

MSU Billings

Community Taskforce Recommendations

February 2018

A year ago, Montana University System Commissioner Clayton Christian created the MSU Billings Community Taskforce. Tapping into the region's strong support for MSU-Billings, Commissioner Christian charged the Taskforce with engaging the broader community in planning the future of MSU-B.

Deputy Commissioner of Higher Education John Cech facilitated the Taskforce, which included broad representation from the community as well as faculty, staff, and administration from the University. The Taskforce met regularly in 2017. At those meetings, Taskforce members gained an understanding of the challenges facing MSU-B and learned of MSU-B's existing programs and planning processes. Taskforce members discussed these issues in depth for several months, exploring avenues for community support. The Taskforce then devoted additional meetings to identifying consensus recommendations for the betterment of MSU-B, focusing on areas most likely to benefit from community involvement.

With this report, the Taskforce provides suggestions, priorities, and ideas gleaned from the group's work. The Taskforce recognizes that MSU-B has already undertaken planning and programs to address some of these issues. Inclusion of those ideas in the report reflects the community's support for existing efforts. The Taskforce seeks to supplement MSU-B's own planning efforts by offering ideas to strengthen the University's connection and responsiveness to the region and to develop community strategies and partnerships to grow enrollment and increase excellence.

The work of the Taskforce revealed the strong ties between MSU-B and the region. In this document "community" is meant to be interpreted liberally, with a focus on people who have a stake in the success of MSUB, such as business leaders, education leaders, health care leaders, tribal leaders, and alumni. It focuses on those living in and around the areas MSUB serves, including Yellowstone County, Eastern Montana, Northern Wyoming and the Western Dakotas.

The Taskforce offers these recommendations to the Commissioner, the Board of Regents, the President of MSU, and to MSU-B's faculty, staff, and administration for their consideration as MSUB begins its new strategic planning phase and charts its course forward. The recommendations are premised on the community's commitment to remain involved in the future of MSU-B.

Pillar 1 - Leadership

Leading Statement:

MSU Billings needs stable leadership. The community desires long-term, visionary, committed guidance for its university. Since 2011, the Chancellor position has been held by three interims and two permanent chancellors. During the same time, the university has had three provosts and a great deal of turnover in the dean positions. A stable leadership team consisting of the Chancellor, Provost, Deans, Directors and Faculty Representatives is essential to the future of the university, including the development and implementation of an effective strategic plan. Strategic planning should be comprehensive and include contemplation of program planning, prioritization, student retention, completion, community engagement, and partnerships.

Recommendations from the Community Taskforce re: Leadership

1. The Montana University System should recruit and retain a stable leadership team for MSUB.
 - a. The community seeks a chancellor who is committed to providing strong, effective, and innovative leadership, and who bridges and unifies the community and the University. The chancellor should engage the community in determining the strategic direction of MSUB.
 - b. The Montana University System should ensure that the Chancellor search is representative, incorporating community, faculty, staff, and student views.
 - c. During the Chancellor search, the interim leadership team should continue to identify and implement near-term, strategic priorities.
2. Once selected, the Chancellor should move quickly to fill interim leadership positions at MSUB.
 - a. The Chancellor and the leadership team should adopt and implement a leadership recruitment and retention strategy.
 - b. Once leadership positions are filled, the Chancellor and the leadership team should review, revise, and implement a comprehensive and flexible strategic plan.
 - c. The strategic plan should reflect the long-term vision for MSUB with built-in flexibility to allow MSUB to react to and take advantage of emerging circumstances and opportunities.

- d. In developing a strategic plan, the Chancellor and leadership team should systematically seek community and student input.
 - e. The strategic plan should articulate a clear vision and set of priorities to guide the university even when there are changes in leadership.
 - f. When the strategic plan is completed, the Chancellor and leadership team will be responsible for implementing the plan and adjusting it, when needed.
3. The MSUB leadership team should recruit, maintain, and nurture partnerships with the community, as partnerships are crucial to the success of MSUB and its students.
- a. Leadership should maintain and nurture community partners through advisory boards.
 - i. MSUB leadership should create a community-based Chancellor's advisory board which meets regularly. The board should be comprised of chairs from several existing college and program advisory boards and some other members of the community. The board should reflect the community and also the focus on healthcare, business, teacher preparation, and applied technology. The MSU President should attend meetings of the Chancellor's advisory board at least twice a year.
 - ii. Colleges and programs should meet frequently with their community advisory boards.
 - iii. Colleges, programs, and leadership should measure and demonstrate effective interaction with advisory boards.
 - iv. Colleges, programs, and leadership should provide an annual opportunity to share ideas among the community advisory boards.
 - v. Each year, campus leadership and the advisory boards should determine short-term and long-term measurable goals for each advisory board and should consider MSUB's strategic plan when setting goals.
 - b. The leadership team should develop and maintain strong partnerships with education, tribal colleges and communities, agricultural groups, health care and mental health organizations, and business interests. These partnerships could include internships, joint research projects, shared education and training, and onsite training and research.

