missing 12 scores (0.15%) doesn’t seem alarming—but what about those twelve students? Where did they go? My nightmare is that I’m driving down the highway with 5,000 tests in the back of the SUV when I’m rear-ended and all the tests fly out into a Montana spring blizzard. Or another—I leave everything behind at a scoring site and the janitor discards all the score sheets. Those scenarios didn’t happen and all we can do is apologize to those 12 students without a score and try harder next year to check and double check tests. .

-Jan Clinard, Director

Percentage of Students Producing Proficient Essays Increasing

This graph speaks for itself: by 2010, 73.5% of all students taking the MUSWA score 3.5 or above, compared to 37.8% in 2001.

Of those planning to attend college in Montana, as noted on the next page, 75.2% scored at or above the 3.5 threshold.



Montana University System Writing Assessment Results Statewide Frequency Distribution 2010

Score	Total	11th	12th	MT HE	OS HE	Job	Military	Home	Other	N/R
1.0	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%	0.2%	0.2%	1.5%	1.6%	4.2%	1.2%	4.2%
1.5	0.5%	0.5%	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%	3.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.3%	1.4%
2.0	4.5%	4.2%	7.2%	2.9%	3.4%	12.4%	8.8%	16.7%	9.8%	12.5%
2.5	5.0%	4.9%	6.4%	4.4%	3.8%	10.9%	8.8%	8.3%	7.4%	4.2%
3.0	16.1%	15.9%	18.5%	14.6%	13.5%	26.0%	23.1%	29.2%	24.3%	19.4%
3.5	15.5%	15.4%	16.6%	15.6%	14.1%	17.2%	20.0%	12.5%	17.6%	8.3%
4.0	28.4%	28.6%	26.9%	30.7%	28.4%	20.1%	22.3%	16.7%	22.4%	26.4%
4.5	13.3%	13.7%	9.2%	15.0%	13.5%	5.6%	8.8%	4.2%	9.2%	11.1%
5.0	11.1%	11.2%	8.9%	11.6%	14.5%	2.4%	3.9%	4.2%	4.5%	6.9%
5.5	3.5%	3.4%	3.6%	3.1%	5.0%	0.9%	1.0%	4.2%	2.6%	4.2%
6.0	1.7%	1.7%	2.0%	1.3%	3.2%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.7%	1.4%
Mean	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.9	4.0	3.2	3.4	3.2	3.5	3.5
SD	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.9	1.1
N	7563	6946	610	3893	2267	338	385	24	584	72

KEY To Student Responses

- MT HE: Continue my education at a college or university in Montana.
 OS HE: Continue my education at a college or university in another state.
 Job: Seek employment after I leave high school.
 Military: Join the military after I leave high school.
 Home: Stay at home and take care of my family.
 Other: Other.
 N/R: No Response (student did not select a plan after leaving high school)

Chart Explained

The chart above contains the following information:

- The first column to the left lists the score points from 1 to 6. Two or three people scored each essay and scores were averaged, resulting in scores such as 3.5.
- The second column (*Total*) lists student score distribution, with a **percentage** at each score point.
- Columns 3-4 list score distributions based on student grade level. Only seniors who scored below 3.0 as juniors were encouraged to take the MUSWA again as seniors.
- The last 5 columns list score distributions for post-secondary plans. NR means no response.
- Below the *Mean* (average scores) row is the standard deviation (SD).
- *N* is the total number and numbers under each category. Data may be missing if students did not bubble-in information about themselves.

The statewide mean for all essays was 3.8; For the 243 handwritten tests, the statewide mean was 3.7. For all word-processed tests the mean was 3.8; for the 4,654 online tests the mean was 3.8; and for the 2,567 word-processed papers submitted in booklets, the mean was 4.0. These score differences may be more correlated with characteristics of the schools that use the different modes rather than the mode itself.

Questions about plans after high school reveal that 81% of these students intend to go to college. Of those planning to continue their educations in Montana, 22.5% scored below the 3.5 threshold for placement into college-level composition.

Forty-eight Trainers Lead Workshops in Eight Locations

Experienced scorers convened in Helena February 18-19 to update the Montana University System Writing Assessment training materials by scoring newly submitted essays and selecting those that best represent each of the score points.

This year, one of the 2009 prompts was “retired” and new prompts were developed and field-tested. MUSWA trainers selected essays written on the surviving new prompt, wrote annotations, and practiced teaching their peers to score accurately. In addition, a newer, retired prompt was selected for the Practical Guide to Writing Proficiency and a new Practice Set One Developed.

Each training team must find essays that represent assigned score points and then defend their choices to the other trainers.

These trainers then organize and lead regional workshops throughout the state. During a Writing Assessment Workshop, scorers study four sets of six to seven scored “anchor” papers and then score four sets of four to eight “practice” papers, discussing each paper’s strengths and weaknesses and how it should be scored.

