

DRAFT

Strategies for Advancing Montana's Two-Year Education Agenda

Follow-up on the Regents' May 27 Resolution

**Montana University System
July 21, 2009**

"America is facing unprecedented economic decline and insecurity. Unemployment is approaching levels unseen in a quarter century. The world's credit markets have collapsed. The auto and banking industries are in financial jeopardy. This crisis demands a turnaround plan that boldly marshals American talent."

Preface to the **Making Opportunity Affordable RFP**

The Lumina Foundation's Making Opportunity Affordable (MOA) initiative is dedicated to engaging and supporting state higher education systems in the effort to create "turnaround plans" that will marshal talent by encouraging more citizens to pursue higher educational attainment levels. To turn our nation around economically, MOA posits, we must reverse a trend that has America tied for 10th among developed countries on the percentage of our population between ages 25 and 34 with a college degree. However, MOA's productivity agenda involves more than accelerating degree production. Equally important are (1) efficient and cost-effective academic and administrative approaches, (2) innovative approaches that will serve more students more affordably, and (3) ensuring quality.

For the past year, Montana has been one of 11 states funded by MOA to explore strategies that will advance this productivity agenda. From the start, Montana's appeal has been our focus on increasing enrollments and completions in two-year education as the focal point for our "turnaround plan." (In light of President Obama's recent announcement of a similar focus at the national level, our choice of the two-year college sector was particularly fortuitous.) As the year progressed, we engaged representatives of government and education, regents and campuses in an examination of the framework for two-year education in Montana and how it might be improved. In May, the regents narrowed that focus, recommending that we pursue three specific strategies. In the months since, we have tweaked those general strategies and fleshed them out with the more specific strategies recommended in this document.

How do these strategies create a turnaround plan to marshal Montana talent?

1. **Our productivity agenda is focused on increasing enrollments in Montana's two-year programs and colleges.** Of particular importance are the steps we are taking to increase high school students' early enrollment in college (currently, we're last in the West with this demographic) and to increase nontraditional student enrollments. Key to the success of both is the designation of two-year colleges as regional hubs, working with area high schools, extension agencies, workforce centers, and economic development organizations to identify and respond to learning needs, sometimes with their own programs, but also pulling from the resources available online or through other campuses.

If Montana fails to engage adults in higher education in far greater numbers than we have in the past, we will not achieve the productivity levels the state and the nation so clearly need. For that reason, perhaps the most important, and most innovative, strategy proposed is the development and delivery of academic programs that are specifically designed with the nontraditional student in mind. In order to ensure that we are attracting new students, rather than relocating existing student populations, this strategy will be the key strategy employed by the "embedded COTs" as they expand their missions to include the

comprehensive two-year mission. Additionally, the virtual community college, although initially focused on engaging high school students, will be an extremely important component of access for adult students.

2. **Our productivity agenda aims to increase the completion of two-year and four-year degrees.** Through a single “transfer core,” aligned related instruction requirements, and shared 2+2 articulation agreements, we will create effective advising tools for clearly defined pathways from high school to two-year college and from two-year college to four-year college. Equally important, the virtual community college will make access to these foundational components of all programs readily available and affordable for all Montanans.
3. **Our productivity agenda will use cost-effective, efficient approaches.** By locating developmental programs and transfer degrees at the two-year level, we will provide these important educational opportunities in settings that reduce costs for the student and the state. By coordinating curriculum, aligning general requirements, and placing commonly required curriculum in the virtual community college, we provide incentives and opportunities for individual campuses to streamline their offerings without reducing access for their students. By investing in information and data systems that are more integrated, we create the capacity for greater access and greater resource-sharing in the century to come.
4. **Our productivity agenda will ensure quality.** Our focus on performance metrics, our streamlining of curricular emphases, and our development of a data management system to provide apples-to-apples data will allow us to track, measure, and adjust for quality.

The remainder of this document provides the general strategies and their supporting specific tactics in detail. Few could be implemented immediately; most will require at least a year of planning and development before they could be implemented. Regardless of what happens with the MOA Implementation Grants, we believe these strategies and tactics will tap the full potential of two-year education in Montana – and through it the potential of the state and its citizens.

