



COLLEGE NOW
The First Three Years

By John E. Cech, Deputy Commissioner for Two-Year and Community College Education

Goal, Objectives, and Strategies (from the September, 2009 Opportunity Grant Proposal)

The goal of Montana’s MOA initiative is to increase the state’s educational attainment levels from 35 percent in 2008 to 55 percent in 2025, representing an overall increase of 24,500 degree recipients. Our objectives for achieving this goal, tested through applications of the student flow analysis, are to increase enrollments, transfers, completions, and efficiency at the two-year college level. Specific objectives (shown here with 2012 progress):

Montana MOA Objectives			
Over the next four years, two-year education in Montana will: (includes all two-year education providers)	2009 level	2014 target	2012 update
1. Enrollment: Increase enrollment by 22% (unduplicated fall headcount).	13,209	16,056	14,860 (+12%)
2. Transfer: Increase transfer from two-year to MUS four-year campuses by 75%.	370	648	382 (+3%)
3. Completion: Increase the number of degrees and certificates by 45%.	2,110	3,089	2,575 (+22%)
4. Efficiency: Decrease expenditures per completion by 25%.	\$35,109	\$26,332	\$29,381 (-16%)

Note: efficiency baseline and target updated in 2012 due to improved ability to disaggregate two-year college data. In both original and revised versions, objective is a reduction of 25 percent in expenditures per completion.

Strategies—original proposal:

1. We will refocus the missions of all Montana University System campuses to **ensure the comprehensive two-year college mission is available at all two-year colleges**. With every two-year college offering affordable, student-centered, high-quality transfer and workforce degrees, as well as college/workforce readiness programs, we can **brand them all compellingly** and distinguish them clearly from their four-year counterparts. By shifting these programs to the sector with lower costs, we will **create savings that can be reinvested in affordability and innovation measures**.
2. We will improve access, student success, and efficiency through state-level coordination and collaboration. We will **develop common core requirements and shared articulations for workforce and transfer programs** to facilitate readiness, dual enrollment, and transfer. We will **develop programming specifically tailored for adult engagement and completion**. Through collaborations at state and local levels, we will ensure that in every region, when business, industry, government, or K-12 schools have a need, two-year colleges respond effectively. These efforts will underscore our commitment to educate and train our people more affordably.
3. We will create capacity – through **curricular alignment, partnerships and integrated technology solutions** – for sharing courses and programs; streamlining business practices, student services, and student transitions; documenting results; and creating savings.
4. We will create **funding incentives at the student and the institutional levels** to promote degree completion and assure quality.

Scope of Work Changes—Summer 2011

Strategies as revised in April 2011 following leadership transition. These strategies (and a revised work plan based on them) were approved by HCM, Lumina, and Tides in June 2011, and further detailed in an approved September, 2011 Scope of Work revision that mapped them to Lumina's Four Steps to Finishing First:

1. **Comprehensive two-year education mission is expanded** so that it is available through every Montana two-year college by 2013.
2. **Every Montana region is served** by a two-year college or two-year college program as its regional clearinghouse hub for education.
3. Montana two-year education is enhanced **through coordinated curricula and integrated technology**.
4. Montana's higher education **funding model includes performance-based components**.
5. Through **effective communication**, constituent groups are aware, informed, and engaged with two-year college education.

These strategies (and the corresponding milestones in the Scope of Work) maintained all key objectives and activities from the original Scope with the notable exception of the Virtual Community College (VCC). In conducting due diligence to begin implementing the VCC, the Montana team realized early on (by studying Colorado's Virtual Campus, among other models) that statewide IT integration is a necessary precondition for creating a statewide virtual community college that provides seamless access to courses from multiple campuses. In response, the revised plan focuses technology efforts on (1) advancing system integration across campuses and (2) coordinating statewide online education to broaden access to dual enrollment through the Montana Digital Academy and two-year education opportunities. While all other milestones from the original plan were included, some timelines were adjusted following new leadership's assessment of progress during first year of implementation.

Accomplishments

Strategy 1: Extend the Comprehensive Two-Year Mission

Expanded Mission Accomplished! All five former Montana University System (MUS) colleges of technology plus two “college program” in Bozeman (similar to satellite campuses with limited offerings, in regions with no two-year college) have been transformed to comprehensive two-year colleges and now provide transferable lower-division instruction, remedial education, community and workforce development, and services specifically targeted to adult students. Strategic planning is underway with Bitterroot College in Hamilton for implementation of comprehensive two-year mission there. In addition, each of the seven colleges is either directly providing adult basic education or working with existing providers to facilitate access for its students.

Transfer Core Widely Available. The number of MUS two-year colleges providing access to a full complement of general education transfer courses went from 2 initially to six in 2013. Transfer associate degrees are now available at all six MUS two-year colleges, as well as the three community colleges. The remaining school, Bitterroot College (until recently a college program), is working to expand general education core course offerings and is currently providing a significant number of these courses via online delivery. In addition, articulation, transfer, and full university credit for general education courses from all two-year colleges is guaranteed through the Regents’ *Courses that Count* transfer core—see Strategy 3.

Positioned as Affordable, Accessible, High-Quality Option for Students. The Board of Regents’ commitment to holding the line on tuition at the two-year colleges (through a six-year tuition freeze) and the state’s rebranding efforts both have helped to reposition two-year colleges as an attractive option for students. Public and media response to the rollout of the renamed, newly-comprehensive two-year colleges has been overwhelmingly positive.