4. The leadership team should create and continue strategies for the success of MSUB students and identify needed resources. Campus and community leaders have a joint responsibility to advocate for MSUB's needs to the Board of Regents, MSU Bozeman, and the Montana Legislature.
 - a. The leadership team should clarify the relationship between MSU-Bozeman and MSU-Billings and communicate to faculty, students and the general public how that relationship works.
 - b. The leadership team should raise philanthropic funds in conjunction with the Foundation, and the chancellor should be at the forefront of philanthropic fundraising activities.
 - c. The leadership team should identify enrollment and retention goals and be accountable for meeting those goals.
 - d. The leadership team should develop a succession plan to be used when a new chancellor is needed.

Pillar 1 Summary: The community recognizes the pivotal role of MSUB in the growth, development, and vitality of this region. The community also recognizes its role in the university's success and the need for the community to take ownership of that role. The Taskforce proposes ways to enhance community involvement with MSUB's leadership and in assisting MSUB's leadership in planning for student success based on the economic needs of the community.

Pillar 2 - Student Success

Leading Statement:

Student success must be the highest priority for MSU-Billings. MSUB serves a student population that is diverse in every sense of the word: age, race, ethnicity, first generation college student, geography, field of study, academic level, employment status. These student groups require deliberate and dedicated academic support and programming efforts to ensure student success.

Student success means that...

- a. Students have choices about what areas of study they pursue and receive guidance in helping them find their areas of strength and interest;
- b. Students use the freshman year as a time of discovery when they can try out areas of interest, as well take basic courses that fit into most majors;
- c. Students are educated about how to finance their education and keep debt as low as possible;
- d. Students complete a course of study and graduate;
- e. Students find employment in their field, move on to the next level (from 2-year to 4-year degrees or from 4-year to graduate education), or pursue their interests in some other productive way.

Recommendations

1. **Learning Preparation.** Remediate math, writing and reading issues early using best practices (e.g., co-requisite instruction). Coordinate with high schools on testing and early learning assessments to support high school college preparation efforts.
2. **Diversity.** Remove barriers that hinder student success, especially for first generation college students, non-traditional students, students with disabilities, students from minority backgrounds, and LBGTQ students); make everything about higher education easy except the learning; identify a point of contact for admissions, financial aid, resident life and housing, student health and mental health counseling, Registrar, and human resources; collect and share data about student needs and accommodations across campus; provide professional development for faculty and staff regarding the unique needs of diverse students.
3. **Advising.** Strengthen all types of advising: academic, career, professional. Develop advising plans for at-risk students. Expand the use of early alerts that lead to interventions for students who are struggling academically.

4. **Career Placement.** Present employment outcomes (placement statistics and starting wages) for graduates of professional programs. Provide students with career pathway information.
5. **Real Life Experience.** Expand internships, apprenticeships, job-shadowing and community service opportunities.
6. **Research and Graduate Courses.** Encourage faculty/student research projects; inform undergraduates about MSU-B graduate courses and degrees.
7. **Increase the number of high school dual enrollment courses in Billings and region.**
Incentivize dual credit high school students to continue their education at MSUB.
Inform dual credit students of what academic opportunities and financial supports are open to them.
8. **Pathways to College or Return to College.** Evaluate degree completion programs.
Enhance degree completion options.
9. **Provide structure and guidance for returning adult students** seeking to begin or complete degrees. Conduct prior learning assessments for non-traditional students. Communicate to returning adult students what credits they have and what it will take to finish a degree, including giving credit for particular kinds of experience or courses from different colleges. Identify and implement ways to support students who must stop out for any reason, including family issues or financial difficulties.
10. **Affordability Case Statement.** Provide every student with a pathway to graduation that shows the least expensive route. Continue and expand efforts to encourage students who intend to graduate in 2 or 4 years to take a sufficient number of credits to graduate on time. Assist students in accessing scholarships, paid internships, financial assistance from their employers as ways to make college affordable.
11. **Retention and Completion.** Identify why students leave MSUB before completing degrees, and implement solutions for the primary causes (e.g., financial issues, academic probation, etc.). Conduct and align a “support inventory” to the primary needs and ensure that all students are aware of the supports available.
12. **Personal Responsibility.** Identify and support the unique needs of traditional students as they make the transition to higher education. Communicate the academic and social expectations and responsibilities of college students and how they are different

