

MSU wins reaccreditation with praise, concern for limited resources

By MSU News Service

2/16/10 Contact: Joseph Fedock (406) 994-4371, jfedock@montana.edu
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Summary: The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities has reaccredited MSU.

BOZEMAN -- A team that recently reaccredited Montana State University has commended the university for an "extremely high level of productivity and effectiveness" and creative use of resources during current fiscal challenges.

MSU learned this week that it had received reaccreditation from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities on the basis of an NWCCU comprehensive evaluation conducted this fall. The NWCCU is the accrediting body for all institutions of higher learning in the Pacific Northwest. It is one of six regional accreditation bodies that grant accreditation on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education.

"Receiving reaccreditation is, at the same time, a validation and a recognition that demonstrates the university is doing the job entrusted to it by the people of Montana by providing a quality education for our students," said MSU President Waded Cruzado. "It's one of our foremost indicators of quality, performance and a commitment to constant improvement."

She said the university was pleased that the report was complimentary of MSU faculty, staff and administration for being named to the Carnegie Foundation's highest classification for research universities on a budget that was much less than peer institutions.

"This confirms to us that we have been good stewards of the resources available to us," Cruzado said. "We are proud of the hard work done by our faculty, staff and administration to make this recognition possible."

Conversely, the committee's first recommendation was that new funds be generated or reallocated, if the university wanted to maintain its rank on the Carnegie Foundation's list of the 96 top research institutions.

Joseph Fedock, MSU's interim Provost and vice president for academic affairs, served as co-chairman of the university's reaccreditation effort with Bruce Morton, former dean of the MSU Libraries and University Honors professor. Fedock said the report was the result of the NWCCU evaluation team's two-day visit to MSU in October. MSU had prepared for two years for the reaccreditation process, Fedock said, including the preparation of an extensive self-study.

"Accreditation is important because it is a key way we measure our performance and provide accountability to our public," Fedock said. "It is an external review that assures us we are accomplishing the strategic priorities that comprise our mission as the state's Land Grant university."

Fedock said that in its 41-page report, which can be found at <http://www.montana.edu/accreditation/MSUBozemanCompEvalF09.pdf>, the review team made four commendations and four recommendations for the university.

NWCCU commended MSU for:

Achieving inclusion in the Carnegie Foundation for Teaching's highest classification for American research universities and for an "extraordinarily high level of productivity and effectiveness" by MSU faculty, staff and administration. "This represents creative and innovative use of resources, particularly in light of the current fiscal challenges facing the university."

Committing to undergraduate research and increasing annually the number of students who have hands-on research opportunities.

Achieving a culture of collaboration across departments, units and programs. "This widespread and sustained commitment of faculty and staff offers rich and truly distinctive educational opportunities for students, teaching opportunities for faculty and promising new areas of research and funding."

Establishing a facilities condition inventory that effectively tracks conditions and necessary maintenance of campus buildings.

The NWCCU also made four recommendations for MSU. They were:

Finding new resources, or strategic reallocations of existing resources, if MSU wants to remain on the Carnegie "Very High Research" classification. Noting "with concern the increasing tension between critical needs and available resources," the committee recommended that MSU needs to find funds to support the areas of research, graduate education, undergraduate research, faculty and staff development.

Better articulation among MSU's Bozeman campus and the three other MSU campuses across the state to take advantage of possible efficiencies.

Working with the Board of Regents and Commissioner to establish competitive salaries and benefits for faculty, staff and administrators.

Centralizing student learning outcomes and educational assessment (measures of whether curriculum and programs teach students what they say they will). Currently, this is done at the department level at MSU.

Fedock said the university will take the recommendations and incorporate them into its planning processes. Under new NWCCU standards that will take effect next year, accreditation evaluations will take place every seven years, rather than on a 20-year cycle.

The entire accreditation report may be found online at:

<http://www.montana.edu/accreditation/MSUBozemanCompEvalF09.pdf>