

INFORMATION ITEM

Progress Report: Bitterroot College Program; The University of Montana-Missoula

The [Bitterroot College Program \(BCP\) of The University of Montana-Missoula](#) had a productive first year of operation. Under the guidance of the 14 member Bitterroot College Program Steering Committee, the program was able to complete a comprehensive needs assessment document while also significantly expanding local access to college and continuing education opportunities. The steering committee had hoped to finalize a strategic plan for future operations by the end of the 2009-2010 academic year, however, this goal proved unattainable as the immediate delivery of services took precedent. The committee's strategic plan report is now on schedule to be completed by the start of the 2011 calendar year.

The [BCP Needs Assessment](#) document was prepared by [Maas Companies](#), a consulting firm which specializes in master planning for community colleges with particular expertise in rural areas. The report was submitted to the BCP Steering Committee in July. Highlights and conclusions from the Maas report included:

Internal scan

- BCP students are older (32 versus 21), take a lighter course load (6 units versus 13 units), and are more likely to be female (60 percent to 40 percent) than their local counterparts who leave Ravalli County for 2-year education
- The BCP should provide services for older students and should offer varied programs/courses that address the needs of these students.

Community survey

- 755 respondents
- Respondents were interested in both for-credit and non-credit programming
- Less than 25 percent of respondents were willing to drive to Missoula for adult learning services

External scan

- Ravalli County population is at 41,000 and growing slightly faster than the state average (1.2 percent versus 0.8 percent)
- Ravalli County's population growth groups are 20-34 year olds and those 55+
- Some programming needs to be tailored for and made available to those 55+
- Ravalli County's percentage of individuals with only a high school diploma or some college but no degree is higher than the state and nation; these individuals are prime candidates for 2-year education; such data suggests tremendous potential for BCP growth; these two groups total almost 17,000 individuals in Ravalli County
- Based on a review of 2-year education participation rates in the state, Ravalli County should expect that by 2015 the BCP, if provided adequate resources, should grow to 440 students.

Summary conclusions from the BCP needs assessment were twofold: 1) there is a strong need and demand for community college programming in Ravalli County, and 2) adult programming in Ravalli County needs to be four-pronged: developmental, technical, transferable, and personal enrichment.

From Fall of 2009 to Spring of 2010, the number of courses and credits offered through the BCP-UM doubled, as did FTE generation. In Fall, six courses were offered generating 9.2 FTE; in the Spring, these were increased to 13 courses with 29.27 FTE. Expanded support services and programs were also offered, including local admissions and enrollment services; workforce development; and personal enrichment programming.

Following this success, community support and interest in providing local access to college and continuing

education programming was strengthened, and county residents became convinced that expansion of the numbers and types of courses offered was essential. These thoughts were mirrored within the BCP Steering Committee, UM and community partners.

Fall semester of 2010 again recorded strong increases in all areas. Nineteen courses were offered, generating 48.2 FTE. In review, the increase in FTE from the Fall of 2009 to Fall of 2010 represented a 523.9% increase. In terms of college admissions and enrollment services, the BCP now provides new student information sessions; new student orientations; career exploration workshops, for instance the state's PEP Talk program, offered in partnership with Ravalli County's Adult Basic and Literacy Education provider Literacy Bitterroot); placement testing; and academic advising.

With respect to workforce development programming during the 2009-2010 academic year, the BCP, in partnership with the Ravalli County Economic Development Authority (RCEDA), offered three sets of Excel, QuickBooks, and Business Planning courses with over 75 students served. These courses were offered again this Fall and 65 students enrolled.

During this time period, there was a further expansion of the BCP-UM program to include personal enrichment courses. In the previous academic year, two "Lifelong Learning in the Root" lecture series were offered in partnership with [UM Continuing Education](#), with over 150 students participating. One featured Professor Steven Hesla from the School of Music and the other focused on international events and included Professors Mehrdad Kia, Steven Levine and Margaret Kingsland. This fall, the collaborative programming has been repeated with 55 students enrolled in a program led by Professor Steve Running entitled, *In our Backyard: Addressing Climate Change*. Nearly 60 Bitterrooters have signed up for these Lifelong Learning lectures.

As college student numbers continued to increase significantly during the Fall of 2010, the BCP turned to address issues of student success, adding academic /student support services, including free tutoring in computers, math, science, and writing and locally scheduled appointments with a UM-COT disability services coordinator. Too, the BCP facility is now open for weekend study hours. Also in response to enrollment expansion, in October 2010 the BCP added a fulltime program assistant to aid the BCP Interim Director as well as hiring six work study students to help with a range of operational tasks.

The BCP remains located at the Ravalli Entrepreneurship Center in Hamilton, where it leases two classrooms and two offices (a total of 800 square feet of space). With continued double digit college student growth expected, the BCP anticipates that in the ensuing academic year additional instructional, academic/student support, and administrative space will be required.

In summary, it was an active first year for the BCP. While expanding operations did prove to overshadow the intended planning effort, it is believed that in the end the resulting BCP strategic plan will be that much closer to the mark because the BCP and its partners now have a true sense of the depth and breadth of the reality of what the local community requires and can support in terms of adult learning services. Importantly, the BCP's affiliation and relationship with The UM and The UM College of Technology (COT) has been decisive in the BCP's success. UM and UM-COT leadership has proved ever-ready to supply the BCP with expertise, resources, and funding – without this willingness from and connection to the Missoula campuses the BCP would not have prospered. In conclusion, as was reported last year to the Regents in the November 2009 BCP progress report, with the continued collaborative relationship and resource support of The UM, the future for the delivery of sustainable and responsive adult and higher education opportunities in the Bitterroot Valley appears very bright.