

# Montana University System

## ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT

**2024-2025**

University of Montana

University of Montana Western

Montana Technological University

Helena College University of Montana

Montana State University

Montana State University Billings

Montana State University Northern

Great Falls College

Miles Community College

Flathead Valley Community College

University of Montana, Missoula

**Academic Priorities and Planning Statement**

**Academic Year 2024-2025**

**1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.**

The University of Montana instruction and research priorities are informed by our Strategic Operating Rhythm (SOR). This is informed by the University Mission, Vision, Design Principles, and Priorities for Action. Each priority includes a set of objectives that are reviewed annually, along with strategies to meet each objective, and actions to ensure incremental progress.

Objectives

The institutional objectives for the coming academic year are mapped to related or shared academic affairs objectives.

FY25 University Objectives	FY 25 Academic Affairs Objectives
Objective 1: Increase enrollment through recruitment and access	Objective 1: Adapt our academic portfolio to the changing educational landscape and our status as an open-access, comprehensive, research university
Objective 2: Increase retention and persistence through enhanced student experiences	
Objective 3: Differentiate UM through an integrated curricular and co-curricular journey that emphasizes academics, service, leadership, and career preparation	
Objective 4: Differentiate UM by serving the needs of a wider range of learners through partnerships and clearer curricular pathways	
Objective 5: Build partnerships and leverage research and economic development initiatives in response to urgent community, state, and global needs	Objective 5: Define and leverage the diverse research and creative scholarship missions of units across the sector and their interdependencies with academic programs
Objective 6: Attract and support employees through improved recruiting, retention, and management efforts	Objective 6: Maintain fair and transparent workloads across faculty appointment types and disciplinary standards
Objective 7: Broaden alumni, community, and donor engagement	Objective 7: Collaborate with the Enrollment and Marketing and Communications sectors to develop and implement integrated strategies

	that highlight essential 21st-century skills across related academic unit clusters
<b>Objective 8: Strengthen core infrastructure and processes to improve students' and employees' campus experiences, enhance efficiencies, and maintain safety and integrity</b>	<b>Objective 8: Align resource allocation methods with the stated values and objectives of our sector</b>

**2. Provide a brief description of the process used to determine these academic priorities.**

The Office of Strategic Planning and Implementation (OSPI) facilitates the SOR to ensure implementation of the priorities, to measure progress, and to annually update the strategies we employ to meet our objectives. In addition, the Provost Office, with the deans and shared governance, created an Academic Affairs Playbook that will inform our priorities. Our current priorities are drawn from [the comprehensive draft playbook that was developed and shared with the campus community in Fall 2023](#). That draft will continue to inform playbooks for subsequent academic years.

**3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.**

**Academic Portfolio Review**

In the Spring of 2024, we launched Academic Portfolio Review as an annual, in-depth analysis of our entire academic portfolio designed to better manage the breadth and depth of our academic offerings. This analysis is guided by metrics defined in BOR Policy 303.3 Program Review and targeted performance indicators that evaluate program health, sustainability, and student success. The initial review resulted in several inactive programs being discontinued and we anticipate further revisions and discontinuations to be forthcoming the academic year. Academic Portfolio Review will also explore questions beyond program viability and sustainability that impact student success. The goal of this year's review is to identify and address curricular complexity impacting students' time and credits to degree and improve graduation rates in workforce and undergraduate programs, including general education.

**Career Competencies and High Impact Practices (HIP)**

The Faculty Senate recently revised our general education requirements to include Career Competencies alongside our existing HIPs with a further goal of expanding these attributes to non-general education coursework and curriculum design. This integration is crucial for tracking and assessing HIPs and linking learning outcomes with career readiness. The Faculty Senate, Registrar's Office, the Office for Experiential Learning and Career Success, and Office of the Provost will continue to collaborate to

ensure that courses are appropriately searchable, and assessable. Programs will begin adding Career Competencies to General Education Courses starting in Fall 2024.

### **Environment and Sustainability**

The first round of Academic Portfolio Review further elucidated the need to pursue a unified approach to academic programming and research in the environment and sustainability. UM submitted a request to plan in the spring of 2023 to combine academic units associated with the environment and sustainability. UM will continue to pursue this in the 2024–2025 academic year with the goal of submitting a revised RTP.

### **Arts and Media**

The College of the Arts and Media will continue to build out its Graduate curriculum in Game Design and Interactive Media. The college is also continuing to explore multidisciplinary approaches to delivering existing curriculum and career development. This includes a new leadership model for the performing arts with coordination being provided by an associate dean overseeing Music, Theatre, and Dance.

### **Health**

In the College of Health, two BOR-approved programs are in development, the Master of Physician Associate Studies with the requisite creation of a School and the professional Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD). Both programs are in a two-year accreditation-mandated development phase and are progressing on schedule. The curriculum for the OTD program has been submitted as a substantive change to NWCCU and will begin recruiting faculty and students for its first class in Fall 2025.

### **College of Business/Missoula College**

The ongoing partnership between the College of Business and Missoula College has been developed to enhance the state's cybersecurity resilience using a multifaceted approach involving education and community outreach. In addition to providing professional certificates, associate degree, the online post-baccalaureate cybersecurity certificate, and the newly developed bachelor's degree, the Center for Cybersecurity Workforce and Rural has been created as the state hub for cybersecurity education and home to CyberMontana programs established to provide skills based, short term training for the technical and nontechnical workforce. Additionally, community outreach is taking place across the state through Cyber-STEM camps, community cyber clinics, cyber competitions, career fairs, the Montana Cyber Range, and the UM Security Operations Center which aims to train security analysts, while protecting underserved communities.

**4. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.**

During the Academic Portfolio Review process, some programs were first placed in the category, *Monitor for Improvement*. We expect that programs in this category will make strategic curriculum and instructional updates next year to address enrollment and completion trends to demonstrate continued sustainability. Future hiring requests and curriculum proposals from these programs will require an improvement plan that addresses instructional capacity, program design, and course rotations. This will include two-to-four-year comprehensive instructional plans depending on the request to ensure investment will yield sustainable results. Some programs were also categorized as *modification required* under the condition that mutually agreeable modifications be implemented in the coming academic year to align the programs with current instructional resources. These program modifications must include two-to-four-year comprehensive course schedules and instructional plans.

**5. Include additional details you find relevant for the BOR to consider as they make decisions about "Requests to Plan."**

N/A

**6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.**

Our accreditation was reaffirmed on July 12, 2024 after a successful Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness seven-year self-study and visit from NWCCU. We received the following commendations and recommendations.

**"The Commission commends The University of Montana - Missoula for:**

- UM faculty, staff and administrators for their deep commitment to the mission of the institution, their resiliency through prior challenges, and their commitment to moving forward together to continuously improve in service to their students and communities.
- Supporting their uniquely diverse student body through the delivery of programming tailored to support student success and well-being.
- Its progress on student success and achievement as evidenced in their metrics, specifically improvements in retention and four-year graduation rates. Further, the institution is commended for their use of disaggregated as well as peer-comparison analytics to identify and address equity gaps.

- Its strong commitment to faculty, staff, and student shared governance and to productive collaboration toward common goals.

### **Recommendations Substantially in Compliance but in Need of Improvement**

The Commission recommends that The University of Montana - Missoula:

- Recommendation 1: Fully integrate Academic Affairs into the Strategic Operating Rhythm planning and evaluation process to inform and refine the institution's effectiveness, assign resources, and improve student learning and achievement. (2020 Standard(s) 1.B.1)
- Recommendation 2: Develop an inclusive and integrated University-wide framework to assess student learning outcomes at the program and degree level that is distinct from the use of student achievement data and metrics. (2020 Standard(s) 1.C.7)
- Recommendation 3: Implement an effective identity verification process for students enrolled in distance education courses and programs to establish that the student enrolled in such a course or program is the same person whose achievements are evaluated and credentialed and that the institution ensure that the identity verification process for distance education students protects student privacy. (2020 Standard(s) 2.G.7)"

The work of the coming year will revolve around revisiting our institutional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), learning outcomes, and assessment framework to address the recommendations we received and fulfill the commendations we earned.