from high school. Encourage persistence during the transition from high school to college.

13. **Engagement.** Develop a vibrant campus/community culture of MSUB pride, academic persistence, personal goal-setting and accomplishments of graduates and alumni. Provide recognition for success in a wide variety of areas, including academics, community, service, internships, special projects, research findings, and athletics.
14. **Community Involvement.** Develop new partnerships and grow existing partnerships with all sectors of the public, private and non-profit schools, businesses and organizations. Expand internships, apprenticeships, community service and job shadowing opportunities for our students. Expand the number of invitations to bring sector leaders onto campus (into the classroom and onto advisory boards).
15. **Benchmarks.** Identify metrics and benchmarks that help MSUB better meet the demands of students and the community. Link metrics to defined outcomes, such as: academic standards; expectations of graduate programs, employers, professions and businesses; and industry standards.

Pillar and Recommendation Summary:

With student success as a primary goal, MSU-Billings uses best practices to provide pathways to graduation through dual-credit for high school students, academic and advisory support for traditional and non-traditional students, and links to career and professional opportunities and employment.

Pillar 3 – Program Offerings

Building from strong community partnerships and liberal arts programming, MSU Billings will emphasize professional pathways to healthcare, business, education and applied technologies.

Recommendations

1. Use regular comprehensive reviews of programs and resources to focus energy on in demand programs needed in the state and region and that differentiate MSUB from other Montana college and university offerings.
2. Leverage the strength of Billings Works and other employment promotion programs to conduct an industry-led needs assessment, focusing on healthcare, business, teacher preparation and applied technology.
3. Use the needs assessment and the expertise of a third-party organization to create a gap-closure plan that bridges industry needs to academic opportunities.
4. Elevate the array of programs and student services on efforts that elevate dual credit and opportunities for transfer students. Explain relationships between course offerings and career opportunities in healthcare, business, teacher preparation, and applied technology.
5. Ensure greater success of the unique MSUB student demographic through flexible and strategic delivery methods. Those include applied and experiential learning opportunities; undergraduate research; and leadership opportunities that encourage an entrepreneurial mindset.
6. Recognize the unique and valuable role that faculty members have in determining program offerings and course content.

Summary

Future success at MSUB lies in its differentiation as a university focused on career and professional success. By focusing energy and resources on key programs in healthcare, business, teacher preparation and applied technology, the university positions itself to be on the leading edge of student engagement and success. This recommendation allows the university to guide existing faculty and student service excellence into new directions that will build partnerships and create a new institutional identity to rally the community.

Pillar 4 – Marketing & Identity Branding

MSUB would benefit from a focused marketing and communication effort that establishes a respected and unique identity for the university to Billings, Eastern Montana, the state, and region, as well as within the Montana University System. These efforts should strengthen MSUB's reputation, grow enrollment and foster a sense of pride for the university.

Recommendations

1. Develop and implement a comprehensive marketing plan. Perform regular analysis, evaluate results, and modify the plan and budget based on these findings. If the budget is not sufficient to execute this plan, look for additional sources of funding within the university. This plan aims to:
 - a. Increase enrollment and retention.
 - b. Raise awareness of specific programs and degrees.
 - c. Position MSUB's state presence as Eastern Montana's university. MSUB should be the preferred choice for students in this geographic area.
 - d. Define and evaluate the effectiveness of the boundaries of the greater recruiting area.
 - e. Raise awareness of MSU Billings as the university of choice for non-traditional students in our region and beyond.
 - f. Continue to grow the Native American student population by making better connections with this community through tribal colleges and recruiting visits to reservations.
 - g. Leverage the latest technologies in website retargeting, email marketing, social media marketing for branding and recruitment efforts.
 - h. Define ways to increase engagement with middle school and high school students. Provide more opportunities for these students to come to campus. Engage MSUB faculty and students with local schools. Examine ways to use the High School Connections (Dual Enrollment) program as a pathway for recruiting future students.
 - i. Identify opportunities to contact individuals who wish to continue/complete their education; for example, those with 2-year degrees or those with incomplete credits to earn a degree.
2. The marketing plan should include the following components
 - a. **Funding Model.** Develop a model for sustainable funding of marketing and communication functions.
 - b. **Branding Control.** Develop policies for the use of logos, communication statements and all marketing efforts so that messages to the public are consistent and focused.

