

CAMPUS PROGRESS REPORTS

PLANNING WRITING PROFICIENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION

THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA-MISSOULA

Committee Chair: Betsy W. Bach, Ph.D., Assistant Provost

Contact Number: 243.4689/4251

Email: BachBw@mso.umt.edu

Committee Membership: The Provost's Writing Committee is composed of representatives from the Schools of Pharmacy, Education, Fine Arts, Business and Journalism, Departments of Chemistry and English, Academic Affairs, Mansfield Library, University College, Registrar's Office, Linguistics Program and a student.

Current measures used for writing assessment: Internal exit exam timed writing sample (3 hours) and Gating or junior rising exam scored with external review

Explanation: The Upper Division Writing Proficiency Assessment (UDWPA) is a diagnostic exam to determine a student's readiness to progress to upper division writing courses, and has been in place since fall semester 2000. The assessment is designed to be both holistic and sequential. That is, upon completion of ENEX 101 (or its equivalent), a second writing course, and 60 credits, students are requested to take the assessment to determine their preparedness for upper-division writing. Those students passing the exam can progress to 300- and 400-level writing courses, while failing students are encouraged to take more writing courses to solidify their writing skills.

The assessment is designed not to penalize, but rather to determine a student's readiness to succeed in upper division courses. If a student takes the assessment just prior to the junior year, there is time for failing students to get remediation prior to enrolling in upper level coursework.

To date just over 1200 students have taken the assessment.

The assessment is given seven times a year, and takes no more than three hours. During the assessment students write an essay in response to a question based upon your reading of a short, 3-6 page, text. A different text is used at each administration of the assessment. The text is posted on our Assessment website two weeks prior to the date (www.umt.edu/ucoll/assessment/text.htm). At the assessment, students are provided with two questions, or prompts. They select one question to which they respond.

Progress to date and next steps: Data gathered from 12/99-12/01 clearly indicate that students with more lower-division writing courses have a much better chance of passing the assessment. Almost *half* (49%) of the students failing the assessment had only one lower-division writing course prior to taking the UDWPA, while 35% of those failing had two lower division writing courses. Only 5% of those students taking 3 or more writing courses failed the assessment.

These data are based on the 239 (28%) students who failed the UDWPA, 91% of whom are transfer students. While the data are encouraging (indicating that students with more lower-division writing fail the assessment at a much lower rate), a much larger sample of students matriculating at UM-M is needed.

Student data gathered during the most recent assessment indicate that only 2/3 of the students read the text prior to the day of the assessment, and more than half spent 30 minutes or less preparing for the assessment (see attached).

Based upon 18 months of assessment data on the UDWPA, we have made several changes to the committee membership, committee charge, and to the assessment itself. Beginning with the February assessment, we offered a choice of question prompts. Two questions are now provided and students select one of the two from which to respond.

Also with the February assessment, we will provide analytical scoring for all failing exams. A trial "scorecard" was given to all students failing the 2/21/02 assessment along with their exams (see attached).

We have also begun an ongoing review of ACT, the group scoring the assessment, to insure accuracy. We will randomly select 10% of the texts from every assessment, grade them locally, and compare the results with the scores provided by ACT. The Committee plans to keep an ongoing tally and communicate and/or calibrate scoring with ACT as necessary.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA WESTERN

(Proposed) Committee Chair: Karl Ulrich

Contact Number: 683-7151

Email: k_ulrich@umwestern.edu

(Proposed) Committee Membership: Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Dean of Arts and Sciences, Dean of Education, Business and Technology. This group will work with entire department faculties to develop writing standards appropriate to each degree program

Current measures used for writing assessment:

All students must meet writing outcomes of ENG 101 Freshmen Composition. Advanced writing proficiency is assessed for teacher education students during portfolio reviews for admission into and graduation from the Teacher Education Program. All business students must successfully complete BUS 217 Business and Electronic Communications, which includes assessment of a writing portfolio. All Arts and Sciences programs have extensive writing requirements in the form of course papers, internship journals or theses.

Proficiency Measures Under Consideration: Thesis, project, or writing sample scored by staff and Writing portfolio scored by staff

Explanation:

All campus academic departments are in the process of developing more detailed writing outcomes and standardized assessments of writing proficiencies appropriate to their disciplines. Most of this will occur using standardized assessment of writing portfolios or capstone writing experiences such as theses or reports on internships or student teaching assignments.

