



# Montana University System

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## Minutes Montana Board of Regents May 20, 2026

**Thursday, May 20, 2026**

Meeting convened at 8:31 am

Regents Present: Todd Buchanan, Chair, Loren Bough, Jeff Southworth, Dean Folkvord, Heather Hoyer, Daniel Spoon, and Carter Jasper, Ex officio members present included Commissioner of Higher Education Clayton Christian and Superintendent Susie Hedalen represented by Deputy Superintendent, Craig Barringer. Ex officio member Governor Greg Gianforte was excused.

Comments by Chair Buchanan | 00:01:07

Chair Buchanan thanked everyone for their attendance and acknowledged the importance of the Board's connection to faculty with its regular breakfast meetings with MUSFAR. He welcomed faculty representative, Grant Olson from MSUN, and tribal representative President Cory Sangrey, Stone Child College. He congratulated the spring graduates across the MUS. He thanked Chancellor Kegel for his leadership at MSUN and congratulated him on his retirement. Chair Buchanan discussed leadership transitions in the MUS over the past few years and changes to the leadership recruitment process. He said he is excited for the new leadership and the expertise they bring to the MUS. He concluded with a review of the agenda.

Welcome by Chancellor Kegel | 00:12:17

Chancellor Greg Kegel welcomed everyone to MSUN and thanked faculty and staff for preparing the campus for the meeting. He shared what an honor it has been serving at MSUN over the past 44 years and thanked the regents, OCHE staff, and staff across the MUS for their continued support. He discussed how MSUN attracts and retains students, reviewed the strategic advancement team and charge groups that were created, and highlighted some of the programs, projects, and enhancements that have been implemented on campus. He shared what MSUN is doing to strengthen partnerships to move the institution forward. Chancellor Kegel discussed MSUN's strategies for keeping costs down for students and investments made in enhancing the student experience. He concluded with a video highlighting innovation and research at MSUN.

Approval of Minutes | 00:39:49

- March 12, 2026, Meeting Minutes
- April 14, 2026, Meeting Minutes

With no corrections offered, the minutes were approved as distributed.

Commissioner's Report | 00:40:06



# Montana University System

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Commissioner Christian welcomed and thanked everyone for attending the meeting and thanked Chancellor Kegel and his staff for hosting the meeting. He acknowledged Chancellor Kegel for his dedication to MSUN over his 44-year career and congratulated him on his retirement. He congratulated the spring graduates, expressed his gratitude for having participated in the University of Montana's commencement ceremonies, and thanked faculty and staff across the MUS for their dedication to student success. Commissioner Christian said he had the privilege of participating in a Blackfeet Pipe Ceremony and commented on what a moving experience it was. He thanked the Tribal Colleges for their continued partnership with the MUS. He said the MUS is actively preparing for the 70<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session and the opportunity to advance the 6-mill levy, noting its importance to the MUS.

- MUS System Initiatives | *00:51:51*

Deputy Commissioner for Government Relations and Communications, Galen Hollenbaugh, said revenue projections for the next biennium are higher than expected and the MUS has scaled the system initiatives accordingly. He presented four system initiatives that will be brought into the executive planning process. He discussed how these initiatives move through the process in development of the final executive budget that is released in November

- Regents Award for Excellence | *00:59:45*

Chair Buchanan presented the 2026 Regents Award for Excellence to Dr. Kayte Kaminski, Senior Assistant Dean and Director of Student Success at the MSU College of Education, Health & Human Development, and to Chris Riley, Director of the Activity Class Program and Budget Office at UM's School of Integrative Physiology and Athletic Training.

- Campus Reports | *01:06:31*
- Introductions | *01:07:33*

Commissioner Christian introduced UM Western's new Chancellor, Estee Aiken, and congratulated Great Falls College MSU Dean, Stephanie Erdmann, on her retirement.

President Brock Tessman, MSU, introduced Ben Wilson and Josey Blazer, ASMU President and Vice President. He also announced the retirement of Provost Bob Mokwa, introduced Interim Provost, Dr. Beth Burroughs, Interim Dean, Norm Asbjornson College of Engineering, Dr. Christine Foreman, and Vice Provost for Graduate Education, Dr. Matthew Lovern.

Chancellor Kegel, MSUN, introduced Dean of Students, Taryn Wallon.

Chancellor Johnny MacLean, MT Tech, introduced Vice Chancellor for Research and Dean of the Graduate School, Katie Hailer.

