

**Montana University System**  
**2011 Biennium Budget Planning – New Proposals (January 2008)**

**Unit/Campus:** Montana's Three Community Colleges:

Dawson Community College  
Flathead Valley Community College  
Miles Community College

**New Proposal Name:**

Community College Retention Enhancement Initiative

**Description of New Proposal:**

Montana's three community colleges must take explicit action to accommodate our students' unique needs and continue to implement innovative, creative, and clear approaches to retaining students. The purpose of this proposal is to improve institutional systems and technology to enhance retention at our campuses, as well as assess the success of our retention objectives.

Although retention is not a new topic, strategies for retaining students are becoming more intricate and complex. According to Vincent Tinto, one of the nation's leading retention researchers, "institutions must move beyond the provision of add-on services and establish educational systems that promote the retention of all students. They must make enhancing student retention the linchpin around which they organize their activities."

Nationally, nearly 50% of those who enter higher education will not earn a degree. Since community colleges provide quality, affordable access to post-secondary educational opportunities for many first-generation and low-income students, matriculation risk factors for these students are heightened. Accordingly these students graduate at a rate far below that of students from other backgrounds.

Most students, especially community college students, require some form of support, be it academic, social, or personal. Such support must be readily available and connected to other parts of the student collegiate experience, not separated from it. Therefore, institutions must also provide faculty with the pedagogical and assessment skills they need to establish conditions that promote student involvement, learning, and retention.

Students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that provide clear and consistent information about institutional requirements. Effective advising about the choices students have to make regarding their programs of study and future career goals is imperative. Students, especially those who are not sure of future plans, need to understand the road map to completion and know how to use it to achieve personal goals.

While serving as a powerful tool for enhancing student achievement and retention, technology also positively impacts student attitudes toward learning, self-confidence, and achievement. However, problems occur in technology integration which all too often focuses on providing hardware and software, and pays insufficient attention to the human and social systems that must also change for technology to make a difference in student retention. Therefore, adaptation of instructional technology must be theory-based, student-centered, and thoroughly assessed in order to understand its effectiveness and impact.

Technology as an instructional tool helps students to master basic and advanced skills. As an assessment tool, technology yields meaningful information about students' progress and accomplishments. Technology also offers several advantages over traditional methods of student assessment. For example, multimedia technology expands the possibilities for more comprehensive student assessments that require students' active participation and application of knowledge.

Retaining students also encompasses clear agreements and strong partnerships between the K-12 school system and community colleges and four-year institutions. This provides greater entry point access for students and gives student opportunities for beginning post-secondary education skill levels; in short, a seamless pathway to student success in higher education retention and career achievement.

Generation “Y” students entering college today are adept at learning anytime, anywhere. This initiative will help the community colleges address the changing learning paradigm through expanded online and interactive television course offerings. In addition, many non-traditional students are place-bound or have work or family commitments. The opportunity to access education through distance delivery methods greatly enhances the ability of these students to complete their education.

The following are examples of specific methods to address retention needs described above:

- Electronic student advising system
- On-line student services
- Interactive television equipment and upgrades
- Improved student data management systems
- Expanded online and ITV course offerings
- Enhanced campus-wide assessment activities
- Expand and enhance K-12 partnerships for seamless education opportunities
- Instructional technology and equipment upgrades consistent with industry standards for career and technical programs
- Technology-based career counseling services