

Significant Issues Raised by House and Senate Leaders during the January Board of Regents Legislative Roundtable

Shared Leadership should continue.

(Most legislators mentioned support for continued work with the Legislature).

- The Shared Leadership mid-legislature update (attached) shows progress to date on all our initiatives.
- What is your vision for the next two years and your priorities during the next legislative cycle?

Affordability is becoming a real problem for Montana students.

(Raised generally by many legislators, particularly by Sen. Tester).

Some progress is being made to increase aid for Montana students. The Shared Leadership update (attached) describes efforts to remove barriers to access and status of current initiatives in this area. Some highlights since our last meeting are:

- We have engaged the National College Access Network to assist us with a comprehensive assessment in where our gaps in aid exist. Members of the Shared Leadership Committee, OCHE, the Student Assistance Foundation, and the Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program have formed a partnership to move this forward.
- OPI, Dept. of Labor, and the Montana University System meet this month to work on better coordination of data across the entire education/workforce system.
- We continue to engage the Access Steering Committee and are currently planning another meeting (post-legislature) to implement the priority non-legislative recommendations of the committee.
- We have spent considerable time in the past two months working with the Governor's Office and Rep. Branae (bill sponsor) on the Best and Brightest legislation (HB435, which is now called the "Governor's Postsecondary Scholarship Program). We have also worked to maintain the HB2 increase in Montana Higher Education Grants in HB2 (about \$450,000). These two programs are good starting points for increasing aid. HB435 is in House Appropriations; HB2 is on the House floor.

We need better distance learning coordination and program development.

(Raised by Sen. Keenan, Sen. Tester, Rep. Brown).

- HB2 currently has appropriated \$300,000 for improving distance learning.
- This funding is enough to fund a position to start coordinating across the system.

There is a need for Montana University System support for energy development, including wind energy, conventional development, and transmission.

(Raised by Sen. Keenan, Rep. Brown).

- The university system has been working during the past month with the Governor's Office to help organize an energy summit. The university system, in particular MSU, will be a leader in planning and executing the summit. The summit is tentatively planned for Bozeman next October and will focus on ways to increase transmission, conventional generation and alternative energy development.
- MSU has begun working on transforming the current Engineering Experiment Station in Bozeman (currently a few people with about \$400,000 budget) into an Energy Experiment Station focused on the state's energy needs. Planning is underway for securing grants to develop the "Station."
- UM-Tech has recently secured a grant to study transmission issues in Montana.

The university system needs to continue to expand workforce training targeting the needs of Montana businesses.

(Raised by Rep. Brown, Rep. Lindeen).

The Shared Leadership status report (attached) outlines efforts that have been made to improve workforce development. Some highlights since our last meeting are:

- The funding in HB2 for workforce development is critical. Currently we have \$900,000 for our Community Colleges, \$1.4 million for the seven MUS two-year programs, and \$3.6 million for equipment purchases at MUS programs and Community Colleges. There is also \$2 million for equipment purchases at the state's tribal colleges.
- This funding is vital for the MUS to expand our ability to be more responsive to business needs. These past two months we have developed the process we will use to allocate the funds. We will be able to put the money to use as soon as it is available (July 1) and demonstrate a significant impact by the next legislature.
- Improving business – MUS links will be a major focus for the new Associate Commissioner for Economic Development. We have already begun prioritizing the most pressing workforce needs in the state to guide our development of new/expanded training programs.
- The university system is prepared to put considerable effort into improving the state's healthcare worker shortages. In particular we will be active partners in evaluating better ways to improve rural health access through either SB 273 (Billings Medical School) or a study bill from the Legislature on this subject.

The university system needs to improve transferability.
(Raised by many legislators).

Highlights of the work done to improve transferability since our last meeting:

- The Montana Board of Regents established eight (8) work groups to develop system-wide policies in response to the Legislative Performance Audit on transfer of credits.
- Three (3) of those groups completed their work and submitted possible policies for the Board's consideration at its March 2005 meeting. The policies deal with outdated coursework, minimum or acceptable course grades, and standard processing for transfer students.
- Two (2) of the groups completed draft policies, and shared that work with the Board of Regents, at its March 2005 meeting, for informational purposes. The two (2) policies, dealing with general education coursework and transfer grade point average, will be ready for the Board's consideration in May.
- Two (2) additional work groups have made significant progress on their project, and will prepare policies or recommendations for the Board's approval at the May 2005 meeting. Those groups are working on a common curriculum for Licensed Practical Nursing programs and assessment data to measure the effectiveness of the new policies.
- The Board of Regents also reviewed a draft policy on a single admissions file process for the Montana University System at its March 2005 meeting. Although that proposed policy is not part of the transfer audit, it will have significant impact on transfer students in the System.