Progress to date and next steps:

Initial meetings of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the respective dean were held with every academic department during spring semester 2002 to discuss the issue of developing detailed writing outcomes and standardized assessment techniques for those outcomes. Writing outcomes and assessment plans will be developed by the departments and submitted to the review committee during fall semester 2002.

MONTANA TECH OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

CURRENT PRACTICE:

Faculty Committee with oversight: General Ed Committee

Currently the Montana Tech campus has writing proficiency requirements as a component as a requirement for a Bachelors Degree.

Writing Requirements for all Graduates as published in the catalog:

As a general education requirement, in addition to English Composition, all baccalaureate degree-seeking students must successfully complete two (2) designated writing courses (W) at the 3000 or 4000 level. The 4000 level course should be a capstone course in the students major. Such courses are indicated in the catalog with a "W" appended to the course number (e.g. BUS 3896W).*

The writing component of a "W" course generally takes one of two forms:

1. The course requires at least three (3) three to five (3-5) page papers, and students must write a substantial revision of at least one of these papers; OR
2. The course requires one major paper of 15-20 pages, and students must produce an early draft of this paper for feedback from the instructor, and then make subsequent revisions.

For a course to achieve the "W" designation it must be approved by the faculty curriculum committee and subsequently be approved by the instructional faculty.

PLANNING PROCESS:

Dissemination of acceptable writing is currently limited to the courses which are "W" listed. As a requirement for accreditation of the engineering areas, writing must be woven throughout the curriculum. Discussions on how to disseminate acceptable writing examples need to take place.

Students who fail to demonstrate a proficiency in writing are currently assisted on a case-by-case basis. This could be incorporated into the role and scope of the on campus tutoring center The Learning Center (TLC) in the future.

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY – BOZEMAN

In February of 2002, the Task Force on Writing Proficiency Graduation Standards was commissioned by the Office of the Provost at Montana State University-Bozeman for the purpose of overseeing the implementation of the Board of Regents' charge to "develop proficiency-based...graduation requirements" for the MSU-Bozeman campus. The 14-member Task Force, chaired by Philip Gaines, Coordinator of Composition in the Department of English, consists of faculty representatives from all the colleges of the university as well as representatives from Faculty Council, International Education, Advance by Choice, Associated Students of MSU, and the Office of the Provost.

In keeping with the Regents' policy that "design and implementation of writing proficiency graduation standards be left to each MUS campus," the Task Force has established the following priorities for MSU-Bozeman:

1. Implement the Regents' mandate in a way that genuinely enhances the writing proficiency of our students.
2. Ensure that all students have multiple opportunities for significant writing combined with substantive feedback.
3. Identify the quantity and quality of student writing in each college and/or department and design initiatives for improving writing proficiency that both address the need and relate well to the subject matter of individual disciplines.

The Task Force has determined that among the Regents' suggested "means by which students will be allowed to demonstrate proficiency in writing", the most appropriate for MSU-Bozeman is successful completion of writing-intensive (WI) courses—generally upper-division in the major. These courses would:

- be adaptations of existing courses as opposed to new courses.
- deal with subject matter integral to the inquiry of the discipline.
- include multiple significant writing assignments coupled with substantive feedback.
- be taught by instructors in the major discipline who have been trained in the integration of writing into their courses.

In addition to the existing universal requirement of ENGL 121 College Writing, the Task Force has tentatively determined that 6 credits of WI-coursework (i.e. two courses) should be incorporated into university degree requirements in order to improve writing proficiency. The content and structure of the courses would be in keeping with university-wide standards for WI-courses and would be evaluated periodically in order to maintain quality control. Writing proficiency standards for graduation would be met by the successful completion of the WI-course requirement.

The Task Force is also considering 1) the relationship of ENGL 121 to the proposed WI-courses and exploring models for how the two might be integrated, 2) a reappraisal of the current writing requirement exemption policy, 3) the implementation of ongoing assessment mechanisms, and 4) possible articulation of the program with the New Core.

A tentative action plan is as follows (to be implemented by appropriate committees and contingent upon resource appropriation):

- Spring 2002
- Complete research into the state of writing in the various departments and colleges of the university.
- Fall 2002
- Establish university-wide criteria and standards for writing proficiency.
 - Develop discipline-specific models for "WI" courses—including number and type of writing assignments, means of instructor feedback, and criteria and performance standards for writing

quality.