Trainer/leaders for the 2010 Writing Assessment Workshop in Billings (March 15-16) included Glenda Skillen Robison of Hysam High School; Kathy Holt of MSU Billings; Cory Snow, of Billings Skyview; Jon Moore of Shepherd High School; and Laurie Nelson and Molly Joyce of Hardin High School. Professor Kathy Holt coordinated and hosted this session, which attracted 56 participants, which strained the capacity of the Lewis and Clark Room of the SUB.

The Bozeman Workshop (March 29-30) was coordinated and hosted by MSU Professor Art Bangert and Instructor Kacie Shoher. Thirty-two teachers and college professors attended. Trainer/leaders were Susan Cotton of Butte High and Kacie Shoher.

The Glasgow Workshop (March 18-19) was organized and hosted by Bob Rennick and Heather Zeller of Glasgow High school, who also served as trainers and helped recruit 25 participants to the Cottonwood Inn. Other leader/trainers were Katrina Vaira, Wolf Point High School and Libby Anderson, Glasgow High School. Workshop participants in Glasgow were honored by the participation of Regent Janine Pease.

The Great Falls Workshop (March 22-23) was coordinated and hosted by Judy Hay, MSU Great Falls College of Technology. The remodeled Heritage Hall easily accommodated 42 participants. Leader/trainers included Jared Smith, Browning High School; Jeff Ross, Belt High School; Kendall Griggs, Conrad High School; and Laurie Smith, Heart Butte High School.

The Helena Workshop was held March 24-25 at the Jorgensons’ Inn for 33 participants. Leader/trainers included Jean O’Connor, Helena High School; Steve Vezina, Beaverhead High School; Claudette Morton, Montana Small Schools Alliance; Jay Pyette and Kevin Shellenberger, Havre High School; and Holly Pepprock, Shelby High School.

The Kalispell Workshop, with 44 participants, was organized by Tari Johnson and held at Glacier High School March 8-9. Leader/trainers were Tari Johnson and Melanie Knadler of Glacier High School; Matt Holloway, Whitefish High School; Sandy Chestnut, Columbia Falls High School; and Shannon O’Donnell and Heather Schmidt, Flathead High School.

The March 16-17 Workshop was held at Miles Community College and attracted 17 participants. Leader/trainers were Shay Witt, of Wolf Point High School and Susan Erlenbusch of Circle High School, who baked decorated cookies for us for Saint Patrick’s Day.

The Missoula Workshop (March 9-10) was coordinated and hosted by UM Professor Beverly Ann Chin and UM COT’s Cathy Corr, who also handled printing of materials. Among Missoula’s 95 participants were 11 UMCOT faculty members and 26 graduate and undergraduate students. Leader/trainers were Anna Baldwin, Arlee High School; Beverly Ann Chin The University of Montana Missoula; Carla Hinman and Debbie Lowe, Missoula Hellgate; Carol Sullivan and Steve Tull, Superior High School; Cathy Corr, UM College of Technology; Rob Plakke, Corvallis High School; Jen Carmody and Kristen Hattlestad, Hamilton High School; and Tim Marchant and Sara Keast, St. Ignatius High School.

Evaluations from the Writing Assessment Workshops were filled with praise for the leadership and skills of these outstanding trainers.

Schools of Merit Honored

Awards of Merit are reserved for the schools scoring in the top quartile of all schools participating in the MUSWA. Schools receive certificates, suitable for framing and displaying in trophy cases.

With school averages increasing, the threshold for the top quartile must also increase. To address issues related to school size and set thresholds fairly, the top-scoring schools in each size category received Awards of Merit.

This resulted in 37 Awards of Merit, or 27% of the 135 participating schools.

Awards of Merit went to nineteen **Class C High Schools** that tested up to 29 students. These schools' averages ranged from 4.2 through 5.5: Augusta, Geysler, Hinsdale, Richey, Hysham, Roberts, Westby, Froid, Saco, Harlowton, Poplar, Denton, Highwood, Lincoln, Moore, Sheridan, Sunburst, Twin

Bridges, Fromberg, and Valley Christian High Schools.

Awards of Merit went to six **Class B High Schools** that tested 30-65 students. These schools' averages ranged from 4.1 through 4.4: Fort Benton, Power, Fairfield, Conrad, Baker, and Manhattan High Schools.

Awards of Merit went to four **Class A High Schools** that tested 66-155 students. These schools' averages ranged from 4.1 through 4.4: Bigfork, Dawson County, Frenchtown, and Hamilton High Schools.

Awards of Merit went to seven **Class AA High Schools** that tested 162-407 students. These schools' averages were 4.0 through 4.3: Missoula Big Sky, Missoula Sentinel, Missoula Hellgate, Flathead, Glacier, Helena Capital and Helena High Schools.

