



Montana University System
Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Montana Board of Regents

FROM: Roger Barber, Interim Deputy Commissioner for Academic & Student Affairs

RE: Additional Discussion on the Quality Project

DATE: October 29, 2003

Dr. Sheila Stearns, Commissioner of Higher Education, asked me to assume responsibility for the quality project that was discussed and approved at the September 2003 Board of Regents' meeting. I have attempted to do that. But based on conversations and input from several people throughout the Montana University System, I am asking the members of the Board to discuss the project in more detail at the November Board of Regents' meeting. I also assume that all of you have had some time to think about the initiative, since the meeting in Billings, and can provide additional insight and direction to the Montana University System and the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education.

I have included some information with this memorandum. At the Board's direction, I asked each of the chief executive officers in the Montana University System to share their thoughts and ideas about the quality initiative. The responses I received, from the CEOs or their designees, are attached to this memo. I have also included an article on educational benchmarks for your consideration. That article summarizes the perspective of one association with more than 10 years experience in the quality area.

In addition to this written material, Mary Craigle, the system information and research officer in the Commissioner's office, will make a short presentation to the Board on the kinds of "quality information and initiatives" that have already been developed by other states and other educational systems. As you would expect, the resources on quality are almost overwhelming.

To assist with the discussion at the November meeting, the following questions may be helpful:

- What is the purpose of the quality project? Is it an effort to define and measure quality in the Montana University System for our interested stakeholders? Or will it also be used as part of the budgeting process? Are there other purposes that the work group needs to be aware of?

- Who should be asked to serve on the quality work group? The item approved by the Board suggests a role for stakeholders outside the Montana University System. A few Regents have suggested that the System should determine the quality question itself. The item approved by the Board states specifically that “(t)he Board should determine size, make up and method of appointment of a committee to work on this task. . .”
- Should members of the Board of Regents serve on this committee? I would recommend that at least two Board members accept membership on this committee, since the final work product will need the endorsement of the entire Board of Regents.
- Should this committee be temporary? Or should it become a permanent committee of the Board of Regents? Most states that have undertaken this effort have recognized it as a long-term and evolving process, something that only works if it has the permanent commitment of policymakers.
- Should the work group focus its efforts only on “academic” quality? And only consider other aspects of the University System, like facilities and research, as they impact academic quality? Or should the evaluation of quality be broader than that, which seems to be the intent of the item approved by the Board in September?
- Should the work group attempt to define and measure quality from a system-wide perspective? Or should quality be individualized or customized for each campus, based on its mission and role and scope? Or should the work group attempt to come up with a mix of the two? The September item seems to suggest the latter approach.
- How does this effort mesh with the Accountability Report developed by the Joint Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education Policy & Budget and the Montana Board of Regents? Is this a continuation and expansion of that effort? Or a new initiative?
- Do you have other ideas or suggestions about the project?

I look forward to this discussion, and your suggestions on how to proceed with this quality initiative.