### **7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).**

Annual academic program planning will nest annually under this broader Strategic Operating Rhythm. As with the last two years, OSPI will continue to generate, support, and prioritize mission-aligned ideas that can be translated into action. OSPI will also monitor and evaluate such initiatives and support leaders who are responsible for their implementation. This iterative, annual process aims to ensure we remain agile and re

University of Montana Western

**ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT**

**Academic Year 2024-2025**



The Montana University System (MUS) Board of Regents (BOR) has requested additional context to support the decisions they make regarding “Requests to Plan” for new academic programs and research centers/institutes. **Toward that end, we ask that each institution submit a report addressing all questions listed below, not to exceed four pages, no later than 5 p.m. on Friday, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024.**

**Separately, please fill-in the Forthcoming Academic Proposals spreadsheet describing academic programs or research centers/institutes that you anticipate may proceed to the “Request to Plan” portion of the approval process in the next year.** Please include contact information for a campus lead on each anticipated proposal. A proposal need not be listed in this report to proceed to the “Request to Plan” stage. However, listing proposals likely to move forward is an appreciated courtesy intended to encourage early communication and collaboration.

**1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.**

In alignment with the University of Montana Western’s strategic plan, our academic priorities and planning for the 2024-2025 academic year focus on the first two objectives:

Objective One – Strengthening Experiential Learning

Objective Two – Enhancing the Whole Student Experience

Specifically, we are prioritizing programs that (1) advance the Experience One model in which students take one course at a time, engage with faculty in small classes, and become immersed in experiential learning; (2) serve populations of Montanans (and beyond) who are currently underserved by institutions of higher education; and/or (3) provide support for faculty to continually improve their experiential education craft. These priorities are well-aligned with UMW’s mission and vision:

Mission – As a leader and innovator in experiential education, the University of Montana Western educates undergraduate students through immersive practices in their field of study, strives for continuous improvement, and achieves evidence-supported student learning and achievement outcomes.

Vision – The University of Montana Western will be recognized as the leader in innovative experiential education.

**2. Provide a brief description of the process used to determine these academic priorities.**

The current administrative structure in Academic Affairs at UMW consists of four Division Chairs who lead the Divisions of Education; Humanities & Social Sciences; Mathematics & Sciences; and Professional Studies. The Office of the Provost worked directly with these Division Chairs to determine UMW’s 2024-2025 academic priorities.

**3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programming that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.**

In support of UMW's academic priorities, we hope to pursue the following:

In the Division of Education, we hope to continue to strengthen our (1) online Elementary Education degree, (2) Graduate Certificate in Teacher Education, (3) Sprint Degree in collaboration with the Great Falls school district, and (4) MT Teacher Residency Program in collaboration with OPI and the other EPPs around the state. We are also considering a Music K-12 Certificate for online post-baccalaureate students, a Master of Education, a Certificate in K-12 Reading, and an Industrial Trades Education program. We are interested in the possibility of a stand-alone B.S. in Special Education K-12.

In the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences, we are pursuing more interdisciplinary options, including a formal administrative structure to provide more focus for existing and potential interdisciplinary programs. We hope to create Minors in Environmental Writing and Business Communications. We are considering moving the Music K-12 Minor to distance and/or hybrid delivery. We are also considering the creation of a Writing Center to support students.

In the Division of Professional Studies, we are interested in developing a Sprint Degree for our B.S. in Business Administration, and we are considering offering this existing program in an online modality. We are in conversations with Little Big Horn College to develop a 2+2 program in Business Administration and in Farm & Ranch Management. We will also begin pursuing several potential short-term certificates to address various workforce needs, such as Meat Processing, various construction trades, Range Management or Range Rider (which would be an interdisciplinary program with the Division of Mathematics and Sciences), and Medical Billing. We are also considering a new B.S. degree in Sports Administration and a certificate in personal training.

In the Division of Mathematics and Sciences, we are considering the possibility of developing 2+2 programs with other MUS institutions to support our pre-professional health programs. We also hope to develop a Math minor in collaboration with the Division of Education that leads to a teaching endorsement. Finally, we hope to partner with the Division of Professional Studies to create an interdisciplinary certificate or minor/option area in Range Management or Range Rider program.

**4. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.**

N/A

**5. Include additional details you find relevant for the BOR to consider as they make decisions about "Requests to Plan."**

As we develop our requests to plan, we will collaborate with other MUS institutions and the OCHE staff as appropriate.

**6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.**

We submitted a “Year Six, Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review” in Spring 2024. Our 7-year accreditation review was postponed by NWCCU by one year, so it will now occur in Spring 2026.

**7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).**

We have begun a 2-year process to revise our strategic plan. Two co-chairs have been selected, and they held multiple listening sessions during Spring 2024. The 2024-2025 academic year will include working groups to address various pillars of the next strategic plan, and we hope to complete it during the 2025-2026 academic year.

Montana Technological University

**ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT**

**Academic Year 2024-2025**

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**1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.**

A goal of the strategic plan of Montana Tech is to have Programs of Distinction that align with our MUS designation as a Special Focus STEM Institution. Montana Tech remains an institution with highly respected and internationally recognized engineering programs, with programs in other disciplines continuing to grow, including those at the 2-year Highlands College. It is in this context that the following institutional priorities are outlined. It is important to note however, that Montana Tech will have a new provost starting July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024, and priorities and implementation in the coming academic year will be guided by the new CAO.

Since the last priority planning document, Montana Tech has hired a new faculty member as the Lance Endowed Energy Chair who is charged with fostering cross-disciplinary growth of environmentally conscious, renewable solutions to critical energy needs that include for example, wind, solar, geothermal, and hydropower, while sustaining prominence of Montana Tech as a leader in the mining and petroleum engineering education domain. Both of these are legacy programs at Montana Tech that will benefit from a focus on adaptation of the programs, embracing the future and working collaboratively with industry partners. The new CAO will be critical in spearheading these conversations with college leaders over the coming year.

Several academic Request to Plan proposals went forward to the BOR this past academic year that we will be working to bring forward as Level II this fall and begin implementation. These programs include a CAS in Smart Manufacturing Technology, a CAS in Broadband Technology, and post-baccalaureate micro-credentials in Extractive Technologies. These programs are fully funded by external grant dollars at this time, with the anticipation that they will become sustainable for the long-term through enrollment gains. These proposals and several forthcoming but currently in infancy are envisioned to respond to a landscape of higher education that is rapidly changing, and where STEM-focused education and workforce development at all levels is critical.

**2. Provide a brief description of the process used determine these academic priorities.**

The programs above were envisioned with meeting national workforce needs in mind and critical partnerships with relevant external entities including federal, state, and regional. Montana Tech completed the NWCCU 7-year peer evaluation process this past spring and evaluators were complementary on the mechanisms by which the institution utilizes industry advisory boards to guide curriculum and research priorities. One of the recommendations of the peer evaluators urged Montana Tech to refine and clarify its processes of program review, data utilization and assessment-based resource allocation to align with student needs for post-graduate career readiness. Some programs at Montana Tech are growing in enrollment, others maintain their enrollment numbers, and still others continue to see low enrollment trends that have been present over several years. In this regard, as we go forward into the coming academic year, we are embracing the recommendation of the commission and will look carefully at the programs that have failed to gain traction or continue to decline as we set academic priorities going forward. These are necessary and critical discussions given the realities of state, system and university resource constraints. Montana Tech will make the decisions needed to fully support its successful programs, provide support for those that are growing or that have strong potential to grow, and consider eliminating or revising those that are no longer meeting student needs.

**3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.**

In addition to the programs listed above, the department of Business and Information Technology is assessing its programmatic options to better align with introduction of generative AI and rapidly expanding industry technology into business operations. A goal of this effort is to design meaningful credentialing pathways that will position our students to be highly competitive in today's job market. Similarly, we are reviewing and assessing curricula for the BS in data science and data science minors, including external market analyses that will drive revisions where needed. We seek to expand offerings in data analytics and enterprise resource planning technology, the latter of which has Montana Tech uniquely positioned in the state and nationally. To complement the curricular analysis, work to collaborate in research in business, entrepreneurship, data science and data analytics across colleges and campus disciplines is underway.

