



MONTANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
OFFICE OF COMMISSIONER OF HIGHER EDUCATION

2500 BROADWAY ♦ PO BOX 203101 ♦ HELENA, MONTANA 59620-3101 ♦ (406)444-6570 ♦ FAX (406)444-1469

TO: Montana Board of Regents

FROM: Roger Barber *Roger Barber*
Deputy Commissioner for Academic & Student Affairs

RE: The Work of the Quality Committee

DATE: June 17, 2004

The charge that was adopted by the Montana Board of Regents in January, 2004, directed me to present a preliminary definition of a "quality Montana University System" at the July 2004 Board meeting. That definition accompanies this memorandum.

The Quality Committee has met four (4) times since its work was officially launched in January. Its discussions have been intense and often difficult, and it would be almost impossible to recreate those conversations. A short description of its work plan might be appropriate, however:

- the Committee divided into two (2) work groups, one that focused on stakeholders and one that focused on benchmarks.
- since the variety of stakeholders, who might be interested in a quality Montana University System, is almost endless, that group quickly decided that any definition should be directed primarily at students and parents, policymakers and University System partners.
- the benchmarks group assembled a list of 34 possible measures that might describe a quality Montana University System; while the list could have been bigger, the group focused its efforts on data that is currently collected by MUS or the institutional research programs at Montana State University-Bozeman and The University of Montana-Missoula.
- the list of measures was carefully discussed, particularly from the perspective of what it might say about "quality."
- during the discussion, the group looked for common themes or ideas that might serve as the basis for a quality definition.
- a preliminary definition was finally drafted, and initial benchmarks were identified.

The definition itself is a first attempt, although the Committee spent almost two hours tinkering with the words. At this point in its development, the group seems to agree that

- quality is an imprecise concept, one that could be described by the phrase "I know it when I see it."
- the definition will almost certainly be imprecise; but the words in that definition should attempt to capture the lofty aspirations conjured up by "quality."
- the definition and the benchmarks should describe the Montana University System, not individual institutions.

Memorandum on the Quality Committee, cont.:

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- every institution contributes to most, but not all, of the words in the definition; and every institution contributes to most, but not all, of the benchmarks.
- some aspects of quality are not measurable, and that may include parts of the definition of a quality Montana University System.
- only the most relevant benchmarks should be used, even though the definition of quality could be evaluated in a variety of ways.

The Quality Committee plans to meet at least two more times before its final report in September.

If you have any questions, I would be happy to try and answer them. Several members of the Quality Committee will also be in attendance at the July meeting, and they may be able to assist with those answers.

A Preliminary Definition of A Quality Montana University System

A quality Montana University System

- prepares its students for successful lives as citizens, employees, entrepreneurs and life-long learners;
- values innovative scholarship and high standards of academic achievement;
- uses its fiscal and intellectual resources in a responsible manner, advances the individual and economic capital of the State, and sees itself as a partner in moving the State forward;
- promotes these goals by being accessible and affordable.

The Montana University System will monitor its success in meeting these expectations by using the following benchmarks:

- 1) Preparation of students:
 - **retention rates
 - **graduation rates
- 2) Scholarship:
 - **research expenditures/faculty FTE
 - **patents and technology transfers
- 3a) Fiscal and Intellectual Resources:
 - **current expenditures by purpose, in percentages
 - **state appropriations/\$1,000 of personal income and per capita
- b) Individual and Economic Capital:
 - **employment/continued employment
 - **growth in FTE enrollment, certificates and degrees conferred in two-year education
- c) Partnership:
 - **collaborative programs with K-12, tribal and community colleges and private educational institutions
 - **service to the business sector
- 4) Access and Affordability:
 - **transferability among institutions
 - **affordability compared to other states