

# Writing Proficiency in the Montana University System

*Newsletter 37 May 2012*

## **A Dozen Years of Success to Culminate with the Montana Writing Summit**

The 2012 average MUS Writing Assessment score was 3.8, slightly down from 3.9 in 2011. In 2012, 7,490 students earned MUSWA scores and 131 high schools voluntarily participated in this testing program. Writing Assessment Workshops attracted 287 scorers to eight regional writing workshops. In 2012, 74.1% of all students taking the MUSWA (including those with and without college plans) earned scores of 3.5 or above, indicating proficient writing, compared to 37.8% proficiency in 2001.

The increase in proficient essays over time 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.

This results in more students beginning college in college-level composition courses, rather than in developmental courses. As of 2011, the remediation rate in the Montana University System, including two-year and four-year institutions combined, had fallen to 8.4% (see <http://www.mus.edu/data/HS-Follow-up>). Considering national remediation rates well above 30%, this is a remarkable achievement. Montana’s teachers deserve commendations.

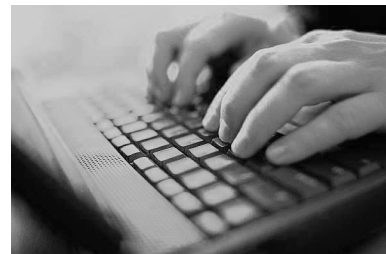
To meet a new challenge, preparing students for ACT Plus Writing, MUSWA leaders are working with the Montana Association of Teachers of English Language Arts (MATELA), the Office of Public Instruction, and ACT to provide inspiration and best practices for Montana’s teachers of writing. The Montana Writing Summit, scheduled for September 23-25 at the Red Lion Colonial Inn in Helena expects to rival the quality that Montana teachers experienced at the most recent National Council of Teachers of English Northwest Regional Conference held in Montana: *Big Sky 2000: Finding our Place in the New Millennium*.

By partnering with MATELA, this conference can host a social event and seminar on real-world writing, with social media entrepreneur, Mike Tornatore on Sunday night; and feature three of the nation’s foremost experts on the topics of assessing writing, Common Core State Standards for Literacy, and writing instruction—Kathleen Blake Yancey, Carol Jago, and Beverly Ann Chin.

Without the annual professional development in writing provided to many high school teachers by MUSWA, the Summit should provide a significant contribution to sustaining the writing gains achieved in this past decade.