**4. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.**

None to mention at this time, recognizing that in-depth assessments of academic programs on will be driven by the new CAO.

**5. Include additional details you find relevant for the BOR to consider as they make decisions about “Requests to Plan.”**

As the new CAO begins his term at Montana Tech, he will have the authority and charge to drive academic program decisions that may vary from what is outlined in this document. It is anticipated that there will be robust engagement with the academic deans, department heads, and campus to help guide priorities.

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**6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.**

Montana Tech recently completed its NWCCU 7-year evaluation cycle. The Standards for Institutional Effectiveness were revised in 2020, with an emphasis of the commission on student success and closing equity gaps. The recommendations of the peer evaluators centered on the need for Montana Tech to define its processes of program assessment, data utilization and resource allocation that feed directly into student success measures. Activities in the coming year will focus on responding by revamping or building structures of assessment that are sustainable, continuous and actionable. At the time of submission of this document, we are still awaiting the final recommendations and affirmation from the NWCCU.

**Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).**

Montana Tech has a strategic plan with defined mission, vision and goals. In the coming academic year, measurable objectives and indicators for each goal will be identified and refined through a campus-wide engagement process. We currently are operating under four KPI that include enrollment, retention, degree completion, and experiential learning. Revision of the strategic plan will center around this important initiative.

Helena College

**ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT**

**Academic Year 2024-2025**



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1. **Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.**

Helena College is prioritizing new academic programs that lead to in-demand careers and that require a certificate or degree and licensure, in addition to academic programs that aren’t already offered at another Montana college or university. An emphasis on programs that align with courses offered at Helena College and available resources, including space, will ensure that the College continues to fulfill its mission in assisting learners in achieving their educational and career goals while aligning with the guiding principles outlined in the [strategic plan](#).

Additional academic priorities include continued collaboration with affiliate partners to create seamless transfer opportunities (and possibly shared academic programs) for Montana students; a continued exploration of micro credentials and how they can be used to benefit Montana students and some Helena College programs; and continued partnerships and collaboration with K12 partners to better serve our students and our community.

2. **Provide a brief description of the process used determine these academic priorities.**

Academic priorities are determined in collaboration with the Helena College community and with our community and industry partners. Priorities are also determined based on labor and wage data, ensuring that credentials lead to in-demand and/or high-wage careers. A few of the processes used to determine academic priorities are highlighted below.

- The OTA program discussion began when an Occupational Therapist in the Helena community approached the College to highlight the need for Certified OTA’s in all areas of Montana. Continued program research, consultation with occupational therapists in Helena, and discussion with academic leadership and Dean’s Cabinet have resulted in the decision to continue to move forward with this program.
- The Cosmetology program expansion has been part of the larger plan for Cosmetology from the beginning. The three new program additions were determined based on advice

from the Cosmetology Advisory Committee, program space capacities, and feedback and needs from the community. The addition of a Cosmetology Instructor program is also important to provide staffing for the program.

- The changes in the IT & Programming program are a direct result of feedback and advice from the program's advisory committee and the changing needs of our industry partners. This program is in a cycle of continuous improvement designed to meet the needs of our industry partners and Montana students.
- Massage Therapy began as a non-credit program in the Community Education department and will transition to a credit program over the next two years. The decision to move the program was based upon the initial success of the non-credit option and the broad career path leading to licensure. Moving Massage Therapy to a credit program makes the program more affordable for students and makes it eligible for financial aid.
- The LPN to RN Bridge program is a result of the ongoing industry need for registered nurses in Helena and across the state. Prior to implementing this bridge, LPNs wanting to continue their education toward registered nursing, had to apply to the existing ASRN program. The Bridge program will follow the current ASRN curriculum and allow prior learning assessments (PLA) for courses from the LPN curriculum and have a full-time and part-time option for students, making this more feasible for those currently working as LPNs, while not reducing the space for students entering the nursing field for the first time.

**3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.**

**Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA):** The College will submit the Level II documentation required to establish a new named A.S. degree in Occupational Therapy Assistant. The new degree will be a sprint degree, with the program designed to be completed in four consecutive semesters. A new course prefix (OTA) will be requested for discipline specific courses in this program. Possible new micro credentials leading into the new OTA program will be explored, including pathways from CMA and CNA certifications.

**Cosmetology:** The College will submit the following academic proposals over the next year to continue to build upon the existing Cosmetology program:

- a. Instructor/Teacher-Training: A 9-credit CTS designed to provide the coursework required by the Montana Board of Barbers and Cosmetologist for licensed barbers, cosmetologists, estheticians, and manicurists to become licensed instructors. The Board requirements include 90 hours/6 credits of teaching methods and 45 hours/3 credits of educational psychology for a total of 135 hours. This CTS will be submitted for approval in late summer or early fall 2023 so it can be offered in 2024.
- b. Manicurist: A 10-15 credit CTS designed to provide the coursework required by the Montana Board of Barbers and Cosmetologists leading to manicurist licensure will be created. The Board requirements include 400 hours of training, of which at least 40 hours is in theory and 360 hours in practical training. This CTS will be submitted for approval in

2024 so it can be added to the program and offered in 2025. A new course prefix (NAIL) will be requested for courses in this program.

- c. Barbering: A 30-36 credit CAS designed to provide the coursework required by the Montana Board of Barbers and Cosmetologists leading to barbering (nonchemical) licensure will be created. The Board requirements include 900 hours of training, of which at least 100 hours is in theory and 800 hours is in practical training. A RTP for a Barbering Nonchemical CAS will be forthcoming in the next 3-5 years. A new course prefix (BARB) will be requested for courses in this program.

**Program Exploration and Collaboration with UM, UMW, and Mt Tech:** The Better Together UM affiliation partnership is fostering academic collaboration. Academic leadership within the UM affiliation are meeting on a regular basis to identify areas where program collaboration can occur. Academic collaboration could include articulation agreements for transfer pathways or shared academic programs. Some of the current academic collaborations are highlighted below:

- d. Industrial Trades Education Pathway, Collaboration with UMW: Helena College and UM Western along with Missoula College, have begun discussing tracks for different audiences leading to various credentials that will expand opportunities for trades instructors in Montana: existing trades faculty at two-year colleges and class 4 license holders (a CTS, and a stackable BAS), as well as a degree for traditional students interested in earning a bachelor's degree and a Montana Teaching license (BS in Trades Education).
- e. Computer Science Transfer Pathway to UMW: Helena College and UM Western are discussing possible new transfer options for graduates of the HC IT & Programming degrees. Early discussions are exploring a pathway to a new BS or BAS at UM Western that could be completed from Helena.
- f. OTA Transfer Pathway Exploration with UM and UMW: Helena College will explore and discuss all transfer options while creating the OTA program. Identifying transfer options while the program is being created allows the College to provide prospective students with a better understanding of the educational and career opportunities available in the field of occupational therapy. Transfer pathways leading to the new UM Occupational Therapy Doctorate (OTD) will be explored, in addition to pathways in the areas of health and human performance.

**Massage Therapy:** Massage Therapy was added as a non-credit program in the Community Education department in AY 22-23. The first cohort of students completed the program in 2023, making them eligible to take the Massage and Bodywork Licensing Examination (MBLEx) for state licensure. All five students successfully passed the licensure exam. The second cohort of students is scheduled to begin classes on September 9, 2024. The College will work with Community Education to move the program to a credit certificate (credential TBD based on required hours for the program) over the next year, with appropriate academic proposals submitted for approval based on the requested credential. A new course prefix (new prefix TBD) will be requested for courses in this program.

**Avionics:** A certificate in avionics was approved in spring of 2022 as a stackable option for our existing aviation maintenance degree. Due to staff turnover and changes in the FAA requirements, we will spend the next year evaluating the aviation maintenance degree program (including course sequencing) and determining the equipment and resource needs so that we can begin offering the C.A.S. in avionics beginning fall 2025.