Strategy 2: Every Montana Region Served by Two-Year College as Education, Workforce Hub

Ten Comprehensive Two-Year Colleges Span State. In combination with three existing comprehensive community colleges, the transformed MUS colleges will comprise a network of ten comprehensive two-year colleges strategically located from northwest Montana to southeast Montana.

Innovative Online Programs, Standardized Dual Enrollment Policies Extend Colleges’ Reach. College!NOW co-created the *Montana Digital Academy* in partnership with the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) to provide statewide credit recovery and original credit opportunities for Montana high school students; online remedial education for high school students not prepared for college coursework; and statewide access to online dual enrollment courses at two-year colleges. In Fall 2012, over 300 students have taken or dual enrollment, remedial, and other courses through *Montana Digital Academy/College!NOW Online*. (This represents 30% percent of Montana’s dual enrollment for Fall 2012.) To facilitate online dual enrollment, College!NOW created statewide dual enrollment guidelines approved by BOR in 2010; established a single, universal admissions and enrollment process across campuses; and significantly reduced tuition for dual enrollment courses in 2012.

Pathways Smooth Transitions from High School to College and Workforce. To encourage high school students’ transitions to postsecondary education, College!NOW has worked with the state’s Carl D. Perkins career and technical education (CTE) program, *Big Sky Pathways*, to articulate 350 career and technical education pathways in 155 high schools and all public two-year colleges (and two tribal colleges). Partly in recognition of this track record, the Governor has proposed an increase of \$1 million to expand dual enrollment opportunities geared to college preparation and workforce development. In addition, College!NOW works closely with the state’s TRIO and GEAR UP programs, now consolidated into the same division as College!NOW, to improve postsecondary preparation and success.

Collaboration with Tribal Colleges. College!NOW has worked in partnership with Montana’s seven tribal colleges, inviting their participation in the two-year college network and collaborating on multi-campus projects (such as a large federal grant proposal and Montana’s *Big Sky Pathways* program). In addition, College!NOW has

established a relationship with the Montana and Wyoming Tribal College Council which had its inaugural meeting in October 2012.

Strategy 3: Coordinated Curricula and Integrated Technology

Common Course Numbering, Statewide Transfer Core Facilitate Transitions. Montana's colleges completed a massive common course numbering effort encompassing 10,500 courses in over 60 disciplines. This represents 100% of undergraduate courses in the Montana University System. In addition, the Board of Regents in 2010 approved *Choices That Count* (CTC), a set of fully articulated, commonly numbered courses guaranteed to meet university general education requirements and transfer for full credit statewide. CTC certificate approved by BOR with two campuses piloting implementation.

Career Technical Education Alignment. As noted under Strategy 2, the MUS has joined forces with OPI to create CTE pathways. This work has included a joint project to align state-approved CTE standards at the secondary and postsecondary levels with the Common Career Technical Core standards.

Electronic Student Advising. Montana State University and its affiliated campuses implemented DegreeWorks which is designed to assist students and advisors in planning toward graduation allowing students and faculty to more easily determine how each semester's coursework affects graduation plans. The implementation of "Plans" which is a significant part of this proposal provides a robust tool enabling the discussion to shift from planning next semester's classes, to planning a complete path to degree. This tool was not implemented at a system level given the lack of a system wide universal information system.

IT System Integration. Achievements include developing common data definitions across all public institutions, both two-year and four-year; bringing Miles and Dawson Community Colleges onto the MSU's Banner software platform; migrating all student data to the MUS student data warehouse; and establishing high-speed telecommunications connectivity for all two-year campuses including the community colleges. Several tribal colleges are also expected to benefit from the new network links. The Governor included in his recent budget \$5 million toward the \$20 million needed to complete IT integration.

Strategy 4: Performance-based Funding

Biennial Budget Includes Outcome-based Funding. In February, 2012, Governor Steve Bullock, Commissioner Clay Christian, and all members of the joint appropriations subcommittee on education signed an agreement to begin implementing outcome-based funding in the 2014-15 academic year. The initial implementation will involve half of the 2014-15 augmentation, or about 5 percent of the system's budget. Efforts are currently underway to define the performance measures for initial implementation and to engage campus stakeholders in the process of designing a comprehensive performance measurement and funding plan for the longer term. (The biennial budget plan is still before the state senate.) Public Agenda is conducting focus groups with faculty members and administrators to help inform Montana's campus engagement strategy. In addition, the Board of Regents approved the creation of a system wide performance-based funding implementation task force chaired by associate commissioner Tyler Trevor with membership including representation from across the MUS from both four year and two-year educational units.

Strategy 5: Communication and Engagement

New Colleges Spur Extensive Coverage of Two-year Education, Productivity Goals. More than 200 newspaper articles, editorials, television stories, and radio interviews have featured College!NOW during the life of the grant. Many of these articles have discussed the motivation behind transformation of the state's two-year college system, namely the need to increase the state's educational attainment through more efficient practices and options. Bipartisan support of Governor Bullock's postsecondary agenda—which includes a goal to increase the number of Montana adults with a postsecondary degree or certificate to at least 60 percent over the next decade—suggests the message is getting across.