**Strategies for Advancing Montana's Two-Year Education Agenda:
Follow-up on the Regents' May 27 Resolution**

Goals:

- Increase enrollments at two-year colleges (E)
- Increase completions of valuable credentials [C]
- Increase transfer rates, thereby increasing four-year enrollments and completions (T)
- Create efficiencies to make college more affordable for students and the state (\$)
- Assure quality and value in two-year programming (Q)

General Strategy I

All two-year colleges will provide affordable access to the comprehensive community college mission – transfer education, workforce education, college/workforce readiness.

A. Transfer Education

1. Participating Montana two-year colleges will develop a certificate program for the Universal Transfer Core, comprised of 15 - 20 of the most frequently offered general education classes and validated through quality assurance measures. (\$, C, T, E, Q)
Move this up to top priority
2. Transfer degrees and the Universal Transfer Core will be available on every two-year college campus, including colleges of technology. (\$, E)
3. Associate degrees **will be comprised of lower-division coursework and** will only be available through Montana's two-year colleges, with the exception of the two-year hubs at MSU-Northern and UM-Western. (E, \$)
4. In communities where two-year colleges are embedded in a four-year university, transfer courses and programs will be designed and delivered at the two-year campus ~~primarily~~ to appeal to nontraditional students (e.g., X-1 formatting, "stackable" modules, evening and weekend schedules, online). (E, C, \$)
5. Tuition incentives for completion of a recognized credential – the universal core or an associate degree – will improve degree completion rates and successful transfer to four-year colleges. (C, T, \$, Q)

B. Workforce Education

1. The design and delivery of workforce programs will emphasize adult-friendly options (e.g., credit for experiential learning, stackable modules, X-1 formatting, evening/weekend/online delivery, one-year completion, etc.) (E, C)
2. In partnership with the Department of Labor and the State Workforce Investment Board, high-priority workforce areas will be targeted for modularized certificate and AAS degree offered through the virtual community college. (E, C, Q)
3. Through the final stages of the process for coming into compliance with BOR Policy 301.12, universal related instruction requirements in programs leading to the same career will facilitate access and student readiness at the various levels of two-year college programs (E, \$, Q).

C. College and Workforce Readiness

1. OCHE and OPI will lead the effort to identify and measure the skills, knowledge, and abilities high school students must have to be ready for baccalaureate-level studies, whether offered at two-year or four-year campuses, and/or to be ready for varying workforce programs. (Q, E, C)
2. Adult Basic Education will be offered at every two-year college, either directly or through the authorized provider. (E, \$)
3. Online ABE will be available through the virtual high school and/or the virtual community college. (E, \$)
4. Developmental courses, programs, and services will be offered only through two-year colleges, with the exception of MSU-Northern and UM-Western. (\$) [This clarification of existing policy will continue transitional programming at every campus affiliated with the Montana University System, but the programming will cost less for students and less for the state.]
5. High-quality online developmental programs and services will be developed and made available through the virtual community college. (E, C)
6. Proficiency-specific modules for developmental courses will be created and assessments will be used to identify and address developmental needs more specifically and through adult-friendly delivery models.

General Strategy II

All Montana University System two-year colleges (as well as the tribal colleges, MSU-Northern, and UM-Western) will be asked to serve as the higher education hubs in their respective regions, partnering with business, government, and education, to respond to regional needs and opportunities. Regional responsiveness, student-centeredness, cost-effectiveness, and system connectivity will be the core messages behind their "brand."

- A. Each college will serve a region of service and develop the partnerships and programs necessary to provide the following services to the region (E):
 1. The development and articulation of high school/adult transitions to career/college, **including both "tech prep" and dual enrollment options.**
 2. Rapid response to workforce needs
 3. Expanded programming in high-density populations through collaboration with local workforce development and education providers
- B. Regional education response teams comprised of local school districts, community colleges, and extension agencies will work with local civic and economic development agencies/organizations to identify and respond to "womb to tomb" learning needs.**
- C. Whether statutorily created community college districts or restructured community/state colleges of the Montana University System, all two-year colleges will be branded to emphasize their shared two-year college mission, their student-centeredness, and their community/regional responsiveness. (E, Q)
- ~~**D. The colleges of technology will be referred to generically as state colleges and will be individually renamed to reflect their regional commitment yet continue their**~~

~~institutional affiliation – e.g., Lewis and Clark College of The University of Montana, Silver Bow College of Montana Tech, etc. (E)~~

General Strategy III:

Montana's two-year colleges will collaborate and coordinate to expand access, share resources, and create efficiencies that promote affordability, cost-effectiveness, and quality assurance.