- c. **Marketing and Recruiting Materials.** Marketing materials and recruitment practices should connect with all types of students the university is attempting to reach as well as their parents. For example, traditional students (high school students) or non-traditional students (City College two-year students, adult students interested in online, part-time, and/or continuous learning for professional development or self-improvement).
 - d. **Effective Marketing Mediums.** Implement an advertising strategy that regularly evaluates each medium's effectiveness for branding and recruitment.
 - e. **Website, Email and Social Media Targeting.** Leverage the latest technologies in website retargeting, email marketing, social media marketing, etc. for branding and recruitment efforts.
 - f. **High School Engagement.** Define ways to increase engagement with high schools. Provide more opportunities for these students to come to campus. Engage MSUB faculty and students with the local schools. Examine ways to use the High School Connections (Dual Enrollment) program to be a pathway for recruiting future students.
 - g. **Marketing College Completion.** Identify opportunities and market to individuals who wish to continue/complete their education; for example, those with 2-year degrees or those with incomplete credits to earn a degree.
3. Suggestions for marketing to the public include the following:
- a. **On-campus events for the community.** Create new events, collaborate with other groups to host events, and increase promotion and attendance at existing events for art, music and athletics.
 - b. **Announcements of Events.** Develop a systematic and continuous vehicle to update the community about university events e.g. weekly event ad in the *Billings Gazette*.
 - c. **Off-Campus Events.** Host off-campus events where MSUB can engage with the community, e.g. faculty speaking at community organizations.

- d. **Volunteer Recruiters and Promoters.** Leverage businesses, community partners, faculty and staff, students, and alumni as recruiters and promoters of MSUB.
 - e. **Brand Presence.** Increase brand presence in the local area, specifically downtown Billings with window clings, large campus banners and/or billboards.
 - f. **Alumni Events.** Develop a homecoming/alumni weekend in the fall, centered on an alumni event(s) and fall athletics.
 - g. **Student Ambassadors.** Create a student ambassador program that engages with the community, especially in the schools.
 - h. **Work-Based Learning.** Grow our internship program to respond to the needs of the community.
4. Communications. Systematic and continuous methods of communication to students, faculty and staff, alumni, community, and media include the following:
- a. Conduct a branding study and host a forum or focus groups with the community and groups such as business leaders, alumni, donors, faculty, staff and students. Bring in an expert to evaluate the effectiveness of the current brand and the potential positive and negative implications of renaming the institution (for example, “Eastern Montana University”) and potentially changing MSUB’s tag line and mascot. Leverage publicity, traditional media and social media to help achieve the goals of the marketing and communication plan (for example, writing a series of guest columns for the *Billings Gazette*).
 - b. Showcase the university’s many community efforts; for example, college advisory boards, research and programs benefitting the community.
 - c. MSUB brand. Revitalize the MSUB brand so it supports the university’s name and location and promotes educational and programming opportunities.
 - d. Ensure the brand increases the visibility of the university.
 - e. Create a culture associated with the brand (similar to ‘Griz’ and ‘Cats’). Strengthen the team brand; for example, increase the use of the mascot in the community. Establish and use a school song.

- f. Review athletic program branding in terms of its ability to attract students. Consider adding athletics programs like football to enhance recruitment of students and interest of the public.
- g. Broaden the distribution of university gear to stores beyond campus e.g. Scheels, Walmart, Target, possibly in the new development on Shiloh adjacent to City College.
- h. Create a campus atmosphere for greater student engagement and community involvement.
- i. Develop ways to make the MSU brand work to our advantage. Leverage their strengths.
- j. Add any relevant items related to marketing and communications from the other pillars in Community Taskforce's strategic plan.

Summary

An improved, comprehensive marketing and communications plan is essential to MSUB achieving its strategic objectives. With this plan, MSUB can establish a stronger brand for the university that attracts and retains students, involves the community, and connects with state and regional needs for higher education.