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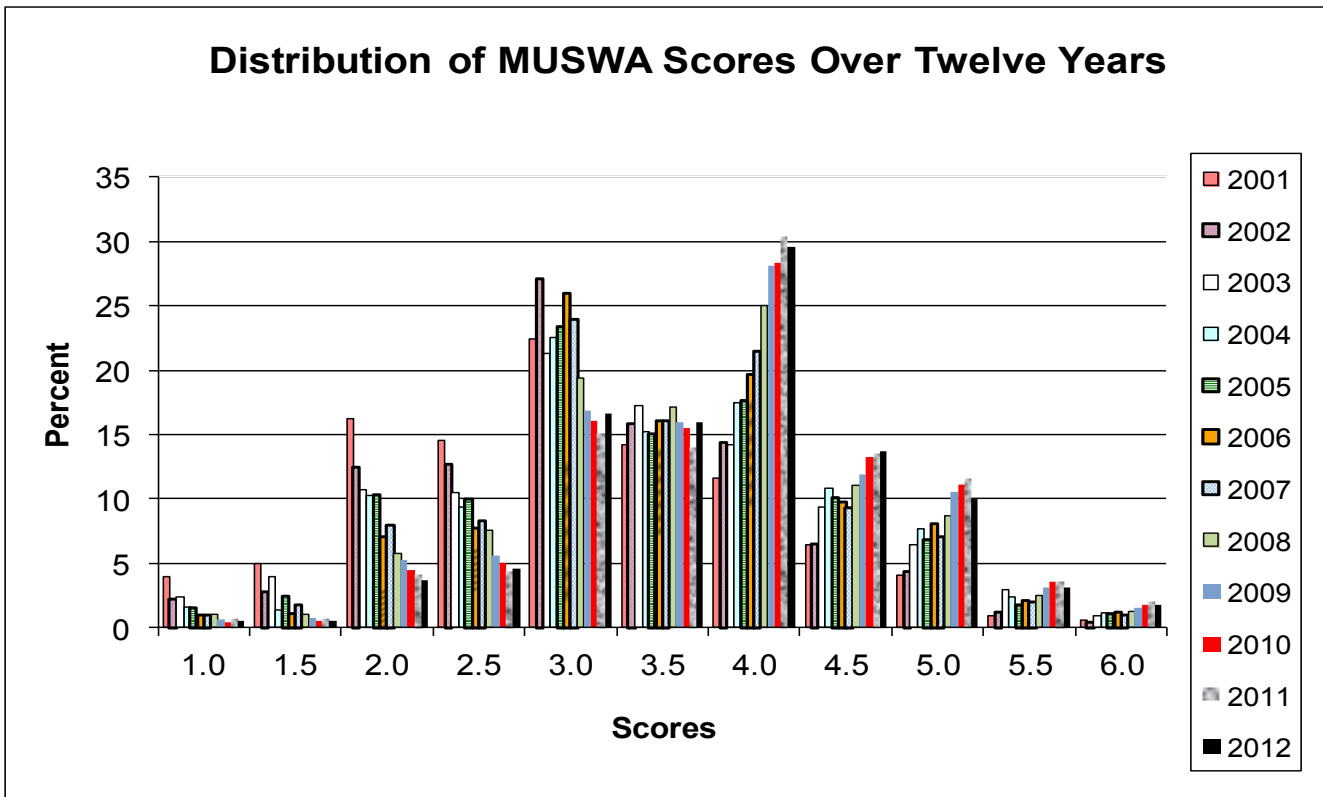
### **Professional Development for the Common Core State Standards**

The Montana Writing Summit, scheduled for September 23-25 in Helena, will include several sessions and a featured speaker designed to help teachers understand and implement the Common Core.

A new Title II award to the University of Montana Helena will feature professional development focused on two important aspects of the Common Core for Literacy: cross-disciplinary literacy expectations and research skills in the digital era.

These workshops and an online course are scheduled for the spring semester, 2013. Contact [jan.clinard@umhelen.edu](mailto:jan.clinard@umhelen.edu) for details.

## Trend Data Documents More Proficient Writing



The unusual dip in this “distribution curve” results from scorer training that stresses distinguishing a proficient essay (4-6) from less-than-proficient (1-3). For this last testing year, the total number of students submitting essays was down slightly, perhaps because 51 high schools participated in the ACT Plus Writing pilot. Five new high schools tested and ten schools that previously tested did not participate. Although the percent of essays scoring at the novice levels was down from 2011, the percent scoring at the advanced levels also witnessed a slight decline. These fluctuations have occurred in previous years, as well. As would be expected, schools with small enrollments experience more fluctuations in their average scores than Montana’s largest schools. Nonetheless, the general improvement in students’ writing proficiency over a period of twelve years is apparent.

**Percent of Students at Each Score Point**

Scores	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
1.0	4.0	2.2	2.4	1.6	1.5	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.6	0.4	0.6	0.5
1.5	5.0	2.8	3.9	1.4	2.4	1.1	1.7	1.0	0.7	0.5	0.6	0.5
2.0	16.2	12.5	10.7	10.3	10.3	7.1	8.0	5.7	5.2	4.5	4.1	3.7
2.5	14.5	12.7	10.5	9.4	10.0	7.7	8.3	7.5	5.6	5.0	4.4	4.6
3.0	22.4	27.1	21.3	22.5	23.4	26.0	24.0	19.4	16.9	16.1	15.1	16.6
3.5	14.2	15.8	17.3	15.2	15.0	16.1	16.1	17.1	15.9	15.5	13.9	15.9
4.0	11.6	14.4	14.2	17.5	17.7	19.7	21.5	25.0	28.1	28.4	30.4	29.6
4.5	6.4	6.5	9.4	10.8	10.1	9.8	9.3	11.0	11.9	13.3	13.5	13.7
5.0	4.1	4.4	6.4	7.7	6.8	8.1	7.1	8.7	10.5	11.1	11.6	10.0
5.5	0.9	1.2	2.9	2.4	1.7	2.1	2.0	2.5	3.1	3.5	3.6	3.1
6.0	0.6	0.4	0.9	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.0	1.3	1.5	1.7	2.0	1.8
Number	3365	3467	3465	4714	5458	6910	7270	7114	7753	7563	7685	7490

