

## **Higher Education in the Bitterroot Valley: The University of Montana Report**

**Background:** In May 2007, The University of Montana informed the Board of Regents of its plan to pilot a higher education center in Hamilton in order to provide more convenient access to postsecondary education in Ravalli County. The plan included the provision that, after a sufficient start-up period but no later than May 2008, the University would return to the Board of Regents for formal approval of the Hamilton Higher Education Center, as required by BOR Policy 307.2. By May 2008, however, voters in Ravalli County had approved the creation of a community college district in the Bitterroot Valley and were awaiting the recommendation of the Board of Regents on that matter and the authorization of the new community college district by the Montana legislature in its 61<sup>st</sup> session. In light of those factors, the University of Montana postponed any request for formal authorization of the Hamilton Higher Education Center until the proposal to create new community college district had either been approved or disapproved through the statutory process.

For the past two academic years, The University of Montana has operated the Hamilton Higher Education Center (HHEC) as a vehicle for making college work available in the Bitterroot Valley. Even prior to the HHEC, some targeted course offerings were presented in Hamilton by the University's College of Technology.

The HHEC was developed to permit course offerings from any UM College or School. A detailed listing of the course offerings was provided in a report to the Board of Regents in September, 2008. In summary, between Summer 2007 and Spring 2009, the HHEC has delivered a total of 26 courses, plus an additional two courses in Laboratory Technology conducted technically outside the HHEC. The courses included mostly 100-level general education courses that permitted students to accumulate college credits, but two graduate-level courses from the School of Education were delivered into Hamilton using technology. A total of 175 enrollments occurred during the two years of HHEC operation which generated 36.81 student FTE. Instructors for the courses consisted of a combination of Missoula campus faculty and adjuncts, some of whom resided in the Bitterroot Valley.

The HHEC was overseen by a full-time Director, Dr. Frank Laurence, who also resides in Hamilton. Dr. Laurence reported directly to the UM Provost in the first year of operation, but was moved into the reporting structure of the UM Division of Continuing Education for the second year in order to provide a greater level of administrative support. The course offerings have been delivered mostly in a private facility, The Carriage House, which the University has rented for this purpose.

Financially, a UM investment of \$190,871 was made in FY 08 and \$180,402 in FY 09 for a total of \$394,315 for the biennium. These investments included administrative costs, instructional costs, and operating costs. The total tuition revenue generated by the HHEC operation over the two-year period was \$63,830, with approximately half of that, \$31,412 paid by scholarship funds generated through the efforts of Dr. Laurence. The net result is that students paid an average net tuition of \$60 per credit hour, providing them an especially affordable rate for college-level coursework.

**Legislative Action:** During 2008-09, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, the Board of Regents, and the Legislature declined support of the proposed Bitterroot Valley Community College.

Deputy Commissioner Mary Moe has coordinated the discussion after the legislative decision about how to proceed with delivery of higher education in the Bitterroot Valley. In addition to the presence of the OCHE, the discussion has involved various stakeholders from the Bitterroot Valley and The University of Montana.

**Transition to the Future:** After considerable discussion, the following steps have been taken in the past two months:

1. A Steering Committee has been formulated, is active, and has assumed the following responsibilities:
  - a. The primary responsibility of the Bitterroot College Steering Committee is to develop a plan for the new learning entity in Ravalli County. The plan will include:
    - A mission statement and name for the entity
    - A governance, management and funding structure
    - A prioritized academic plan reflecting the results of the needs and resources assessment
    - A three- to five-year business plan for start-up of the new entity
    - Performance metrics for continued support beyond the start-up period
  - b. The secondary responsibility of the Steering Committee is to identify and recommend responses to high-priority needs and opportunities for adult learning programs currently existing or emerging prior to the completion of the plan. These needs and opportunities include, but may not be limited to:
    - Continuity and quality of HHEC for-credit services in Ravalli County during the planning and transition phase
    - Workforce training
    - Emergent opportunities through the ARRA and Montana legislation related to the ARRA, as well as the Making Opportunity Affordable Initiative.
2. The Committee composition was designed to reflect a partnership between the community, the University, and OCHE. The Committee members and their respective affiliations are:
  - a. County Commissioner- Carlotta Grandstaff
  - b. School Superintendent- Tim Bronk
  - c. Economic Development- Rick O'Brien
  - d. Job Center- Patti Furniss
  - e. Former BVCC representative- John Robinson
  - f. Former BVCC representative- Patricia Wilson Meakin
  - g. Adult Basic Education- Dixie Stark
  - h. Commissioner's Office- Mary Moe
  - i. UM Academic Affairs- Royce Engstrom
  - j. UM COT- Lynn Stocking
  - k. UM Continuing Education- Sharon Alexander
  - l. FVCC Designee- Chuck Jensen

- m. MSU Extension- Katelyn Anderson
  - n. Student representative- To be named
3. The Steering Committee has formulated a Search Committee to conduct a search for the Interim Director of the effort. The Search Committee has drafted a job description and advertisement with the help of the Human Resources Office at UM. The position will be advertised with an anticipated start date of July 1, 2009. The Interim Director will report to the Provost at UM.
  4. A slate of coursework for Fall semester has been developed through discussion with the Steering Committee. The slate of six-seven courses will provide opportunities in developmental work, general education, and business. A tentative set of courses has been developed for Spring 2010 and Fall 2010, but those will be refined at a later date based upon enrollments and interest in Fall 2009.
  5. A set of non-credit course offerings is under development for offering as early as this summer. Those offerings focus on beginning computing, introductory business software ("QuickBooks"), and possibly the Certified Nursing Assistant.

**Actions Recommended:** At this time, in view of recent developments looking toward the establishment of a permanent entity to deliver higher education in the Bitterroot Valley, The University of Montana requests approval of two actions by the Board of Regents:

1. The University of Montana will terminate the Hamilton Higher Education Center as of June 30, 2009.
2. The Board will authorize The University of Montana to deliver higher education in the Bitterroot Valley in an ongoing manner with guidance from the Steering Committee through a University entity yet to be named. Offerings will be designed specifically to meet the needs of the citizens of the Bitterroot Valley and the effort will be directed by the Interim Director (see item 2 above) and then a permanent Director, who will report to the Provost. Tuition structure will be designed to be consistent with two-year education in Montana.