Pillar 5 – Facilities/Infrastructure

Campus facilities are an important connection to the community and part of the attraction for students. MSUB is composed of two campuses: i) the campus adjacent to the medical corridor and the urban center of Billings, and ii) City College on the Shiloh Corridor, the western gateway to greater Billings and the Yellowstone region. Both campuses have extraordinary potential to attract students to two-year, four-year and graduate-level career pathways. The campuses also serve as “hubs” for higher education, community activities, and preparation for traditional student and adult lifelong learning.

Recommendations

1. The first priority of MSUB and the community is completion of fund raising and breaking ground for the Yellowstone Science and Allied Health Building. Attainment of this objective will improve STEM programming, create new interest in the university, and enhance MSUB’s reputation as a dynamic, progressive campus.
2. Develop effective communication about MSUB’s ability to host public and private events at both the central campus and the City College campus.
3. Raise the visibility and ongoing coordination of Shiloh Corridor development activities and 2017-18 city renovations of Central Avenue to the highest leadership levels of MSUB, SD2 and City of Billings leadership/planning. Also, closely coordinate integration of CTE/Applied Technology education facilities development between the Career Center of SD2 and City College MSUB.
4. Take quick action on current plans to take down the former academic support center at the central campus in order to allow for better use of that space.
5. Commensurate with anticipated improvements in both overall MSUB student recruitment and retention, begin long-term planning for renovating and updating MSUB student residence facilities to make them more attractive to incoming students.
6. Develop City College as a western “gateway” to two- and four-year and graduate level education.

Summary

In the short term, much can be done to accomplish solid progress in advancing the physical plant and outward appearance of the University and City College campuses as “One MSUB”. The first is completion of fund-raising and breaking ground for the Yellowstone Science and Allied Health Building. The second is the demolition of the former academic support center. MSUB can also expand support of community and local business activities on both the University and City College through expanded communication and effective marketing of conference and meeting spaces (small and large). Expansion of those activities provides an effective means of

showcasing MSUB to local and regional community members.

Awareness of both two- and four-year program pathways can be enhanced by further integrating Billings K-12, City College and central campus curriculum. Enhancing these connections will further the public's understanding of the linkages between the two MSUB campuses. Using strategic partnerships, MSUB is well-positioned at its central campus to take advantage of partnerships with public and private schools and downtown business. MSUB's Shiloh campus can respond to the growth trends on Billings' west end. With strategic planning, both MSUB campuses can keep pace with the growth in student population and economic development in the region.

Appendix A

Taskforce Membership:

Chair: Deputy Commissioner John Cech

Billings Community Members

Deborah Agnew	Billings Clinic, Division Chief
Scott Anderson	School District No 2, Superintendent
Roberta Anner-Hughes	MSUB Alumni and Attorney Anner-Hughes Law Firm
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Terry Bouck	School District No 2, Superintendent
John Brewer	Chamber of Commerce, President & CEO
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Mike Gulledge	Billings Gazette, Publisher
Kathy Kelker	Representative, HD 47
Lenette Kosivich	Rimrock Foundation, CEO
Richard Little Bear	Chief Dull Knife College, President
Steve Loveless	Saint Vincent Healthcare, CEO
Greg McDonald	McDonald Land Development, President
Mike Nelson	Northern Hotel, Owner and Manager
Lisa Perry	Northwestern Energy, Community Relations Manager
Michael Sanderson	Sanderson Stewart, President and CEO
Kristi Summers	First Interstate, Vice President
David Trost	St. John's Lutheran Ministries, CEO
Alex Tyson	MSUB Alumni and Visit Billings, Executive Director
Bill Underriner	Underriner Motors, CEO

MSU and MSUB Members

John Cech	Taskforce Facilitator and Deputy Commissioner of Higher Education
Cliff Coppersmith	City College, Dean
Diane Duin	MSUB, Dean at College of Allied Health Professionals
Vern Gagnon	City College Faculty Association

Susan Gilbertz	MSUB, Faculty Senate Chair
Robert Hietala	Gallatin College, Dean
Robert Hoar	MSUB, Provost & Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
Joy Honea	MSUB Faculty Association, President
Ron Larsen	MSUB, Interim Chancellor
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Erik Rose	OCHE, Director of Workforce and Information
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Shannon Wilcox	MSUB, Director of University Relations