Office of Academic Assessment

English Courses and SAT-Writing Scores
Tracking Study of the Fall 2008 First-Year Students

Office of Academic Assessment
University of Southern Maine
Spring 2009
Overall Profile

The purpose of this report was to examine the profiles of the fall 2008 first-year admitted students (N=974) in regards to SAT-Writing test scores and English course performance. The demographic profile (gender, enrollment status, and major/college) is shown on the top section of the following table, and the overall grade profile on the bottom section. The student data was grouped by their SAT-Writing scores; that is, 144 (15%) with no SAT scores, 643 (66%) had SATW scores below 550, and 187 (19%) had SATW scores of 550 or above. Overall, regardless of the SAT score, a large percentage of students had successful (A-C) grades in their English course, and had a fall ’08 grade point average of 2.00 or higher.

Profile of Fall ’08 First-Year English Students (N=974)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile</th>
<th>No Scores</th>
<th>Scores below 550</th>
<th>Scores 550 or above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrolled</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/Major</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASET</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAS</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUS</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAC</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUR</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UND</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GO (CND)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 08 Semester -GPA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 2.00</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00 or above</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall -English Grades</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-C grades</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-F grades</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-L-W grades</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
English Proficiency Policy (effective March 2008)

The newly revised English proficiency policy states that students entering the university with no SAT-Writing scores or scores below 550 are required to enroll in the ENG 104 course. Students with SAT-Writing scores of 550 or above may enroll in the ENG 100C course.

The following table shows the enrollment numbers for each of the English courses and the breakdown of the SATW scores. As noted in the chart, 58% were enrolled in the ENG 104 course, 22% enrolled in the ENG 100 course, and 20% enrolled in another ENG course (ENG 120 or higher). Out of the 569 ENG 104 students, there were 565 (33 students with no SATW and 532 with scores below 550) who followed the proficiency requirement, and 4 students who met the English proficiency requirement, but opted to enroll in ENG 104. Out of the 210 ENG 100 students, approximately one-third (32%) of the students had not met the proficiency requirement (23 students with no SATW and 44 students with SATW below 550), yet enrolled in the ENG 100 course, instead of ENG 104.

Lastly, there is a concern about the 195 first-year students who enrolled in another English course, 120 or higher. Some of these students clearly did not meet proficiency by their SAT scores, some were perhaps older students, and others may have met their English proficiency through CLEP or AP scores. Further investigation would be necessary to explain how these first semester students ended up in a higher level English course.

### Enrollment of ENG courses and Breakdown of SAT-Writing Score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Course Taken</th>
<th>No SATW score</th>
<th>SATW below 550</th>
<th>SATW 550 or above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. Enrolled</td>
<td>N   %</td>
<td>N    %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG 104</td>
<td>569 (58%)</td>
<td>33  6%</td>
<td>532 93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG 100</td>
<td>210 (22%)</td>
<td>23 11%</td>
<td>44 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG 120+</td>
<td>195 (20%)</td>
<td>88 45%</td>
<td>67 34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Totals</td>
<td>974 (100%)</td>
<td>144 15%</td>
<td>643 66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Performance in English Courses

According to the tracking results, over 80% of the students who did not meet the English proficiency requirement and enrolled in the ENG 104 course had obtained successful or passing (A-C) grades. For the 44 students who had SATW scores below 550 and opted to enroll in ENG 100, 84% were able to be successful in their ENG 100 course, compared to 87% (N=143) of those who had SATW scores of 550 or above. For the 67 students who had scores below 550, and enrolled in an ENG 120 or higher level course, the success rate was 73%, compared to the 85% success rate of those who had higher SATW scores (N=40).

Many students with no SAT scores had higher success rates than students with SAT scores. According to previous English studies, this is a common pattern for the students who are older (non-traditional age) upon entry to USM.