The university system needs to do more to support the needs of our Reservations.
(Raised by Sen. Keenan).

Ellen Swaney and Rene Dubay from the Commissioner's staff meet regularly with tribal leaders and our tribal college staff. In addition to this regular communication, a letter has been drafted, addressed to each of the tribal chairs or presidents, to invite them to attend Regents meeting and give them an opportunity to voice opportunities for the university system to assist our Native American communities.

Status of Shared Leadership for a Stronger Montana Economy As of Transmittal Break, beginning of March 2005

This update describes the status of all three steering committee's recommendations. Since the last meeting of the combined steering committees in January much has transpired. Of course, the legislative session has the top priority since January, but things are progressing reasonably well through the first half of the session. Here is a brief update on where things stand.

Distance Learning:

The university system request through the Martz executive budget was for \$1 million to fund the top three priorities of the steering committee:

- Create a system-wide IT position;
- Create a Montana Gateway Portal for all university system distance courses; and
- Develop additional on-line curricula in high-demand areas.

After working through the budget with the Schweitzer administration and the Appropriations Education Subcommittee funding is down to \$300,000 at this point in the process. While this sounds like bad news, it will allow us to make a big step forward. It has been fairly obvious that the administration and the legislature faced the same problem as the distance learning steering committee – namely the lack of anyone working at the statewide level makes it hard to develop details of exactly what needs to be done. We are to some extent caught in our own catch-22: without a detailed plan we have difficulty getting funded but without funding we have a difficult time developing a detailed plan.

The funds we currently have in the budget will allow the university system to bring in expertise at the system-wide level to begin coordinating certain aspects of distance learning in Montana and develop detailed plans. This is very similar to the way the state began solving the problems associated with lack of coordination in IT processes throughout the various state agencies – the creation of the Chief Information Officer position. While the distance learning initiative envisions a position not completely analogous to the Montana CIO, it is still true that the first critical step toward progress is having one or two people devoted full-time toward developing better distance learning coordination. The funding in the current budget will allow that first important step. Although the current funding will not provide resources for much curriculum development or to complete implementation of the Montana Gateway, the state should nonetheless be well positioned to achieve these objectives within a 2-4 year time frame.

Workforce Training:

The Workforce Committee has a number of recommendations. Some of these priorities require funding in the legislature and some do not. The focus during the past 6 weeks has been to secure needed funding while the legislature is in session then to concentrate on the other priorities after adjournment. At this point, there has been a significant commitment by the legislature to expanded workforce development.

Starting with the Martz budget last November, funding included \$2.58 million for better data system development and to develop curricula for high demand workforce training. It also included \$5 million for equipment purchases at the state's two-year programs.

Out of this total \$7.58 million we have been fortunate to have thus far preserved \$5.9 million for workforce-related programs.

While the original funding for workforce training was available for allocation across statewide two-year programs, the Appropriations Subcommittee has directed some of the funding into specific programs. Current status is as follows:

- \$300,000 to each of the state's 3 community colleges for any purpose (total \$900,000).
- \$200,000 for program development to each of the university system's 7 two-year programs – 5 COT's plus programs at MSU-Northern & UM Western (total \$1.4 million).
- \$3.6 million for equipment purchases at any of the state's two-year programs, including the community colleges, allocated through a competitive process.

\$2.00 million has also been appropriated for equipment purchases at the state's seven tribal colleges. The bad news: at this time there is no funding for the university system to improve data systems.

Clearly, neither the previous \$7.58 million nor the current \$5.9 million in funding will be adequate to solve all of the workforce training needs in the state. However, the current level of funding will be adequate to accomplish two things. First, it will allow the system to identify and target the state's most critical program and equipment needs. Second, the current funding will allow the state's two-year system to develop a track record in solving workforce shortages around the state. This track record should provide a great head start toward making the case for additional funding in subsequent legislative sessions.

