

Improving Student Writing Pilot Study (WAVES)

Bowie State University (BSU) is participating in a U.S. Department of Education(DOE)/Educational Testing Services (ETS) grant called "Exploring Writing Achievement and Its Role in Success at 4-Year Postsecondary Institutions" to study writing achievement and to ascertain how achievement in this area relates to student success. This ETS study, which is also called WAVES, is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences' Program for Postsecondary and Adult Education. WAVES is a \$1.3 million grant with eight other participating higher education institutions.

At BSU, the Center for Academic Programs Assessment (CAPA) is coordinating the assessment pilot study. WAVES will begin in fall 2017 at BSU, focusing on freshmen. The focus on freshmen will allow CAPA to ascertain over time whether students' performance in writing, and the relationship to academic success during their college careers, changes between the students' freshman and senior year.

According to the Department of Education's website:

"The researchers will evaluate writing-specific and domain-general knowledge using subtests of ETS's HEIghten [writing] assessment and intrapersonal factors using existing motivation and interest scales. They will also collect administrative data on students' overall GPA and GPA from writing intensive courses, course completion, major course enrollment and completion, and retention in college for five semesters following primary data collection." (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/grantsearch/details.asp?ID=1807>)

The DOE web site states that in the area of writing-domain knowledge, the researchers are focusing on:

- Conventions (e.g., grammar, spelling, citations);
- Coherence (e.g., topic development, topical cohesion);
- Organization (e.g., thesis sentences, use of rhetorical and discourse markers, such as therefore, however);
- Source use and integration (e.g., appropriate use of citations); and
- Topicality (e.g., relevant vocabulary)

Further, the researchers are analyzing whether critical thinking skills correlate with writing ability. Regarding intrapersonal factors, the site states that the researchers are exploring whether the student's interest, engagement, goal-setting and motivation in writing correlate with the student's writing ability (<https://ies.ed.gov/funding/grantsearch/details.asp?ID=1807>).