**4. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.**

There are currently no areas or programs identified as being less prioritized or considered for disinvestment, moratorium, or termination in the next year.

**5. Include additional details you find relevant for the BOR to consider as they make decisions about “Requests to Plan.”**

**6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.**

**NWCCU:** Helena College submitted the year seven self-study for the Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness in February 2024 and hosted a team of NWCCU peer evaluators in April 2024. In June 2024, the Dean/CEO and ALO attended the Commission meeting to discuss the report and plans to address identified concerns.

**Nursing Accreditation:** The Nursing department submitted a Self-study report including the Systematic Plan for Evaluation to Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) February 6, 2024, and hosted three peer evaluators March 19, 20, and 21, 2024. The ACEN peer evaluators found the Nursing program in compliance with all 5 standards. They did find areas for suggested improvements in Standards 4 and 5. These include revision of our course student learning outcomes to reflect progression across the curriculum and ensuring our didactic and clinical assignments and hours do not overlap. The program director and faculty met in May 2024 to discuss the areas needing improvement and develop a plan for implementing changes beginning fall semester 2024. In addition to the areas for suggested improvements, the ACEN team also found our program to have Strengths. They identified strengths in Standard 2-criteria 2.5a; related to our faculty mentoring and supporting new faculty/instructors and each other; and Standard 5-criterion 5.2b for our completion rate, which is 94% or higher for the past three years.

**7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).**

Our Year Seven site visit with the peer evaluators for NWCCU has resulted in two preliminary recommendations focused on strategic planning, specifically our key performance indicators. In response, the Dean’s Cabinet will review and develop a shared understanding of all existing KPIs to establish priorities for the college. The KPIs will be disaggregated by special populations, where available, to identify equity gaps and begin discussions about how they might be closed. The

performance of KPIs will also be benchmarked against peer institutions when available, to support strategic decision-making and planning. The entire campus will also be educated on our KPIs – not only what they are, but also why they were chosen, how we are doing, and what we plan to do with the information we learn from monitoring the metrics. The Institutional Development, Effectiveness, and Accreditation Committee will be re-focused to prioritize strategic planning activities and move assessment under a new Faculty Senate or Academic Standards and Curriculum Review sub-committee.

Montana State University - Bozeman

**ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT**

**Academic Year 2024-2025**

The Montana University System (MUS) Board of Regents (BOR) has requested additional context to support the decisions they make regarding “Requests to Plan” for new academic programs and research centers/institutes. **Toward that end, we ask that each institution submit a report addressing all questions listed below, not to exceed four pages, no later than 5 p.m. on Friday, July 12, 2024.**

**Separately, please fill-in the Forthcoming Academic Proposals spreadsheet describing academic programs or research centers/institutes that you anticipate may proceed to the “Request to Plan” portion of the approval process in the next year.** Please include contact information for a campus lead on each anticipated proposal. A proposal need not be listed in this report to proceed to the “Request to Plan” stage. However, listing proposals likely to move forward is an appreciated courtesy intended to encourage early communication and collaboration.

**1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.**

Montana State University, the land-grant research university for the state of Montana, integrates education, creation of knowledge and art and service to communities. MSU has a vision to transform lives and communities in the people’s interest while guided by the values of excellence, integrity, inclusion, collaboration, curiosity and stewardship. Academic priorities align with this mission and guide the institution’s planning for new academic programs and the enhancement of existing curricula.

MSU prioritizes access to higher education beyond admissions. By providing a wide variety of supports to students to enhance both persistence and reduce time to degree, MSU is addressing both affordability and appropriate workforce skill development to ensure greater success for our students and the communities in which they reside. Through research, MSU significantly contributes to the economy by creating jobs and working with businesses in the state to apply research findings to solve issues faced by our Montana communities.

As an institution, MSU is continuing to prioritize our Strategic Plan Goal 1.1: Broaden access for underrepresented populations and increase academic success for all students through excellence in undergraduate education. Areas of special attention include increasing enrollment of students from historically underrepresented groups, increasing our ability to meet student financial need, improving completion rates in foundational math and writing courses and increasing our retention and persistence of students to degree completion.

**2. Provide a brief description of the process used to determine these academic priorities.**

Montana State’s strategic plan Choosing Promise has guided academic planning since its adoption in 2019. Planning Council has been responsible for aligning our strategic plan and defining the institutional criteria and procedures necessary to prioritize existing and proposed programs. MSU is currently assessing this model for planning. All new program proposals are reviewed in our shared governance system with input gathered from students, faculty, staff and administration at multiple stages.

**3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.**

Gallatin College continues to develop and propose credential and degree programs designed to meet the workforce needs of the region and state. During AY 24-25, MSU will complete approval of certificates in Public Safety Officer training (CTS), Sales/Salesforce (COC), and submit requests for certificates in Digital Media (COC), Hospitality (CAS), Behavioral Health (CTS), and Non-profits (COC). MSU plans to propose 4 new agriculture degrees to meet the dire need for value-added agriculture in Montana (BS in Biosystems and Robotics Engineering) and broadly train for the agricultural sales, ag marketing, and ag communication needs across the region (BS Broadfield Ag and Masters of Ag). To meet the needs of Montana's growing professional healthcare workforce, MSU will propose new options within the established Doctor of Nursing Practice. These proposed programs address our strategic plan goals to expand high-quality graduate education (Goal 1.2) and grow mutually beneficial partnerships across Montana (Goal 3.2).

**4. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.**

MSU continuously reviews low to no enrollment programs. These programs will be placed in moratorium or terminated to focus on other areas of growth within the discipline: Arabic Certificate, Bio-Resources option of Civil Engineering which has been eclipsed by other Civil Engineering and Engineering options in attracting students, Cell Biology and Neuroscience option that is now only two courses different from the other Cell Biology and Neuroscience option, and Gallatin College's Aviation Electronic Technology AAS.

**5. Include additional details you find relevant for the BOR to consider as they make decisions about "Requests to Plan."**

MSU assesses and evaluates career and job outcomes for recent graduates in our 7-year program review. Designing degree curricula with clear pathways to 4-year graduation is a priority linked to both persistence and improved time to degree. All academic proposals submitted by MSU will include updated, verifiable data and information addressing future employment opportunities for graduates of the proposed degree.

**6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.**

Montana State submitted the university's Year-Six NWCCU accreditation report on Policies, Regulations and Financial Review in August 2023. From review of the report, MSU received 3 findings that are being addressed in the addendum of the subsequent Year-Seven NWCCU accreditation report. Work on the Year-Seven NWCCU accreditation report on Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness will be completed and submitted in August 2024. The institution will receive an NWCCU accreditation review team visit on Oct 9-11, 2024, with an NWCCU Board of Commissioners report to the MSU President and Accreditation Liaison Officer during their January 28-31, 2025 meeting.



**7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).**

Montana State's current five-year Strategic Plan, Choosing Promise, was enacted in 2019. During AY 24-25, we will continue focused efforts to implement action items, assess outcomes and reach the goals established in the university's strategic plan. Due to necessary pandemic-related adjustments, MSU's Strategic Plan goals were reevaluated and either extended to 2026 or removed from the plan.

**Montana State University Billings**  
**ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT**  
**Academic Year 2024-2025**

The Montana University System (MUS) Board of Regents (BOR) has requested additional context to support the decisions they make regarding “Requests to Plan” for new academic programs and research centers/institutes. **Toward that end, we ask that each institution submit a report addressing all questions listed below, not to exceed four pages, no later than 5 p.m. on Friday, July 12, 2024.**

**Separately, please fill-in the Forthcoming Academic Proposals spreadsheet describing academic programs or research centers/institutes that you anticipate may proceed to the “Request to Plan” portion of the approval process in the next year.** Please include contact information for a campus lead on each anticipated proposal. A proposal need not be listed in this report to proceed to the “Request to Plan” stage. However, listing proposals likely to move forward is an appreciated courtesy intended to encourage early communication and collaboration.