There has also been some progress in addressing the committee's priorities in areas that do not require legislative funding:

- The Request for Proposal (RFP) to hire a marketing firm to continue elevating the image of the state's two-year programs has been released. The final selection decision will be made in March. The campaign will begin this summer.
- A working group comprised of two-year program deans and registrars began meeting this month to work on standardizing AAS degrees. The group is trying to adapt a model developed in Idaho and expects to have a progress report for the Board of Regents meeting in March. Standardizing some AAS degrees is an important first step in improving system-wide coordination and curriculum approval processes. Arlene Parisot is spearheading this work.
- The Board of Education's P-20 committee has formed a subcommittee to standardize language concerning dual enrollment programs in Montana. Arlene Parisot is one of the co-chairs of this subcommittee. This is a critical step toward improving access to dual enrollment around the state and a progress report should soon be ready for the Board of Education.
- Through funding made available by the National Governor's Association, Jay Pfifer from Florida spent considerable time with the Board of Education at their last meeting. Jay will continue to help Montana to develop a better, integrated data management system as he has done so successfully in Florida.

Access to Education

There have been considerable developments with regard to removing access barriers in Montana. It will be a long road, but the beginning steps are in motion. To start with probably the highest profile initiative, the Governor's Best and Brightest scholarship program cleared the House of Representatives during the first half of the legislative session. The legislation will still have to pass the Senate, but it is generally expected to be enacted during the next 6 weeks. The program will create both need-based and merit-based scholarships at two- and four-year institutions. As currently constructed, there will be a total of almost 1,000 scholarships awarded per year, each worth between \$2,000 and \$8,000 over the course of a student's degree program. Scholarships will be available for students pursuing both 2- and 4-year degrees.

The Appropriations Subcommittee has also agreed to appropriate an additional \$470,000 to the Montana Higher Education Grants program, which is a very flexible financial aid resource already managed by the Montana Guaranteed Student Loan program. Non-beneficiary student funding at the state's tribal colleges has also been increased to the level of approximately \$1,500 per non-beneficiary student per year. This will provide funding for non-tribal students who attend tribal colleges and provides much needed support for tribal colleges that have become regional institutions supporting all residents in the area.

The steering committee's recommendation on reducing financial barriers to postsecondary education is to move Montana's level of need-based aid (about \$60 per student) to at least the western state's average (about \$240 per student). The current level of funding will move us about 15% closer to our goal – a nice step forward, but certainly leaving much work to be done in the next few years.

There has also been progress on "access" recommendations that do not require legislative action. First, a small team of postsecondary education staff is working internally, and with national access experts, to outline a comprehensive road map that will define critical aspects of postsecondary success for all Montana citizens. Currently, Montana lacks adequate, accessible data to determine which citizens are, or are not, succeeding at various levels throughout the educational pipeline. A Montana status report with suggested next steps for obtaining, compiling, and sharing data is being finalized for steering committee review.

There are several other major data-coordination efforts currently proposed or underway throughout the state including at the Office of Public Instruction, the Department of Labor, the Montana University System, and a national tribal college program. Under the auspices of the P-20 committee, a meeting of all key staff involved in these efforts is being convened in March to discuss how these projects might be coordinated or enhanced to achieve statewide goals.

Discussion and planning related to the formation of an Access to Education Coordinating Council has also been moving forward. On February 19th a conference call was convened by the Empowerment/Outreach and Communications sub-committee and facilitated by several staff from the National College Access Network. A preliminary action plan for achieving the committee's recommendations regarding the following initiatives will be prepared for their review, including:

- A comprehensive outreach and empowerment network;
- Recommendations to coordinate a sustained communications and outreach campaign;
- Better ways to work with current providers to expand awareness and career counseling services, including a "career store" as a single source of contact for career/college information in Montana;
- Development of a statewide initiative involving businesses, private organizations and individuals across the state in mentoring/encouraging Montana students;
- Enhanced coordination of efforts between the Board of Education's Indian Education For All and P-20 committees.

Summary

As expected, the new Administration and the Legislature are influencing how we accomplish the objectives, but we have maintained good support for all of the priority initiatives. Obviously much can change in the next two months, but the initiatives launched under the auspices of Shared Leadership for a Stronger Montana Economy are generally progressing well.