## Montana Writing Assessment Results Frequency Distributions 2012

Score	Total	11th	12th	MT College	OS College	Job	Military	Home	Other	N/R
1.0	0.5%	0.5%	1.0%	0.3%	0.2%	1.3%	0.6%	4.0%	2.2%	0.0%
1.5	0.5%	0.4%	0.9%	0.3%	0.4%	1.3%	0.8%	0.0%	0.5%	1.6%
2.0	3.7%	3.6%	5.2%	2.5%	3.1%	7.3%	9.5%	16.0%	7.6%	4.8%
2.5	4.6%	4.5%	6.2%	3.4%	3.2%	9.2%	12.0%	4.0%	10.2%	9.5%
3.0	16.6%	15.7%	25.1%	16.3%	12.4%	24.0%	22.9%	20.0%	23.6%	34.9%
3.5	15.9%	15.9%	15.8%	16.1%	14.7%	18.9%	16.5%	12.0%	17.2%	17.5%
4.0	29.6%	29.9%	26.6%	32.3%	28.4%	25.1%	26.5%	24.0%	22.2%	25.4%
4.5	13.7%	14.0%	10.0%	14.7%	15.6%	9.4%	5.6%	12.0%	8.6%	1.6%
5.0	10.0%	10.3%	6.5%	9.9%	13.8%	2.2%	4.2%	4.0%	5.9%	3.2%
5.5	3.1%	3.3%	1.3%	2.7%	4.8%	1.1%	1.1%	4.0%	1.7%	1.6%
6.0	1.8%	1.9%	1.3%	1.5%	3.4%	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%
Mean	3.8	3.9	3.6	3.9	4.0	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.3
SD	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.1	0.9	0.7
N	7490	6805	677	3823	2269	371	358	25	581	63

### KEY To Student Responses

MT College:	Continue my education at a college or university in Montana.
OS College:	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.
NR:	No response.

## Chart Explained; Data Analyzed

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. The last 5 columns list score distributions for post-secondary plans.
- 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 all word-processed tests the mean was 3.8; 5,936 of which were submitted online and 1,334 were word-processed papers submitted in booklets. This year, 1,282 more tests were submitted online than in 2011. Only 166 (2%) tests were handwritten, with a mean score of 3.6.

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, 77.2% scored at or above the 3.5 threshold for placement into college-level composition. In 2012, 5% of the students planned to join the military, up from 4% in 2010. As with every other year, students who plan to attend college out of state score slightly higher than all other students and the lowest averages are earned by students who do not or cannot respond to the question about their future plans. Only seniors who scored below 3.5 as juniors are encouraged to take the MUSWA again as seniors, so their lower average score actually indicates an improvement from their previous score.

## Forty Trainers Lead Workshops in Eight Locations

Experienced scorers convened in Helena February 16-17 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.

One of the 2011 prompts was “retired” and new prompts were developed and field-tested. MUSWA trainers selected essays written on a new prompt, wrote annotations, and practiced teaching their peers to score accurately.

Each training team found essays that represent assigned score points and then defended their choices to the other trainers. These trainers organized and led regional workshops throughout the state. During Writing Assessment Workshops, scorers studied four sets of six to seven “anchor” papers and then scored four sets of four to eight “practice” papers, discussing each paper’s strengths and weaknesses and how it should be scored.

The Kalispell Workshop, with 42 participants, was held at Glacier High School March 5-6. Organizers and trainers were Tari Johnson of Glacier HS and Luke Johnson and Sarah Walters, Somers Middle School. Other trainers included Jenna Holmes and Liz Sykora, Flathead HS, Alyson Dorr, Columbia Falls High School, and Denikka Miller, Troy HS.