- Announce and publicize the writing-intensive initiative across campus.
- Develop an implementation budget.

Spring 2003 • Invite, review, and accept proposals for a limited number of pilot WI-courses in selected departments.

- Conduct training workshops for WI-course instructors.

Fall 2003 • Implement pilot WI-course program.

Spring 2004 • Evaluate pilot program and implement necessary changes.

- Invite, review, and accept proposals for a complete program of WI-courses.

Fall 2004 • Implement complete WI-course program for inclusion in the 2004-06 MSU Bulletin.

Recommendation: Given the differences in the campuses, their programs and missions, the Sub-committee believes that a single approach to assessing writing proficiency for graduation would not be appropriate. Instead, the Sub-committee recommends that the design and implementation of writing proficiency graduation standards be left to each MUS campus, with implementation to be established within the next two years.

This means that campuses would form appropriate faculty committees to:

- Generate criteria that students will need to meet in writing to graduate;
- Establish performance standards delineating the characteristics or skills that students should be able to display for a proficiency rating;
- Prepare for wide dissemination models of acceptable writing;
- Identify means by which students will be allowed to demonstrate proficiency in writing such as written exit exams, scores on the verbal portion of the GRE or other standardized tests, completion of "W" courses, capstone projects, senior seminars with substantial writing assignments, etc.;
- Define a process for regular review of criteria, standards and activities by which student proficiency in writing is to be documented for graduation; and
- Determine how students who fail to demonstrate proficiency in writing will be assisted to achieve this standard and graduate.

The Committee recommends that these studies be completed at each campus in the next 24 months and that reports on each campuses' policies and activities for graduation proficiency in writing be submitted to the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education in time for inclusion in the report to the Board of Regents in May 2002. This would allow for Board review and campus adoption effective with the rising junior class in Fall 2002.

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY-NORTHERN

(Proposed) Committee Chair: Will Rawn (temporary)

Contact Number: (406) 265-4169

Email: rawn@msun.edu

(Proposed) Committee Membership: one member from each of Northern's four colleges in addition to other campus representatives with expertise in assessment and/ or writing instruction.

Current measures used for writing assessment: portfolio assessment for composition 1 and composition II by composition faculty

Proficiency Measures Under Consideration: Writing portfolio scored by staff

Explanation: MSU-Northern proposes to assess the writing proficiency of its graduating students in the capstone courses required in each major. The material to be evaluated would be portfolios of written work for this course. The primary evaluators would be faculty in the appropriate discipline.

Progress to date and next steps: We have reached general agreement that it would fit the institutional mission to measure exit writing proficiency through the capstone courses; that a rubric proposed by the composition faculty would be appropriate for this assessment; that the composition faculty will facilitate workshops on evaluating student writing to help prepare other faculty to evaluate capstone course work in their disciplines; and that the results of assessment should be reported to the office of the dean of Arts and Sciences.

Faculty from across the disciplines at Northern have had input in planning for exit writing proficiency measurement. Proposals, originating from the composition faculty, have been discussed in faculty meetings of each college. The deans have discussed faculty suggestions from those meetings, and the composition faculty and College of Arts and Sciences have responded to requests from the deans for modifications and amplifications of the assessment plan.

The deans find that campus consensus regarding the general plan for assessment is sufficient that the next step should be formation of a cross campus committee for implementation. Two immediate tasks for that committee will be establishing faculty workshops on writing assessment, and planning for remediation.

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY--BILLINGS

(Proposed) Committee Chair: Sandra A. Rietz (subject to change)

Contact Number: 657-2167

Email: srietz@msubillings.edu

(Proposed) Committee Membership: Sandie Rietz, Deb Schaffer, Tami Haaland, Susan Baack, Tom Rust, Randall Gloege, Kathy Holt.