A. Program-level approaches

1. To facilitate high school transitions, policies and advising/communications tools will be developed to clarify the varying range of skills and proficiencies necessary to complete a postsecondary credential without added time and expense for courses needed to build entry-level proficiencies.
2. To facilitate high school transitions and statewide responses to workforce needs, related instruction requirements in workforce programs will be aligned and, whenever possible, common curricula will be developed. (\$, E)
3. The Universal Transfer Core will be **the centerpiece** for the virtual community college, facilitating academic engagement and expediting degree completion. (\$, E, C, T)
4. Five early college programs for high school students will be available through the virtual community college by Fall 2010. (E)
5. Shared 2+2 articulations utilizing the Universal Transfer Core will be developed in high-demand workforce areas. (E, C, T, \$)
6. "Portable" programming packaging online, interactive video, and/or compressed scheduling will expand access to underserved areas of the state. (E)

B. Technology-based strategies. The long-term goal of these strategies is to create and coordinate a two-year college system that expands access to underserved areas/populations, broadens academic options for students, and creates efficiencies for the Montana University System in order to cut costs and promote branding. Achieving these outcomes will require a long-term commitment. Therefore, each of the following two strategies will be implemented over time to ensure quality and sustainability.

1. Virtual Community College. Through a consortium approach, participating two-year colleges will contribute their "portable" programs and services to a virtual community college. Initially funded by HB 645, a single portal housed at The University of Montana will provide access to the virtual community college. A single learning management system will be used. The presidents/deans of participating colleges, as well as key staff at OCHE, will serve as the executive team directing the virtual community college.

Initially, the virtual community college will feature online early college opportunities, partnering with the virtual high school initiative to ensure that the intent of HB 645 is realized. The first set of courses will be available for students no later than Fall 2010. By Fall 2011, the virtual community college will provide programming tailored to adult learners, working with workforce development and economic development groups and other states to ensure responsive, affordable, and high-quality programming. (E, \$)

2. Data Integration and Warehousing. Integrating data is essential to coordinating any system -- first, to improve analytical reporting capabilities, and second, to expand data

sharing between campuses in order to facilitate multi-institutional enrollment capabilities and improve student transferability processes. In order for the MUS to advance and refine centralized storage, reporting of student information, and productivity-based decision-making, the System must develop a more sustainable, more comprehensive approach toward warehousing data and must simultaneously provide the tools necessary to make the warehouse a widely used asset.

- a. *Integration:* The first step in this process is to move the CC's into the same software system as the rest of the MUS (Banner). By integrating the CC's into Banner (and thus into the data warehouse) the 2-year colleges have the opportunity to better align business practices, develop standardized data structures and codes, take advantage of centralized institutional research and other services, and develop a shared electronic accountability portfolio. (E, Q)
- b. *Warehousing:* The system office will improve warehouse functions by reducing the number of data elements stored in the warehouse to those that are critical for system-wide measures and reporting, as well institution-level analysis; standardize codes for critical data elements in Banner; and explore investing in a new data warehouse product and/or reporting and analysis tools. (E, Q)

C. Quality Assurance

1. Statewide performance goals and metrics will be developed for:
 - a. Expanded access for target populations
 - b. Achievement of "momentum points"
 - c. Increased completion of certificates and degrees
 - d. Increased transfer and persistence toward degree
2. Quality assurance processes and metrics will be developed for:
 - a. Early college pathways
 - b. "Stackable" modules
 - c. Developmental programs
 - d. The Universal Transfer Core
3. Performance-based funding for two-year colleges will be pursued.