The Missoula Workshop (March 7-8) 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 87 participants, were 6 UMCOT faculty members

and 20 UM graduate and undergraduate students. Trainers and leaders were Carla Hinman and Debbie Lowe, Missoula Hellgate; Steve Tull and Beth Keyser, Superior; Rob Plakke, Corvallis High School; Tim Marchant and Sara Keast, St. Ignatius High School; Sarah Nassem, Stevensville; and Jen Carmody, Hamilton HS.

The Helena Workshop was held March 13-14 at the University of Montana Helena for 34 participants. Leader/trainers included Jay Pyette and Kevin Shellenberger, Havre HS; Holly Pepprock, Shelby HS; and Joel Beatty, UM Helena.

Trainer/leaders for the Workshop in Billings (March 19-20) included Glenda Skillen Robison of Hysham High School; Kathy Holt of MSU Billings; Cory Snow, of Billings Skyview; and Laurie Nelson and Molly Joyce of Hardin High School. Professor Kathy Holt coordinated and hosted this session, which attracted 45 participants.

The March 20-21 Workshop was held at Miles Community College and attracted 16 participants. Leaders/trainers were Susan Erlenbusch of Circle High School; Laurie Nelson of Hardin; and Greg Hirst of Poplar HS.

The Bozeman Workshop (March 22-23) was coordinated and hosted by MSU Professor Art Bangert. Held at the Wingate Inn, 32 educators attended. Trainer/leaders were Susan Cotton of Butte High School; Kurtis Koenig, Ennis High School; and Laurie Nelson, Hardin.

The Great Falls Workshop (March 26-27) was coordinated and hosted by Heidi Pasek, MSU Great Falls College of Technology in Heritage Hall for 29 participants. Leader/trainers included Jared Smith, Browning High School; Laurie Smith, Heart Butte HS; Kendall Griggs, Conrad HS; Laura Schnittgen, North Star HS; and Katie Kottynski, Great Falls Public Schools.

The Glasgow Workshop (March 28-29) was organized and hosted by Linda Allie Glasgow High School and held in the basement of the First Lutheran Church for 19 participants. Leader/trainers were Jane Kolstad, Glasgow High School and Jessica Sweet, Wolf Point High School.

Evaluations from the Writing Assessment Workshops were conducted with participant’s choice of paper and pencil forms or online responses using survey monkey.

Participants noted that samples in the Training Binders were particularly helpful this year. Annotations included descriptors from the ACT Scoring Guidelines, which are written in more detail than the MUSWA rubric.

MUSWA’s **Practical Guide to Writing Proficiency** included several pages that provide a crosswalk between the very familiar and simple MUSWA rubric to the detailed ACT rubric. By showing how the rubrics compare, these pages assist teachers in making the transition to preparing students for the ACT.

## Schools of Merit Honored

Awards of Merit from the Montana Board of Regents are given to schools scoring in the top quartile of all schools participating in the MUSWA. Schools receive certificates, suitable for framing and displaying in trophy cases.

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 33 Awards of Merit, or 25% of the 131 participating schools.

Awards of Merit went to thirteen **Class C High Schools** that tested up to 30 students. These schools' averages ranged from 4.8 through 4.1: Shields Valley, Plevna, Roberts, Froid, Melstone, Savage, Sunburst, Denton, Highwood, Richey, Westby, Moore, and Roy High Schools. Though not technically Class C, the Helena Project for Alternative Learning also won an award in this size category.

Awards of Merit went to seven **Class B High Schools** that tested 32-60 students. These schools' averages ranged from 4.4 through 4.0: Florence Carlton, Manhattan, Three Forks, Huntley Project, Broadwater, Plains, Powell County, Sweet Grass County, and Wolf Point High Schools.

Awards of Merit went to four **Class A High Schools** that tested 61-185 students. These schools' averages ranged from 4.4 through 4.0: Frenchtown, Park, Hamilton, and Belgrade High Schools.

Awards of Merit went to six **Class AA High Schools** that tested 256-426 students. These schools' averages were 4.2 through 4.0: Glacier, Missoula Sentinel, Helena Capital, Flathead, Billings West, and Missoula Hellgate High Schools.