**1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.**

Aligned with the strategic themes and objectives of [MSU Billings university strategic plan \(2019 – 2026\)](#), and following the framework described below under #2, the following academic priorities have been established. At the core of all these priorities are our goals to (1) design curricula that enhance student success; (2) meet market and student demand for existing programs and emerging areas; (3) meet the workforce needs of Billings, Montana, and the broader region we serve; (4) increase student access to courses needed to make timely progress toward degree completion; (5) improve the quality of our educational programs through assessment and program review processes; and (6) enhance support and opportunities for faculty to expand faculty research, scholarly, and creative activities, as well as faculty-led student research and creative works, with the goal of increasing extramural research dollars attracted to MSU Billings in support of faculty and students.

***The College Experience (first-year experience course).*** For many years, conversations and planning have been ongoing at MSU Billings to significantly improve our first-year experience course. Our existing course is A&SC 111 First Year Seminar (2 credits). This course “provides resources, strategies, and learning environments that actively engage students in meeting their educational goals while increasing their knowledge of community, civic engagement, and service learning.” One large challenge with this course has been that in spite of strong recommendations by faculty and staff advisors, only a small fraction of students have historically enrolled in this course. During advising sessions, freshman students are strongly encouraged to take the course. Students do register for the course during registration advising sessions but later drop the course. With a few exceptions (e.g., Montana 10 students), the course is not a required course as part of our curricula.

We intend to change this by incorporating a 1-credit first-year experience course in our General Education curriculum. The course will be called “The College Experience” and will be a required

general education course for all incoming freshman students. This will ensure that all students derive the rich benefits known to be extended to students in a freshman experience course. These benefits include college skills, study skills, knowledge of resources available to students, navigating complexities of higher education, financial literacy, sense of belonging, etc. As part of our planning and course design processes, our faculty have engaged in consultations with other Montana University System (MUS) campuses, as well as other campuses around the country to design course learning outcomes based on research and best practices. The College Experience course proposal is expected to move through all review and approval steps in academic year 2024-2025 to be ready for inclusion in the 2025-2026 academic year catalog and offered to incoming freshman students in Fall 2025.

**Ongoing Restructuring of Academic Programs to Better Meet Student and Workforce Demands.**

We have intentionally worked with our academic colleges and departments to streamline our program offerings in ways that are relevant and intuitive to our students. A major goal has been to ensure prospective students have a clear understanding of our programs. As an example, in academic year 2023-24, we consolidated our Communication options. We consolidated the B.S. in Public Relations, B.A. in Communication Arts—Organizational Communication, and B.A. in Communication Arts-Media Studies into the Bachelor of Arts in Communication. This change brings about efficiencies and, in addition, it allows us to better communicate the relevance of our Communication program to prospective students and employers. Similar efforts will continue to ensure we better meet the needs of our students, while at the same time, we operate our programs in more efficient and effective ways.

**Course Sharing within the MUS.** MSU Billings continues its planning to join other MUS campuses to offer online courses on the Quottly/Parchment platform to students enrolled at other MUS campuses. Fundamentally, we see this as a student success initiative to give more options to MUS students to make timely progress toward degree completion by taking degree-appropriate courses offered by any MUS campus. MSU Billings has long been a leader in online education with a significant number of fully online programs, as well as a significant number of classes that are fully online. Making some of our fully online classes available to students enrolled at other MUS campuses will serve dual purposes of (i) ensuring there is strong demand for our courses and that our course fill rates stay at appropriate levels, and (ii) providing a variety of course options to students at other MUS campuses.

We have worked closely and collaboratively with academic colleges and departments to formulate an appropriate internal structure and process for identifying courses to be offered on the Quottly platform, carefully considering all the factors that will lead to successful and sustainable implementation of this initiative. A core team has been working closely with partners at MSU Bozeman and OCHE to ensure our systems properly communicate with the Quottly platform for our courses to be offered on this platform. Our efforts have been delayed by some technical challenges, however, our team is working with partners to resolve these.

**Second Chance Pell.** Starting in Spring 2023, MSU Billings participated in the Second Chance Pell Experiment, an initiative launched by the U.S. Department of Education, which provides

incarcerated individuals access to post-secondary education opportunities and federal need-based Pell Grants. These programs have been shown to reduce recidivism, support economic development, contribute to workforce development, and enhance community safety. Providing incarcerated individuals opportunities to participate in higher education is aligned with MSU Billings' mission to deliver "a transformative education that empowers students from diverse backgrounds to succeed." It is also aligned with our workforce development goals. Through a partnership between MSU Billings, the Montana Women's Prison (MWP), and Montana State Prison (MSP), MSU Billings continues to enroll students in two online programs: Associate of Applied Sciences in Business program and Bachelor of Science in Liberal Arts program (both online programs).

By and large, students enrolled in these two programs have performed very well, often receiving A letter grades in their classes. We have faculty and staff members who are very passionate about this program and are committed to ensuring the success of this program and the students served. We have forged strong partnerships with OCHE, Montana Department of Corrections (MDOC), as well as personnel at MWP and MSP to ensure that we serve the needs of this student population. Working with our MDOC colleagues and other partners in Billings, we recognize that we need to consider other short-term certificate programs as we look to provide more relevant offerings under the upcoming Prison Education Program (PEP). We are currently engaging in conversations and planning related to candidate programs that will be of benefit to this student population and their future job prospects.

We remain committed to ensuring that these students will be successful in their pursuit of academic endeavors and will continue to ensure academic support structures are in place to successfully guide these students toward degree completion. We are currently working to accept a new cohort of students for Spring 2025. As the experimental Second Chance Pell program transitions to become the ongoing Prison Education Program (PEP), we will ensure that we have all the curricular, academic support (e.g., advising, tutoring, etc.), and other support (financial aid, etc.) elements in place to ensure a successful and sustainable program. As Pell funds do not cover the full cost of this program, we continue to explore sustainable funding models to support the ongoing success of this program.

## **2. Provide a brief description of the process used determine these academic priorities.**

At MSU Billings, we follow a collaborative, inclusive, consultative, and transparent process for establishing academic and institutional priorities, ensuring that all constituents are engaged in the decision-making process. Forthcoming program proposals follow a well-established and transparent process. We have developed a comprehensive framework and process that faculty and academic departments use to propose new programs. The Provost, Deans, Academic Senate Chair, and Senators representing their college constituents were involved in developing this framework. This process front-loads much of the conversations, background research, determination of student and employer demand for any new program, and examination of resources required in order to determine whether or not a program is a good candidate to be proposed as a new program. This

process has significantly improved and elevated the quality of planning needed to bring new program proposals forward for consideration. Using this new framework and process, our faculty engage in collaborative and fact-finding conversations with Deans, Provost, and others related to the feasibility of new programs, short-term and long-term student and market demands, as well as short-term and long-term workforce needs. Relevant data are brought to consideration in determining market and workforce needs. Faculty bring initial ideas and plans to the Academic Senate, where the merits and justification for forthcoming program proposals are thoroughly discussed. Following approval by the Academic Senate, we pursue any additional steps required to seek program approval by MSU Bozeman, Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE), and the Board of Regents.

**3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.**

Through close engagements with students, faculty, advisory boards, employers, and the community, MSU Billings remains responsive to existing and emerging student and market demands, as well as workforce development needs. Several potential academic programs are now in the initial stages of campus ideation, exploration, discussion, consultation, consideration, and feasibility determination. These consultative and planning conversations have and will continue to follow the process described above under #2. The list of programs in various stages of exploration and consideration are included in the attached file (2024-2025 - MSU Billings - Forthcoming Academic Proposals.xlsx). Two examples are highlighted below.

We are engaging in conversations and planning related to a Certificate of Applied Science in Industrial Maintenance. The program of Industrial Maintenance Certificate of Applied Science prepares students for a career path in repairing and construction support to manufacturing and other industries that include mechanical processes as part of their operations. Graduates of this program will have the skills to maintain complex systems including welding, machining, carpentry, and electrical. This program will be delivered in multiple modalities, including online courses utilizing course sharing with Flathead Valley Community College, face-to-face instruction at City College, as well as instructor-led laboratory instruction.

