TO: Montana Board of Regents

FROM: Roger Barber
            Deputy Commissioner for Academic & Student Affairs

RE: An Update on the Temporary Program Approval Processes for Two-Year
                    and Certificate Programs

DATE: May 29 – 30, 2008

During the discussion of new academic programs at the March 2008 Board of Regents' meeting, the subject of the Board's accelerated program approval processes came up. The Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education was asked to prepare a short report on those processes for the May 2008 Board of Regents' meeting.

The Level I Temporary, Two-Year Approval Process:

The two-year, temporary approval process is based on the following language adopted by the Board of Regents:

> *Certificate or Associate of Applied Science Degree Programs may be submitted as Level I proposals, with memo and backup documentation, when they are offered in cooperation with and/or at the request of private or public sector partners and the decision point to offer the program is not consistent with the regular Board of Regents program approval process. Level I approval for programs under this provision will be limited to two years. Continuation of a program beyond the two years will require the normal program approval process as Level II Proposals.*

Since my employment at the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education began in September 2003, I have approved the following programs as Level I items under that procedure:

Montana State University-Billings College of Technology:
- A.A.S. degree in Radiologic Technology (September 2003)
- A.A.S. degree in Application Development (May 2004)
- A.A.S. degree and certificate in Construction Technology-Carpentry
        (November 2005)
- Certificate in Medical Coding and Insurance Billing (November 2005)

The University of Montana Western:
- A.A.S. degree in Natural Horsemanship, with two options in Natural Horsemanship Science and Natural Horsemanship Business Management (March 2004)

The University of Montana-Missoula College of Technology:
- A.A.S. degree and Certificate in Carpentry (January 2005)
- A.A.S. degree in Energy Technology (January 2007)

Montana Tech of The University of Montana College of Technology:
- A.A.S. degree and Certificate in Construction Technology-Carpentry
  (May 2006)

Miles Community College:
- Certificate in Agriculture (January 2005)

In that same time period, the campuses used the traditional, two-meeting approval process to create 33 Certificate and A.A.S. programs.

The "30 Credit or Fewer" Certificate Process:

The Board of Regents also authorized an accelerated process for the creation of certificate programs in March 2005. That process is set out in Policy 303.1, as follows:

> *Certificates of 30 credits or less may be implemented by the individual campuses of the Montana University System, without approval by the Board of Regents. All such certificates shall be reported to the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, however, and listed on the official degree and program inventory of the System.*

Since the implementation of that policy language just over three years ago, the campuses of the Montana University System have created 30 certificates, including the lineman program at Montana Tech of The University of Montana College of Technology. That program has been held up as a model of collaboration between business, industry and higher education during several meetings throughout the State.

Some Additional Comments:

The following additional information may provide some perspective on the Level I process:

   --since the temporary approval request is in the form of a Level I item, it can work its way through the Board of Regents in one meeting, rather than the usual two-meeting review and approval process.

   --with the advent of the "new" Board of Regents' meeting schedule, however, Level I items are only processed in March, May, September and November. That does delay the approval process a bit.

--approximately two years ago, I met with the Two-Year Council to go over the language in the temporary approval process. That language does require two (2) conditions or circumstances before the request is appropriate: private or public sector interest and collaboration; and a Regent meeting schedule that would delay the program's approval. Several of the requests that were coming across my desk did not meet those conditions, and I was told that my predecessor instructed the campuses to just use the process for any two-year degree or certificate. As a strict constructionist, I told the campuses that I thought that was bad advice and I intended to follow the language and spirit of the Board's policy.

--anecdotally, I am occasionally told that the Board's program approval process makes it hard to respond to workforce needs. I will almost certainly be challenged in making this statement, but my own experience at both the campus and system level leads me to a different conclusion. The real constraints in program development are: 1) resources and personnel to implement the program; and 2) the campuses' own internal program review process for new academic offerings.