## 369 Students Receive Letters of Recognition

Letters of Recognition, signed by CEO/Dean of the University of Montana Helena and Angela McLean, Chair of the Montana Board of Regents, honored the outstanding performance on the MUSWA of 138 students, demonstrated by the highest score of "6" and 231 students with scores of 5.5. These students scored in the top 4.9% 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:

- 7,490 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.

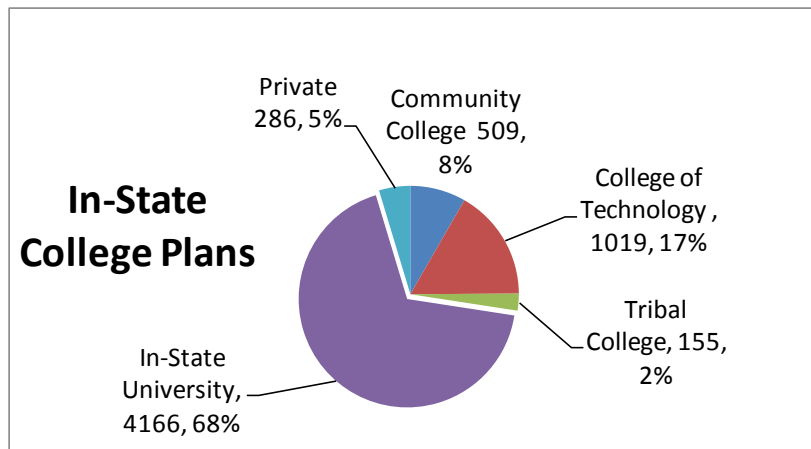
### Writing Summit's Sunday Social: Wine, Writing, and Semiotics

Featured presenter for Sunday evening's sectional and social, *Wine, Writing, and Semiotics*, Mike Tornatore, is a social media entrepreneur passionate about sharing his love and knowledge of wine. As a boy, Mike grew up in the upstate New York Finger Lakes wine region, where he watched his grandfather graft fruit trees and grape vines in the family garden. From this beginning grew Mike's love for learning about the magic of growing and harvesting.

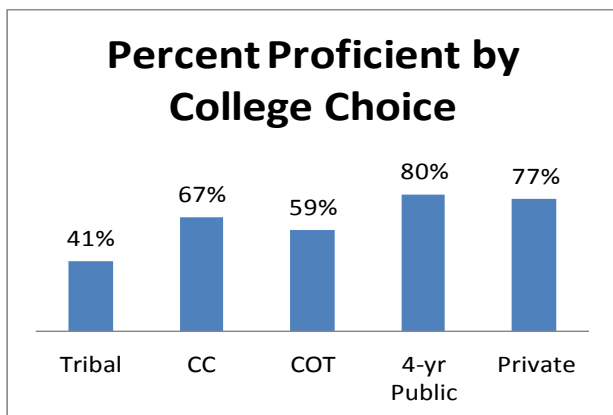
Today, Mike is recognized as an influencer and advisor at the consumer-wine industry nexus. He will share his knowledge about label, bottle, and wine-growing semiotics, with a focus on the psychology and rhetorical strategies that influence semiotic communication. Mike will also describe the process he engages to write about wine for multiple modalities (radio, podcasts, blogs, television, video, and other publications) and will invite participants to produce their own writing. After the presentation, the wines mentioned during the discussion will be available at a wine-tasting session.

## Students' College-Going Plans Correlate with MUSWA Scores

The data table on Page 3 indicates that 3,823 (51%) of the students tested plan to attend college in Montana and another 2,269 (30%) plan to attend college out of state. That means 81% of the students (overwhelmingly juniors) have college plans. This pie chart shows where those who selected "college in Montana" plan to enroll. Over the past few years, students headed to Colleges of Technology have increased slightly each year.



The MUSWA data also correlates the type of post-secondary educational institution in Montana students plan to attend in relationship to their scores. Often, students who score below 3.5 plan to attend a two-year program, where several developmental courses are offered and where they can be admitted without provisions.