Our Criminal Justice Bachelor of Science program has been growing steadily for a number of years. Program faculty have been very responsive to student needs as well as developments in the field, ensuring that the program curriculum is current and relevant. In response to student requests and employer recommendations, we are considering a Master of Science in Criminal Justice. Concurrent with these conversations, we are also exploring developing a Criminal Justice Bachelor to Master 3 + 2 program.

**4. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.**

Through two phases of a comprehensive Strategic Program Alignment (SPA) process completed several years ago, MSU Billings placed over eighty (80) academic programs on moratorium and eventually eliminated these programs. Most of the programs eliminated had zero or unsustainable student enrollment levels. Since the completion of the SPA process, we annually monitor a variety of metrics for all academic programs to ensure that programs are not only viable and sustainable, but that they demonstrate effective student outcomes, including retention rates, graduation rates, and achievement of program learning outcomes. This ongoing, data-informed monitoring process has established a clear and objective mechanism by which additional academic programs may be designated as candidates to be phased out. This process has led to over twenty (20) additional programs that have been placed on moratorium. The close monitoring of program effectiveness will be ongoing at MSU Billings.

**5. Include additional details you find relevant for the BOR to consider as they make decisions about “Requests to Plan.”**

At MSU Billings, we engage in several activities to ensure our academic programs remain relevant to students and employers, and remain viable with respect to enrollment and resources required.

(i) As described under #1 above, MSU Billings has been very intentional about offering new academic programs that are responsive to the needs of students, employers, community, and emerging workforce trends.

(ii) As described under #2 above, we follow a systematic and rigorous process to ensure that newly proposed academic programs are researched thoroughly, that student demands as well as industry and employer needs for program graduates are well understood, and that program resource needs are properly anticipated and available. This rigorous process not only ensures that newly proposed programs have a strong chance of being relevant to students, employers, and broader workforce needs, but also that these new programs will be viable.

(iii) MSU Billings annually monitors key academic program metrics to ensure the viability of its existing academic programs.

(iv) Programs monitor assessment of learning in order to ensure students achieve the stated program learning outcomes. Annual assessment reports are completed by all programs.

(v) Each academic program undergoes a comprehensive Academic Program Review (APR) process every seven years. We continually improve our APR process to ensure that it leads to a reflective and productive assessment and examination of the status of the academic program under review, and that the review endeavor leads to action items that ensure that the program not only continues

to meet the needs of students and employers, but also that curricular elements ensure student learning outcomes are achieved in measurable ways.

**6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.**

**Institutional Accreditation:** In academic year 2023-2024, MSU Billings began writing the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) Year Six: Policies, Regulation and Financial Review (PRFR) report, due fall 2024. Writing the Year 7: Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE) report and preparing for the comprehensive visit (fall 2025) will be the accreditation priorities for MSU Billings in the upcoming 2024-2025 year. The executive leadership at MSU Billings continued to work on fulfilling the only outstanding recommendation from the NWCCU, Recommendation 1: Fall 2021 Mid-Cycle Review to ensure MSU Billings will continue its commitment to stabilize its administrative team: [https://www.msubillings.edu/assessment/pdf/Commission\\_Letter-Montana%20State%20University%20-%20Billings-1\\_18\\_2022.pdf](https://www.msubillings.edu/assessment/pdf/Commission_Letter-Montana%20State%20University%20-%20Billings-1_18_2022.pdf). MSU Billings made progress in further stabilizing the administrative team. After a thorough national search, Dr. Susan Gilbertz was appointed as the permanent Dean of the College of Business. She served as the Interim Dean in 2023-2024, and began her permanent position on July 1, 2024. The progress made towards fulfilling the outstanding recommendation will be included in the NWCCU annual report, due every August.

**Program Accreditation:** During academic year 2023-24, MSU Billings hosted two program-level accreditation visits. The Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) reviewed the Applied Behavioral Analysis (MS) program. The visit was successful but with declining enrollment and budget constraints, the difficult decision was made to place this program on moratorium. Students in the program have teach-out plans and MSU Billings faculty and staff are working collaboratively with the ABAI to ensure current students complete in a timely manner. The National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) reviewed the MSU Billings Art programs. Early feedback indicates the visit was successful, and the official report is forthcoming. Several program accreditation visits will take place in the upcoming academic year including review of the College of Business (AACSB), the College of Education (CAEP), the Registered Nurse program (CNEA), and the Paramedic program (CAAHEP, CoAEMSP).

**7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).**

While much of the [current strategic plan \(2019-2026\)](#) has been operationalized, strategic planning activities are focused on the subobjectives where there is still work to be completed. The implementation of the [Retention and Graduation Plan 2022-2027](#) is ongoing. Early progress demonstrates positive results, with increases in retention rates overall and for specific student populations. While we are encouraged, much remains to be done and this work will continue in the coming year and beyond. Additional strategic planning activities for the coming year will also



include improving community giving, strengthening relationships with the Billings community and alumni, ensuring the operating budget is aligned to strategic objectives and establishing a stable auxiliary funding platform. These, among other strategic plan initiatives, will continue to be a focus for MSU Billings in the coming academic year.

Montana State University - Northern

**ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT**

**Academic Year 2024-2025**

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**1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.**

MSU-Northern provides higher education to students for professional and technical careers through an institution dedicated to teaching and the pursuit of knowledge. The University serves the Hi-Line and the State of Montana as the only four-year institution of higher education in the northern half of the state; thereby providing access to quality education for underserved populations in numerous areas with a high degree of rurality. In this spirit, MSU-Northern’s academic plans focus on the needs of the region and of our students, providing a vehicle for significant upward social and economic mobility. The University’s current academic portfolio includes programs from the Certificate to the Master’s levels that provide students with the skills necessary to succeed in a variety of fields including Business, Agriculture, Criminal Justice, Education, Physical and Mental Healthcare, the Trades, Automotive and Diesel Technologies, Social Science, and the Arts, to name a few.

For the coming academic year, MSU-Northern’s academic priorities will continue to focus on programs related to Education and workforce development as those are areas of critical need across the Hi-Line and the State. Specifically, with the current shortage of qualified workers, the University is deepening its investment in providing access to high-quality programs in Education, Healthcare, Agriculture, and the Trades. This focus on these areas is in direct alignment with the mission of the University and will increase the capacity of the institution to respond to the current economic climate.

**2. Provide a brief description of the process used determine these academic priorities.**

Currently, the process to determine academic priorities includes the collection of data and feedback from the institution’s many advisory boards as well as a review in enrollment trends; all within the context of the University’s mission and strategic plan. Discussion is had at the programmatic and College levels and the resulting recommendations are reviewed at the administrative level.

MSU-Northern is heading into a new academic planning cycle in Fall 2024 whereby policies and procedures related to academic planning will be reviewed and updated and opportunities for program innovations and additional offerings will be explored.

**3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.**

Over the past year, MSU-Northern increased its focus on its Education Preparation Programs and received approval from the Board to 1) establish an MS in Teaching (Content Area) and to 2) plan a teaching minor in mathematics. In addition, in Fall 2024, the University is launching its Elementary Education program in an online format - with personalized, interactive, in-person opportunities - to allow for place-based learning across the state.

For the coming year, the focus for MSU-Northern's Education Preparation Programs will continue to remain on addressing the need for accessible educational options, especially for students in areas with a high degree of rurality. This will include increasing offerings in academic areas leading to endorsement, and pursuing a 4+1 Master's in Education program.

MSU-Northern continues to build on its strength in workforce development programs and will be pursuing career pathways for dual enrollment students in both the Trades and in Healthcare. The University will also be exploring several different micro-credentialing models to allow for upskilling and career transitions for displaced workers.

Finally, MSU-Northern continues to maintain strong academic programming, in the areas of agricultural sciences & technology and agricultural mechanics, that connects closely with our agriculture industry in the local community, across the region, and across state. In this area, the University is identifying strategic opportunities to complement recent advancements in precision agriculture and agricultural data analytics.

**4. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.**

None at this time.

**5. Include additional details you find relevant for the BOR to consider as they make decisions about "Requests to Plan."**

During MSU-Northern's most recent accreditation review conducted by NWCCU, the University received commendations as follows:

"The Commission commends Montana State University - Northern for:

1. An immense amount of pride and care across every level of the institution. Each person the peer evaluation team met at Northern expressed their deep affection for their students.

