

May 21, 2025

ITEM 218-1505-R0525

**Request for Authorization to Confer the Title of Professor Emeritus of Nursing on Karen VanDaveer;
Montana Technological University**

THAT

Upon the occasion of the retirement of Karen VanDaveer of Montana Technological University, the faculty wish to express its appreciation for her years of dedication and valued service as both Director of Nursing and Dean of Highlands College by requesting the rank of Emeritus be conferred upon her by the Board of Regents of Higher Education.

EXPLANATION

Karen has consistently demonstrated an unwavering commitment to excellence in academia and leadership throughout her distinguished tenure. As Director of Nursing, her visionary approach was instrumental in shaping a program now recognized as the top nursing program in Montana. Karen began her career teaching in the Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) certificate program and later transitioned into the role of Director of Nursing. With this transition, Karen met Montana State Board of Nursing standards accepting a full-time leadership position as Director while maintaining faculty rank. In 1999, she led the efforts to secure initial authorization for Montana Tech to offer an Associate of Applied Science Practical Nursing (AAS PN) degree, and an Associate of Science in Nursing (ASN), complete with a bridge pathway for students aspiring to continue their education. Her active involvement in professional organizations and the healthcare community helped shape a visionary blueprint for the program's continued evolution.

This forward-thinking leadership contributed to the establishment of an Associate of Science in Registered Nursing (ASRN) degree, accompanied by its accreditation from the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC). Recognizing the need for continued student advancement pathways, Karen spearheaded efforts to launch an online Bachelor of Science in Nursing completion degree, which earned accreditation from the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). She then built upon her legacy of innovation by overseeing the development of Montana Tech's pre-licensure 120-credit Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN)—the first standalone BSN program approved by the state in 78 years. In 2018, the BSN program received its re-accreditation visit from CCNE and was granted re-accreditation for 10 years, one of the highest re-accreditation standards possible. Karen's commitment to excellence is also showcased by the NCLEX-RN pass rates of 95-100% over the last 10+ years which were consistently above the state and national averages. To date, over 900 nurses have graduated and entered into the nursing profession under Karen's watch.

Karen exemplifies the ideals of an educator, mentor, and advocate, continually inspiring her students and colleagues with her wisdom, passion, and strategic vision. She possesses a unique ability to identify the strengths of those she works with and inspire them to excel. Personally, I had the privilege of being mentored by her during the fundraising and establishment of the Lesar Family Nursing Simulation Center, which was entirely funded through private donations. Her networking and partnership efforts were pivotal to Montana Technological University receiving a \$7 million endowment for the Sherry Lesar School of Nursing. Her remarkable contributions have also been recognized with several prestigious awards, including the Award for Excellence in University System Citizenship (2005), the Butte Chamber of Commerce Excellence in Education Award (1992), and the Outstanding Nurse Award (2015) from the Montana Center to Advance Health Through Nursing.

Karen's commitment to advocacy for nursing and healthcare extends to her service on numerous community and state boards. Across Montana, she is widely regarded as a passionate advocate and visionary leader whose name is consistently called upon for discussions on nursing education. Most recently, her contributions to state nursing education reform included her appointment to the HealthCARE Steering Committee as part of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Training (TAACCCT) grant. As Montana Tech's project director for the statewide \$15.4 million TAACCCT grant, Karen was actively involved in developing curriculum to create pathways linking Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN), and Registered Nurse (RN) programs to BSN completion.

Karen has also been recognized as a steadfast advocate for student success, faculty mentorship, and academic integrity. She is known for her student-centered approach and her open-door policy, consistently supporting students and colleagues alike. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Karen took on broader leadership responsibilities, serving as Interim Dean of both the College of Letters, Science, and Professional Studies and Highlands College, before her appointment as permanent Dean of Highlands College in 2021.

As Dean, she prioritized workforce development, community and industry partnerships, and curricular innovation. She led efforts to align programs with transferability and accreditation standards; launch "short courses" to meet immediate workforce needs; and expand access and responsiveness in programs across technical and academic disciplines.

Karen's strategic vision and collaborative leadership significantly enhanced Highlands College's capacity to serve students, support faculty, and respond to community and industry needs in communities across Montana. While Dean of Highlands College, she was instrumental in securing over \$8 million in outside funding which includes \$1 million of American Rescue Plan Act funding through Butte-Silver Bow, funding to develop a smart manufacturing program, and \$5.75 million to train boots on the ground broadband installers throughout Western Montana. She has consistently demonstrated strategic foresight, collaborative leadership, and an unwavering commitment to the mission of public higher education. Karen's philosophy is "we don't say no until thorough research is completed and an informed decision can be made".

Karen's contributions to Montana Technological University have been both profound and enduring. She has been a relentless champion of advancing nursing education, a passionate advocate for lifelong learning, and a dedicated steward of community engagement. Her legacy will continue to resonate throughout our institution for generations. On a personal level, I am deeply grateful for her extraordinary ability to inspire and empower those around her. Karen played a pivotal role in guiding me on my journey to pursue a graduate degree, secure a faculty position, and bring to life the dream of establishing a simulation center on our campus. It is through her exceptional ability to recognize the potential in others and her unwavering support for their growth that I am honored and privileged to serve today as the Director of the Sherry Lesar School of Nursing.

In recognition of her extraordinary service, leadership, and dedication, the faculty of Montana Technological University wholeheartedly nominate Karen VanDaveer for the title of Professor Emeritus. This honor would be a fitting tribute to her exceptional contributions to Montana Tech and her enduring commitment to the advancement of education and healthcare.

ATTACHMENTS

None