Profile of ENG Course Grades and Meeting English Proficiency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENG Course</th>
<th>Course Grades</th>
<th>SAT-W Test Scores</th>
<th>Did not meet Proficiency</th>
<th>Met Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No Score</td>
<td>&lt; 550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG 104 Course</td>
<td>A-C grades</td>
<td>N=33</td>
<td>27 (82%)</td>
<td>432 (81%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D-F grades</td>
<td>N=532</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>72 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I-L-W grades</td>
<td>N=4</td>
<td>5 (15%)</td>
<td>28 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG 100 Course</td>
<td>A-C grades</td>
<td>N=23</td>
<td>22 (96%)</td>
<td>37 (84%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D-F grades</td>
<td>N=44</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>6 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I-L-W grades</td>
<td>N=143</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG 120+ Course</td>
<td>A-C grades</td>
<td>N=88</td>
<td>79 (90%)</td>
<td>49 (73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D-F grades</td>
<td>N=67</td>
<td>4 (4%)</td>
<td>11 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I-L-W grades</td>
<td>N=40</td>
<td>5 (6%)</td>
<td>7 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Totals</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>187</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Correlation between Writing and Critical Reading

Average SAT-Writing scores and SAT-Critical Reading scores were examined to determine if any patterns existed for different level English students. On average, students with low SAT-Writing scores tended to have low SAT-Critical Reading scores (461.8 and 474.2 respectively). Conversely, students with high SAT-Writing scores (550 or above) also had high SAT-Critical Reading scores (590.8, 564.9 respectively). A moderate correlation was found between the Writing and the Critical Reading scores (.68); which means, in several cases students had similar (scaled) scores on both tests.

**SATW Below 550**: Profile of English Students and Average SAT-Writing and Critical Reading Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Course Taken</th>
<th>Enrolled</th>
<th>Average SAT-W Score</th>
<th>Average SAT-CR Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENG 104</td>
<td>532 (83%)</td>
<td>460.0</td>
<td>471.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG 100</td>
<td>44 (7%)</td>
<td>469.1</td>
<td>479.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG 120+</td>
<td>67 (10%)</td>
<td>471.0</td>
<td>492.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Totals</td>
<td>643 (100%)</td>
<td>461.8</td>
<td>474.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SATW 550 or Above**: Profile of English Students and Average SAT-Writing and Critical Reading Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Course Taken</th>
<th>Enrolled</th>
<th>Average SAT-W Score</th>
<th>Average SAT-CR Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENG 104</td>
<td>4 (2%)</td>
<td>565.0</td>
<td>540.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG 100</td>
<td>143 (76%)</td>
<td>588.5</td>
<td>565.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG 120+</td>
<td>40 (21%)</td>
<td>601.5</td>
<td>566.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Totals</td>
<td>187 (100%)</td>
<td>590.8</td>
<td>564.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Validation of Cut-off Score

To examine whether the cut-off score of 550 on the SAT-Writing Test is a valid proficiency score, various SAT-W score ranges were analyzed by examining the English course grades. The findings did indicate that students with higher SATW scores were more likely to have higher passing grades in their English course; however, the passing rates were only slightly higher. A high percentage of students (87%) with scores between 520 and 540 had successful ENG grades (N=100), which indicates a case of decreasing the cut-off score to 520; although it may be too early to make a judgment without further analysis.

Breakdown of SAT-Writing Scores and ENG 104 & 100 Course Grades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakdown of Scores</th>
<th>ENG Grades</th>
<th>numbers of students (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAT-W Score</td>
<td></td>
<td>A-C grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>450 or below</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>187 (76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>460 – 510</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>195 (84%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>520 – 540</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>87 (87%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 550 – 590           | 93         | 76 (82%)   | 12 (13%)   | 5 (5%)      |
| 600 – 640           | 45         | 40 (89%)   | 2 (4%)     | 3 (7%)      |
| 650 +               | 9          | 9 (100%)   | 0 (0%)     | 0 (0%)      |

| Totals              | 723        | 594 (82%)  | 92 (13%)   | 37 (5%)     |

Conclusion

Based upon the data analysis on the fall ’08 first-year students, a cut-off SAT-Writing score of 550 appears to be an adequate and valid score for determining English course placement. This tracking report shows that when students are placed and enroll in the ENG 104, they are likely to be successful even though they have low SAT-Writing scores and low SAT-Critical Reading scores. Follow-up (performance and retention) tracking studies will be completed in the next few semesters to determine further validity of the SAT-W score and to establish the reliability of the proficiency policy.