2. Community engagement as demonstrated by significant participation in campus events and impressive fundraising support.

3. The deep devotion to their institution and appreciation for all the faculty and staff do to support their academic, professional, and personal success.

4. Their outstanding commitment to first generation college students, lower income students, and, in particular, Native American students.”

MSU-Northern is singularly focused on the success of its students and their communities. Because of this, and because of the institution’s unique location in the state, any proposal presented to OCHE and the Board is developed and delivered with thoughtful consideration of its feasibility, sustainability, and anticipated impact on students, families, and communities across the State.

MSU-Northern appreciates and values the spirit of partnership, collaboration, and support present in its relationships with OCHE, members of the Board, and all fellow institutions across the MUS and is looking forward to many more years of continuous development and improvement for the benefit of our students.

**6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.**

MSU-Northern participated in many accreditation activities over the 2023-2024 academic year, at both the institutional and programmatic levels.

First, during AY24, the institution underwent its Year-Seven comprehensive review with the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), whereby the University prepared a self-study report and hosted an evaluation team for review with respect to NWCCU standards. This review was highly successful as the Commission determined that all recommendations from the previous accreditation cycle had been fulfilled and reaccreditation was reaffirmed. The Commission also offered four new recommendations for the continuous improvement of the institution and progress on these recommendations is currently underway.

Second, MSU-Northern’s Bachelor of Science in Diesel Technology was reviewed for reaccreditation with the Associated Equipment Distributors Foundation (AEDF). This is a comprehensive review that also included a site visit. Through this process, accreditation of the program was reaffirmed and recommendations for continuous program improvement were provided. As with the NWCCU recommendations, progress on these recommendations is currently underway.

Third, MSU-Northern hosted a verification site visit from the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) in Fall 2023. This Fall 2023 verification visit was made as a follow-up to the virtual reaccreditation site visit held in Spring 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Fall 2023 verification visit was highly successful. Of note, during the last accreditation cycle, MSU-Northern’s ASN and RN to BSN programs received full accreditation reaffirmation through Spring 2029.

Finally, MSU-Northern's initial and advanced education programs were reviewed in AY24 for reaccreditation by the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) through a comprehensive self-study and site visit. The cycle for this review is still in process and the institution expects to receive word regarding reaccreditation in September 2024.

In addition to these accreditation activities, MSU-Northern completed all reporting obligations regarding accreditation for the institution and for all six externally-accredited programs.

**7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).**

MSU-Northern is in the process of assessing its progress on its All N 2023 – 2033 Strategic Plan. This year, it is anticipated that the data collection processes related to the assessment of strategic plan goal achievement will be refined in order to ensure long-term sustainability. Additionally, trends in KPIs will be examined to determine whether there is a need for any adjustments in policies, procedures, initiatives, or resource allocation with respect to the institution's achievement of its goals for the coming year.

Great Falls College MSU

**ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT**

**Academic Year 2024-2025**

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**1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.**

The results of an in-depth process launched in 2022 to show the current state of programming at Great Falls College illustrated the capacity to add programs that complement the current programming mix, satisfy industry demands, and provide livable wages. Great Falls College has identified programs that could increase academic program offerings onsite and through use of OneMSU, dual enrollment academies, and workforce partnerships.

Persistence and Retention

*Strategic Plan 2022-2027 Priority: Align human, physical, and/or financial resources to support strategic plan initiatives.*

The purpose of the Strategic Enrollment Management Committee is to use a data-informed process to align fiscal, academic, student support and engagement, and enrollment resources to accomplish the college’s mission and strategic plan, ensuring the college’s long-term enrollment success and fiscal health.

Assessment of Student Learning

*Strategic Plan 2022-2027 Priority: Seek and encourage efficiency and innovation in the work of the college.*

The Student Learning Assessment committee members serve as champions of outcomes-based student learning assessment, promoting its importance to the college mission, and supporting ongoing and effective assessment practices by educating and mentoring faculty.

**2. Provide a brief description of the process used to determine these academic priorities.**

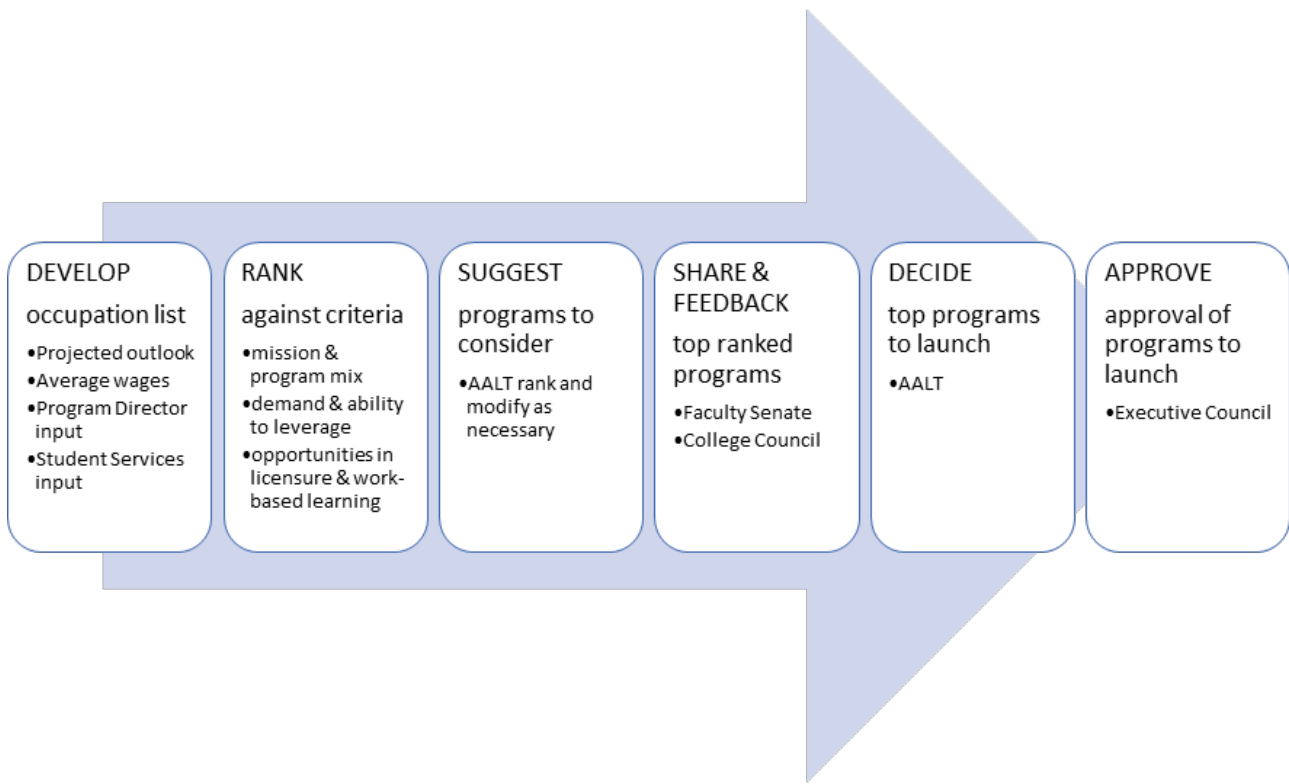
The Academic Priorities of Great Falls College center around four discrete but interrelated components to develop conclusions and recommendations.



- Component 1: Current programming mix
- Component 2: Educational trends
- Component 3: Labor and Industry Trends
- Component 4: Academic Program Reviews and other resources

The first three components focus heavily on current academic programs and how they align with educational and labor and industry trends. The fourth component centers on data provided annually through the program review process, retention efforts, and aligned the organizational structure to the strategic plan priorities, and strategic enrollment management plan the current educational and labor and industry trends. The results culminate in academic plans and programming efforts.

Below is a visual of the collaborative process used to determine new program offerings. “AALT” is the Academic Affairs Leadership Team comprised of the CAO, Executive Director of Instruction, and the Division Directors.