Despite the apparent imbalance of students scoring "proficient" who intend to enroll in tribal colleges, the general increase in proficiency for students headed to tribal colleges is significant, as illustrated in the table entitled Tribal: Percent Proficient.

Tribal College: Percent Proficient	
2006	14.80%
2007	12.60%
2008	26.90%
2009	38.70%
2010	40.70%
2011	43.50%
2012	41.29%

## Developmental Writing Courses Offered by Two-Year Colleges

Students who earn 3.5 or above on the MUSWA are placed into WRIT 101 College Writing, which is offered at the universities and the two-year colleges in the Montana University System. Students whose scores are below 3.5 must take another test (such as COMPASS, the SAT, or ACT's writing test) or enroll in a developmental course designed to prepare students to be successful in the college-level course.

WRIT 095 **WRIT 095 Developmental Writing** is offered on all of Montana's two-year campuses. Outcomes for that course include the following: "Upon completion of this course, a student will be able to: Use writing to enhance thinking skills and assess effectiveness of one's own writing; Use texts as a springboard for writing; Develop strategies for pre-writing, organizing, drafting, revising, and editing; Cite sources correctly; State and support a position on an issue with some elaboration or relevant explanation; Demonstrate basic competency the use of the conventions of language, including grammar, syntax, punctuation, spelling, and mechanics; Use well-controlled sentences, express ideas clearly, and choose words appropriate to the topic and audience. "

In addition, UM Helena and MSU Great Falls offer WRIT 080, Building Basic Writing Skills, as well as WRIT 201, College Writing II (also offered by most of the four-year universities).

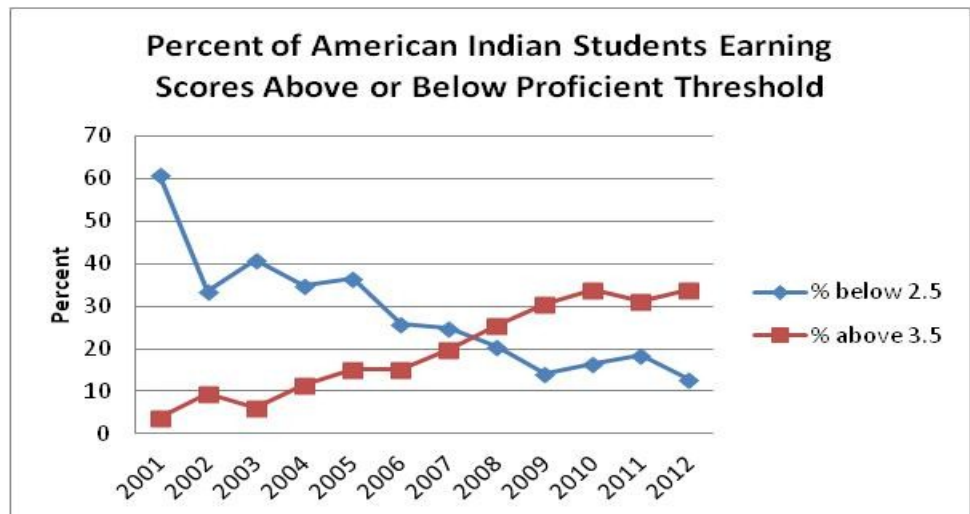
## Scores Compared by Ethnicity

When students take the MUSWA, they provide information about their ethnicity in categories suggested by ACT. Note in the following table, that most students identify themselves as White, followed by American Indian, then Multi-racial. Some students (No Response) do not fill in this information.

	Af-Am	Am-Ind	Asn-Am	Hisp	Mex-Am	Multi	White	NR
Average Score	3.30	3.29	3.65	3.63	3.61	3.62	3.92	3.63
Number	63	586	102	55	146	329	6153	57

Because American Indian students constitute the largest minority (about 8% of the test-takers), data from this group has been carefully studied over MUSWA’s lifetime. A striking improvement has been the percentage of American Indian students scoring at or above the proficient level (scores of 4-6) versus those scores deemed novice writers (scores of 1-2).