Provost Adrea Lawrence, UM, introduced ASUM President, Chase O'Brian and announced the retirement of Missoula College Dean, Tom Gallagher, and Vice President for Research and Creative Scholarship, Scott Whittenberg. Provost Lawrence introduced the Interim Dean of Missoula College, Lauren Fern, Interim Vice President for Research, Dr. Paul Lukacs, Phyllis J. Washington College of Education Dean, Dr. Jennifer Snow, and Franke College of Forestry and



Conservation Dean, Libby Metcalf.

Remarks by Superintendent Hedalen (or Designee) | 01:18:36

Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction Craig Barringer congratulated Chancellor Kegel on his retirement and thanked him for his years of service at MSUN. He reviewed OPI's participation in meetings and conferences across the state. He discussed changes to Class 8 licensure to make dual enrollment available to more students as well as expedite implementation of the Future Ready Program.

**Budget, Administration and Audit Committee | 01:24:01**

**CONSENT | 01:24:42**

**Staff Item:**

- a. Labor Agreement; OCHE/MUS ITEM 224-101-R0526 | Attachment #1

**Facility Items:**

- b. Request for Authorization to Replace the Elevator at the Music Building; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1008-R0526 | Attachment #1
- c. Request for Authorization to Replace the Roof on the Interdisciplinary Science Building (ISB); UM Missoula ITEM 224-1009-R0526 | Attachment #1
- d. Request for Authorization to Renovate and Address Deferred Maintenance at the Molecular Biosciences Building; MSU Bozeman ITEM 224-2003-R0526 | Attachment #1
- e. Request for Authorization to Renew and Modify a Ground Lease for the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Department Located at 1400 S. 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Bozeman; MSU Bozeman ITEM 224-2004-R0526 | Attachment #1

**ACTION | 01:25:09**

- a. Request for Authorization to Name the Space Comprising the Auxiliary Gyms Located in the Adams Center to the Steve and Shirley Nelson Training Center; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1006-R0526 | Attachment #1

Commissioner Christian presented the request per Board Policy to authorize the naming of the Auxiliary Gyms in the Adams center after Steve and Shirley Nelson.

- b. Request for Authority to Increase Spending for McGill Hall WPEM Addition; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1007-R0526 | Attachment #1 | Attachment #2

Director of Facilities, Dan Stevenson, presented the request to increase spending authority to \$6M for UM's McGill Hall construction project to house the Montana Center for Work Physiology and Exercise Metabolism (WPEM). The 68th Legislature provided \$3M authority-only for the planning, design, and construction of this addition with subsequent BOR authorization. The 69th Legislature provided an additional \$3M in authority-only for a total of \$6M. Project design is in progress and



# Montana University System

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anticipated to be bid in summer 2026. This project will be paid for using Facilities and Administrative (F&A) cost recoveries from the federal grants received by WPEM.

- c. Request for Authorization to Increase ASUM Fees; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1011-R0526 | Attachment #1 | Attachment #2 | Attachment #3

Deputy Commissioner for Budget and Planning, Tyler Trevor, said fees are typically addressed during the May meeting after the legislative session, but Board policy provides an exception for associated students to come forward with fee requests.

UM Vice President of Operations and Finance, Paul Lasiter, presented the request for a \$10 increase in the standard ASUM fee and an \$18 increase in the transportation fee per semester for each academic year.

ASUM President, Buddy Wilson, described in detail how revenue from these fees is used and the level of student support among the students for the increases. Discussion followed.

- d. Request for Authorization to Construct Housing Improvements; MSU Bozeman ITEM 224-2005-R0526 | Attachment #1

Director Stevenson presented this request to authorize Montana State University to spend up to \$3.5M to begin construction on housing improvements. This request is for the first phase of construction to prepare the site for new housing including removal of dilapidated housing, installation of new and expanded utility infrastructure and associated work. The estimated total for new housing construction is up to \$50M. The work will be paid for using auxiliary revenues.

- e. Request for Approval of the FY 2027 Tuition and Mandatory Fee Rates; Flathead Valley Community College ITEM 224-301-R0526 | Attachment #1
- f. Request for Approval of the FY 2027 Tuition and Mandatory Fee Rates; Dawson Community College ITEM 224-201-R0526 | Attachment #1

Director of Budget and Administration, Margaret Wallace, presented the tuition and fee increase requests for Flathead Valley Community College and Dawson Community College. She noted that community colleges operate under a dual-governance structure, with local Boards of Trustees providing management oversight and the Board of Regents providing supervision and coordination under BOR Policy. Both proposals were approved by their local Boards of Trustees and were reviewed in the context of current higher education inflationary and operating cost pressures. FVCC requested a 3% tuition increase and 5% mandatory fee increase, for an overall increase of approximately 3.5%, while DCC requested a 5% tuition increase and 8% mandatory fee increase, for an overall increase of 6.5% for in-district students. Discussion followed.