Persistence and Retention

While new programming is important to the success of Great Falls College, so is retaining current students; thus, the DREAM (Driving Retention and Educational AttainMent) team was created. The purpose of the DREAM team is to develop and facilitate implementation of campus-wide, sustainable strategies and practices to increase student persistence in support of the college’s student retention, completion, and strategic enrollment management goals, including closing equity gaps. The goals align with the strategic plan, and college and community needs.

## Assessment of Student Learning

To meet the NWCCU 2020 Standards 1.B.1. and 1.B3., the college will need to continue to develop an ongoing and systematic evaluation and inclusive planning process to inform and refine its effectiveness, assign resources, and improve student learning and achievement. By implementing quantitative measurements into the assessment process at the course and program levels, the college will meet the standards.

The Student Learning Assessment committee is charged with creating a systemic process for reviewing student learning data and making curricular adjustment based on the information. The committee has created Data Day, held annually, for faculty to review the information and determine an action plan to enhance learning results.

### **3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.**

#### **Proposed new associate degree programs.**

Based on the current programming mix, industry trends, state and local industry demands, and enrollment opportunities, the following programs, expansions, and opportunities arose.

Four new programs will be implemented over the next 5 years.

- Veterinary Technician AAS (Spring 2024)
- Veterinary Office (Fall 2024)
- EMT Pre-Paramedic (Fall 2024)
- Substance Abuse & Addictions Counseling CTS (Fall 2025)
- There are other potential programs under consideration.

#### **Partnerships**

Program Directors overseeing healthcare programs will partner with OneMSU colleges, MUS colleges, and industry partners to expand healthcare-related educational opportunities to Montanans.

- Dental Assistant - starting fall 2025 in partnership with Gallatin College

Continue developing Dual Enrollment Academies

- Continue offering the EMT Basic through dual enrollment with Lewistown School District and possibly expand to other rural school districts.

#### **Special Initiative: Second Chance Pell Program Prison Education Program**

Great Falls College will complete the Prison Education Program application this summer to offer Substance Abuse & Addictions Counseling AAS and Office Support CAS programming to the incarcerated at Montana Women's prison and Montana State prison run by the Department of Corrections.

4. **If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.**

None currently.

5. **Include additional details you find relevant for the BOR to consider as they make decisions about “Requests to Plan.”**

Great Falls College has developed a comprehensive vetting process for bringing forward new programs, expanding current programs, and engaging in partnerships with business and industry to provide training and academic programming relevant to their needs.

6. **Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.**

Great Falls College will complete a Mid-Cycle On-Site Review with NWCCU in Spring 2025.

7. **Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).**

Great Falls College completed its 2022-2027 strategic plan called Forging Futures in 2022. The plan details can be found on the college’s website [here](#). The college also completed ancillary plans to complement the strategic initiatives including facilities, strategic enrollment, and marketing plans.

**Montana University System**  
**ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT**

Miles Community College  
**ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT**  
**Academic Year 2024/25**

The Montana University System (MUS) Board of Regents (BOR) has requested additional context to support the decisions they make regarding “Requests to Plan” for new academic programs and research centers/institutes (<https://mus.edu/borpol/bor300/303-1.pdf>). Toward that end, we ask that each year institutions submit a report, of no more than three pages, eight weeks prior to the July BOR Meeting. This report should include:

- A high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.
- A brief description of the process used to determine these academic priorities.
- A description highlighting new academic or research programming that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.
- If/where applicable, a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.
- Additional details you find relevant for the BOR to consider as they make decisions about “Requests to Plan.”

Separately, please fill-in the [Forthcoming Academic Proposals](#) spreadsheet describing academic programs or research centers/institutes that you anticipate may proceed to the “Request to Plan” portion of the approval process in the next year. Please include contact information for a campus lead on each anticipated proposal. A proposal need not be listed in this report to proceed to the “Request to Plan” stage. However, listing proposals likely to move forward is an appreciated courtesy intended to encourage early communication and collaboration.

### **Miles Community College**

The Academic 2024/25 year at Miles Community College (MCC) is focused on academic priorities that align with our community college mission to prepare students for success and provides opportunities for lifelong learning through quality programs, community outreach, workforce training and partnerships.

The process MCC utilizes to determine academic programs includes input from faculty, staff, advisory boards, local community and regional industry feedback.

Currently, for the 2024/25 Academic year MCC is working with faculty, advisory boards and industry partners to explore areas to research regarding new academic certificates, programs and workforce training.

MCC is focusing on expanding our “Start Here Go Anywhere” ideology to partner with high schools to offer dual enrollment courses in general education and career/technical areas to expand the opportunity for our Eastern Montana high school

students to earn college credit and explore careers such as our Opportunity Realized Program. Additionally, MCC is working with industry partners to build on workforce training through our Workforce Solutions Program. MCC continues to grow our articulation agreements for various programs and 2+2 Pathways with four-year institutions to provide a full array of curriculum, programs and pathways to pursue education and training for the citizens of Miles City and Eastern Montana to achieve their educational and career aspirations!

**FOR OCHE USE**

**[OCHE COMMENT]**

Flathead Valley Community College

**ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT**

**Academic Year 2024-2025**

The Montana University System (MUS) Board of Regents (BOR) has requested additional context to support the decisions they make regarding “Requests to Plan” for new academic programs and research centers/institutes. **Toward that end, we ask that each institution submit a report addressing all questions listed below, not to exceed four pages, no later than 5 p.m. on Friday, July 12, 2024.**

**Separately, please fill-in the Forthcoming Academic Proposals spreadsheet describing academic programs or research centers/institutes that you anticipate may proceed to the “Request to Plan” portion of the approval process in the next year.** Please include contact information for a campus lead on each anticipated proposal. A proposal need not be listed in this report to proceed to the “Request to Plan” stage. However, listing proposals likely to move forward is an appreciated courtesy intended to encourage early communication and collaboration.

1. **Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.**

The mission of Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC), as approved by the Board of Trustees, is to “promote excellence in lifelong learning, focused on student success and community needs.”

FVCC’s academic priorities are workforce and transfer programs. These priorities meet the needs of business and industry, enable students to seamlessly transfer to a four-year institution and ensure student success. FVCC’s academic priorities are directly related to and support our mission and institutional strategic plan.

2. **Provide a brief description of the process used determine these academic priorities.**

Academic priorities are identified through a collaborative process. FVCC collaborates with business, industry, faculty, and transfer institutions to ensure academic priorities meet stakeholder needs. Data analysis of proposed priorities includes required resources. Academic priorities are reviewed by faculty, administrative and leadership committees and then by the Board of Trustees.

3. **Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.**

FVCC has receive repeated requests from surrounding communities to explore programs in dental hygiene, airframe and power programming, veterinarian technician, ultrasound tech and respiratory therapy, and entrepreneurship. The college is exploring requirements and needed resources for each of these programs.



4. **If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.**

As part of the program review process, FVCC continually reviews programs to determine the continued need. These reviews may result in a recommendation for program moratorium or termination. At this time, no programs are being considered for moratorium or termination.

5. **Include additional details you find relevant for the BOR to consider as they make decisions about “Requests to Plan.”**

None at this time.

6. **Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g., reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.**

In response to the spring 2023 Mid-Cycle NWCCU visit, the Strategic Planning and Accreditation Council, in coordination with the data team and feedback from the campus community, developed and thoroughly vetted a revised set of mission fulfillment indicators that directly align and support each of FVCC’s strategic goals.

Looking ahead, FVCC will review its policies and procedures throughout the upcoming academic year in preparation for the NWCCU spring 2026 Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review (PRFR).

7. **Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g., revision of your campus strategic plan).**

FVCC continues to develop of a comprehensive strategic plan for workforce development that aligns with the college mission and campus strategic plan. One of the first main goals is to strengthen the workforce pipeline for occupational trades. In 2024 FVCC will work with the Society of Manufacturing Engineers to strengthen and grow manufacturing training in the Flathead Valley.

FVCC also updated the language of its current strategic plan and types of mission indicators to ensure that all goals and objectives in the plan are measurable.