The MUSWA rubric and the essays in its training materials are sensitive to possible cultural biases. Essays that use narrative as a device to persuade or that approach organization in ways that don’t necessarily privilege the five-paragraph essay that demands a thesis sentence in the first paragraph can earn scores in the proficient-advanced range on the MUSWA if they use these techniques effectively.



The number of American Indian students taking the MUSWA and their average scores have both increased over the 12 years that MUSWA has been offered to Montana’s high schools.

	2003		2004		2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		2010		2011		2012	
	Indian	White	Indian	White	Indian	White	Indian	White	Indian	White	Indian	White	Indian	White	Indian	White	Indian	White	Indian	White
#	275	3104	297	3984	307	5056	328	5940	454	6175	438	6124	534	6514	530	6317	549	6376	586	6153
Mean	2.55		2.66		2.73		2.85		2.94		3.08		3.24		3.28		3.21		3.29	

For the 2012 MUSWA, 8 American Indian students received Letters of Recognition and one reservation school, Wolf Point High School, earned an Award of Merit for achieving an average score among the top 25% of Montana’s participating high schools. In addition, 12 students who identified themselves as Multi-racial earned Letters of Recognition. Three reservation high schools earned averages at or above the state average of 3.8 and four additional schools with over 60% American Indian populations had averages above the 3.5 threshold.

Montana’s high schools that serve American Indian students have participated fully in the MUSWA by testing their students, sending teachers to Writing Assessment Workshops, and serving as Trainers. In 2012, eight of the forty Leader/Trainers hailed from reservation high schools. Their hard work is evidenced by the achievement of these students.

## Gap Between Male and Female Scores Continues

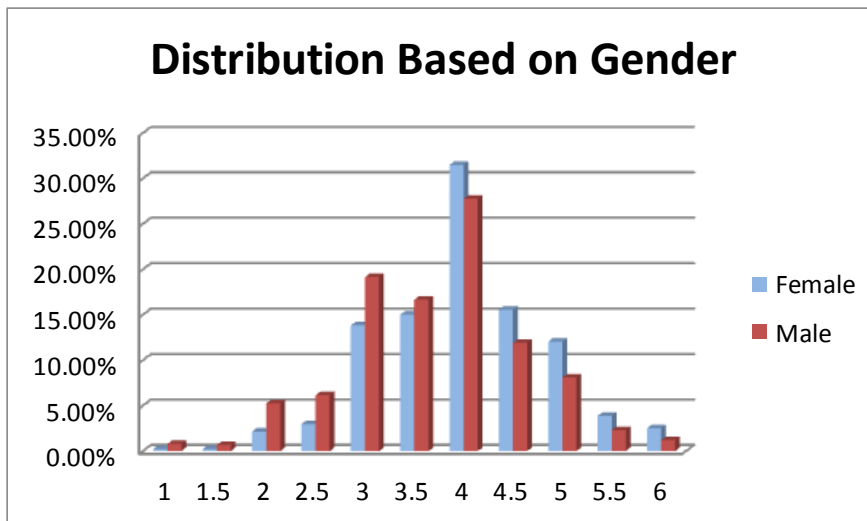
Score	Female	Male
1	0.22%	0.81%
1.5	0.25%	0.68%
2	2.15%	5.23%
2.5	2.97%	6.16%
3	13.84%	19.17%
3.5	15.02%	16.67%
4	31.51%	27.78%
4.5	15.58%	11.91%
5	12.05%	8.09%
5.5	3.88%	2.31%
6	2.53%	1.20%

Every year, girls outperform boys on the MUSWA. In 2012, the female average (3.99), was .3 above the male average (3.69). This year, boys wrote 33% of the 6's. However, in 2011, boys wrote 45% of the 6's compared to 39% in 2010 and 2009, 36% in 2008, and 32% in 2007. At the other end of the scale, boys wrote 75% of the essays with scores of 2 or below, whereas in 2011, they wrote 68% of those "novice" essays.

Year	Male	Female
2007	3.28	3.66
2008	3.44	3.83
2009	3.57	3.95
2010	3.65	4.03
2011	3.72	4.02
2012	3.69	3.99

Another piece of interesting data regarding the differences in the scores of boys and girls is related to the six different writing prompts. Each year, when one or two prompts are retired and new prompts added, MUSWA leaders consider gender differences of prompts, in addition to other factors, such as popularity, inter-rater reliability, balance of options, and scorer comments about the prompts. Prompts 2 and 4 generated the highest scores for both genders.