2011 Testing Window Set and Writing Workshop Dates Proposed

Schools may plan ahead to a **testing window of February 1-25 for the 2011 MUSWA**. Schools should schedule a regular testing date, as well as one day for make-up tests within this window. Training of Trainers may be scheduled February 17-18 to allow adequate time to print training materials.

Working around Spring Breaks for MSU, MSU-Billings, and UM, the following potential scoring schedule is proposed:

- March 7-8 Kalispell
- March 9-10 Missoula
- March 14-16 Helena
- March 21-22 Billings
- March 22-23 Miles City
- March 24-25 Bozeman
- March 28-29 Glasgow
- March 30-31 Great Falls

Would this schedule present a conflict for you?

PLEASE CONTACT ME:

jclinard@montana.edu or 406-444-0652.

Students Receive Letters of Recognition

Letters of Recognition, signed by Commissioner of Higher Education Sheila Stearns and Board Chair Stephen Barrett The Montana Board of Regents honored the outstanding performance on the MUSWA of 130 students, demonstrated by the highest score of "6" and 262 students with scores of 5.5. These students scored in the top 5.2% of the state's test-takers.

Students are encouraged to include their official Letters of Recognition in college admissions files. The letter includes information to help admissions officers interpret these scores:

- 7,581 students received scores ranging from 0-6 on this test;
- the average score was 3.8;
- each test was scored at least twice by trained teachers and professors;
- inter-rater reliability coefficient has been calculated at .86 for this test;
- students are given a choice of two persuasive prompts;
- students have 40 minutes to hand-write or word process their responses; and
- a score of "6" is described as follows: *These papers clarify a position on the issue defined in the prompt, developed with extensive and compelling evidence. Organization is unified and logical, with effective transitions. Language use is fluent with well-controlled sentences, clear and effective expression of ideas, and precise word choice. While there may be a few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics, an outstanding command of language is apparent.*

The letters remind students that the Montana University System provides a wide array of quality programs to meet the needs of outstanding students. Students are encouraged to consider applying to one of the MUS campuses.

Montana University System Holistic Scoring Rubric

- 6 These papers clarify a position on the issue defined in the prompt, developed with extensive and compelling evidence. Organization is unified and logical, with effective transitions. Language use is fluent with well-controlled sentences, clear and effective expression of ideas, and precise word choice. While there may be a few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics, an outstanding command of language is apparent. (Advanced)
- 5 These papers clarify a position on the issue defined in the prompt, developed with moderate and relevant evidence. Organization is unified and coherent and transitions are used. Sentences are almost always well controlled, expression of ideas is usually clear, and word choice is often precise. While there may be a few errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics, a good command of language is apparent. (Advanced/Proficient)
- 4 These papers state and support a position on the issue defined in the prompt, developed with some elaboration or relevant explanation. Organization is generally clear. Sentences are usually well controlled, expression of ideas is usually clear, and word choice is appropriate for the topic. A competency with language is apparent, even though there may be some errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. (Proficient)
- 3 These papers state and support a position on the issue defined in the prompt, developed with a little elaboration or explanation. Organization is clear enough to follow without difficulty. Sentences are usually well controlled, expression of ideas is at times awkward or unclear, and word choice may at times be inaccurate or inappropriate. A basic control of language is apparent, even though there may be frequent errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics. (Nearing Proficiency)
- 2 These papers may state a position on the issue defined in the prompt, but development may be minimal or irrelevant. Organization may lack clear movement or focus, making the writer’s ideas difficult to follow. Sentences may often be unclear, expression of ideas may often be awkward or unclear, and word choice may often be inaccurate or inappropriate. Numerous errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics show poor control of language and may at times impede understanding. (Nearing Proficiency/Novice)
- 1 These papers may not state a position on the issue defined in the prompt or develop an idea. Problems with organization and lack of focus may make the paper very difficult to follow. Sentences may seldom convey meaning clearly, expression of ideas may be very unclear and confusing, and word choice may often be inaccurate or inappropriate. Severe problems with grammar, usage, or mechanics show very poor control of language and may significantly impede understanding. (Novice)
- 0 These papers cannot be scored with the rubric. They may address topics unrelated to the test prompts, be illegible, be a blank page, use offensive language, or be plagiarized.

What’s on that WEBSITE ?

<http://mus.edu/writingproficiency/>

This website is full of information, such as an archive of all newsletters published since 2000, a *Practical Guide to Writing Proficiency* (with all relevant policies and sample essays) Power Point presentations, and links to several interesting sites that can help with preparing students for college writing.

Students are encouraged to use <http://Webwriters.msugf.edu> as a tutorial on persuasive writing throughout the school year. It is open for essay submission November through April each school year to schools that have registered for the MUSWA.