Current measures used for writing assessment: internal English department criteria for passing required writing courses within the general education program

Proficiency Measures Under Consideration: Writing portfolio scored by staff and with external review

Explanation: Given the consensus that a portfolio of each graduating senior's college writing will offer the best evidence of that student's writing proficiency and that such a portfolio could be successfully assembled without requiring a traditional classroom-bound course, the Writing Proficiency Exit Standards Committee makes the following recommendations for a revised capstone-portfolio requirement:

1. Each MSU-Billings student will enroll in a three-credit capstone-portfolio course (CRN to be determined later) as part of her/his general-education requirements (fees to be paid during the student's senior year). Ideally, students will be thoroughly informed about the nature of this requirement during freshman orientation and will enroll during their freshman year. To fulfill the course requirements, students will collect into a formal portfolio a variety of papers they will produce for a number of courses and as special projects over the next four years, in consultation with course instructors, department heads, the students' own advisors, and perhaps other campus experts to be decided upon. Each item included will also be accompanied by a pre-write of some sort and a rough draft.
2. To provide a comprehensive picture of students' writing abilities and development, the portfolio will include **ten pieces of writing in six required components:**
 - a. **Four** pieces of writing produced for **general-education courses (including b.)**, to be presented to each student's major and minor departments when these choices are declared and to include at least one personal expository essay, at least one personal argumentative essay, and at least one research paper or its equivalent (e.g., a business report incorporating documented secondary-source information);
 - b. A **capstone general-education research paper** or its equivalent to be designed by the general-education faculty.
 - c. **Four** pieces of writing produced for courses **within each student's major (including e. and f.)**, two to be required by the department, and two of the student's own choice;
 - d. **Two** pieces of writing produced for courses **within each student's minor**, one required by the department, and one of the student's own choice (special arrangements for c. and d. may be needed for double majors or minors, extended majors, or other exceptional situations);
 - e. A **junior paper** produced for a course within each student's major, ideally incorporating documented secondary-source information;
 - f. And a **senior paper** produced for a course within each student's major, ideally incorporating documented secondary-source information.

3. The general-education, major and minor papers will be evaluated by the teachers of the courses for which the writing was produced, but the junior and senior papers will also be evaluated anonymously by outside readers, who will be compensated for their efforts from the students' fees for the course. A possible source of experienced readers lies in retired faculty, especially those with post-retirement teaching duties, some of whom might prefer this activity to teaching courses. If any reader feels a student's paper needs more revision to be true evidence of writing proficiency, it will be the student's responsibility to improve the paper based on the feedback received and with the help of the Writing Lab and whatever other resources might be available (course instructors, advisors, etc.); the paper will be worked on and reviewed until determined to be acceptable, and will then be added to the portfolio.

4. Finally, a college-wide (or university-wide) committee will evaluate each student's final portfolio (presented anonymously) prior to that student's graduating, using an evaluation rubric and performance criteria agreed upon for the university as a whole. Furthermore, since every faculty member will be involved in writing evaluation and/or advising at one level or another, some training or orientation should be provided campus wide, whether in the form of advising packets, writing-evaluation workshops, mentoring by experienced faculty, or some combination of these or other methods.

Progress to date and next steps: *Progress to date:* The writing proficiency committee at MSU-Billings met, developed a model for assessment of student writing, presented same to the Provost's Council, negotiated, redrafted, and constructed a reasonably cost efficient plan that:

1. lends coherence to writing across the curriculum,
2. supports the efforts of the general education committee to bring greater focus and cohesion to general education,
3. emphasizes for students the importance of writing in all coursework,
4. focuses a student's writing over his/her college career on a summative end product.

Next steps: Assuming that the appended plan or some facsimile of it survives the campus shared governance process:

1. meet with general education committee to determine courses and course products which will qualify for portfolio inclusion,
2. present model to general education faculty,
3. develop criteria for writing performance pertinent to general education writing products,
4. prepare faculty development handbook to help faculty to support student writing via application of effective prewrites
5. support faculty in development of writing assignments for inclusion in the portfolio,
6. prepare faculty for consistency of internal evaluation of student writing,
7. meet with departments to determine writing assignments within majors and minors destined for portfolio inclusion,
8. work with department faculty to set performance criteria, develop effective writing processes for assignments and establish consistency of internal evaluation of student writing in majors and minors,
9. meet with faculty and administration of colleges to construct portfolio expectations and design junior and senior papers,
10. meet with Provost and Provost's Council to discuss staffing of external review for junior and senior papers,
11. make appropriate catalogue changes,
12. provide a support system for students who give evidence of struggling with writing early in the portfolio development process.