One of the new professional development programs proposed for 2013, focused on writing in the field of geosciences, may appeal to male students and generate equally high-quality writing from both genders.



## 123 "English as Second Language" Students Score Only Slightly Below Average of Students With English as Primary Language

Only 123 students reported that English was not their primary language and their average score was 3.34, as compared to 3.84 whose primary language is English. This difference is smaller than the difference in 2011, when 152 ELS students averaged 3.24, compared to an average of 3.88 for other students.

In addition, 37% of these students were able to produce essays that scored 4 or above, as compared to 29% in 2011, 15.5% in 2010, 12.8% in 2009, and 8.4% in 2008. Two of these ESL students earned Letters of Recognition.



## New Professional Development Program to Stress Reading, Research, and Writing in the Content Areas

The **Common Core State Standards** have set the entire nation's sights on college and career readiness in mathematics and literacy. Instructors at the college level often complain about students' inability to produce logical written arguments based on reliable evidence. ACT's research brief, *Reading Between the Lines*, points out that our high school students have difficulty comprehending and analyzing complex texts. The **Common Core State Standards** stress the need for students to synthesize complex, informational texts and to write argumentation. The Director of College Readiness Programs at the University of Montana Helena (and MUSWA Director for the past twelve years) has proposed a program that will focus on guiding teachers as they implement specific aspects of the *Common Core State Standards: English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*, in particular, synthesizing complex texts, conducting digital research, and writing arguments based on discipline-specific texts. This program is designed to help teachers use interdisciplinary approaches to achieve these aspects of the CCSS:

- *appreciate the norms and conventions of each discipline; understand domain-specific words and phrases; gain knowledge from challenging texts that use elaborate diagrams and data to convey information and illustrate concepts.*
- *conduct research to answer a question, synthesize multiple sources, gather relevant information from multiple digital sources; assess the strengths and limitations of each source; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source; and follow a standard format for citation, and*
- *write arguments focused on discipline-specific content and cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of science and technical texts.*

The **Montana Writing Summit: Sustaining Gains** will serve as the culminating activity for the Montana University System Writing Assessment. Embedded in the Summit will be breakout sessions about technical writing and incorporating writing in the content areas, introducing participants to the professional development opportunities described in this program—Literacy in Social studies, Sciences, and Technical Subjects, **LISSTS**. This will help transition from a professional development program that used samples of timed persuasive essays produced in the English classroom, to professional development that supports interdisciplinary teaming and the production of argumentation requiring research.

Three regional workshops with interdisciplinary teams will be supported by an online course helping teachers guide students through the process of *gathering relevant information from multiple digital sources; assessing the strengths and limitations of each source; and following a standard format for citation*. The regional site leaders will schedule and conduct three onsite workshops between January and June, 2013. Implementing CCSS will be the major goal of these workshops. The CCSS stress that “instruction in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language be a shared responsibility within the school.” Included in their key design considerations are that “most of the required reading in college and workforce training programs is informational in structure and challenging in content” and that students “be able to write about what they read” and “share findings from their research.”

Although the online research course will be available throughout the state, schools will apply to participate in one of the regional workshop offerings. Tentatively, the Billings region will focus on English and social sciences; the Helena region will focus on English and geosciences, and the Missoula region will focus on English and health science. Middle or high school teachers wishing to form interdisciplinary teams and become involved in the workshop series should contact one of the following regional leaders: Kathy Holt, Billings (kholt@msubillings.edu) Beverly Ann Chin, Missoula (Beverly.chin@mso.umt.edu), or Jan Clinard, Helena (jan.clinard@umhelena.edu).

## 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. To assist in preparing for 2013, download the *Practical Guide* for information comparing the MUSWA and ACT scoring rubrics.

Webwriters.msugf.edu has served as a tutorial on persuasive writing over the past several years. At this point in time, considering the new emphasis on ACT Plus Writing, the future of Webwriters is uncertain.