- g. Staff Item; OCHE/MUS ITEM 224-100-R0526 | Attachment #1

Deputy Commissioner Trevor presented the request for approval to implement the MUS pay plan



for employees on Board of Regents contracts.

## **INFORMATION | 01:45:39**

- a. MUS Facilities – General Spending Authority Report
  - a. MSU | Attachment #1
  - b. UM | Attachment #1

Deputy Commissioner Trevor shared highlights from the annual enrollment report showing growth across the MUS.

Director Stevenson reviewed the MUS Authority Reports. These reports are summaries of authority requests throughout the past year.

## **Academic, Research and Student Affairs Committee and Action | 01:50:44**

### **CONSENT | 01:50:51**

#### **Emeriti Faculty:**

- a. Herron; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1003-R0526
- b. Humphrey; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1004-R0526
- c. Lee; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1005-R0526
- d. Vonessen; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1012-R0526
- e. Harrison; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1013-R0526
- f. Kinch; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1014-R0526
- g. Dalenberg; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1015-R526
- h. Shoostari; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1016-R0526
- i. Stickney; MT Tech ITEM 224-1501-R0526
- j. Cairns; MSU Bozeman ITEM 224-2001-R0526
- k. Ruff; MSU Bozeman ITEM 224-2002-R0526

#### **Tenure Faculty:**

- h. MT Tech; ITEM 224-1500-R0526
- i. Helena College; ITEM 224-1900-R0526
- j. UM Western; ITEM 224-1600-R0526
- k. MSU Bozeman; ITEM 224-2000-R0526
- l. MSU Extension; ITEM 224-2400-R0526
- m. MSU Billings; ITEM 224-2700-R0526
- n. MSU Northern; 224-2800-R0526
- o. Great Falls College MSU; ITEM 224-2900-R0526

#### **Other:**

- p. Request for Approval to Appoint a Faculty Member on Continuous Tenure to the Committee on Service OCHE/MUS ITEM 224-102-R0526



## **ACTION | 01:51:10**

- a. Request to Plan Items | OCHE Executive Summary | Supporting Documentation

MSUN Provost, Jennifer Brown, and Professor in the Integrated Health Sciences Program, Dr. Chad Spangler, presented the request to plan a two-year Associate's program in Integrated Health Sciences

UM Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, John DeBoer, presented the request to plan two concentrations, Instrumental and Choral, within the Bachelor of Music Education. Discussion followed.

- b. Request to Plan the James C. Kennedy Waterfowl and Wetlands Center UM  
Missoula ITEM 224-1002-R0526 | Attachment #1

Vice Provost DeBoer presented the request to plan the James C. Kennedy Waterfowl and Wetlands Center. Discussion followed.

## **INFORMATION | 02:22:48**

### **Policy Items:**

- a. Policy 303.3, Program Review | Attachment #1 | Attachment #2

Interim Deputy Commissioner for Academic, Research & Student Affairs, Joe Thiel, said this proposed policy change arises from the work of the MUS Academic Process Task Force to establish an ongoing performance-based review of academic programs across the MUS that compliments the seven-year cycle review that campuses undergo. Discussion followed.

### **Academic Review Items**

- b. Academic Approval Items
- c. Degree Approval Tracking

Interim Deputy Commissioner Thiel reviewed these two academic review items. He said Item b. is a step in the request to plan process for final approval and Item c. is the detailed tracking list of degree approvals across the MUS.

### **Strategic Priority Items:**

- d. MT 10/Campus Innovation Projects

OCHE Director of Student Affairs, Crystine Miller, provided an update on MT10 and Institutional Innovation projects funded through one-time-only legislative funding. MUS institutions continue to deliver MT10 with new cohorts at 9 MUS campuses this fall including MSU, which newly launched MT10. Director Miller said campuses have also launched institutional innovation projects that aim to enhance student success by bringing innovative, technology-driven solutions to reducing operational and process frictions in the student experience and academic journeys. She said



these projects are intended to enhance on-time graduation and reduce time-to-degree. Discussion followed.

e. Math Pathways Report

Associate Professor & incoming Missoula College Interim Dean, Lauren Fern, and Director Miller updated the Board on efforts to support students in gateway (first required college-level) math and writing course completion. They said that existing math pathways had been revised and refined to address changes in math skill needs within meta-majors, develop clear pathway for trades fields, and support credit mobility among dual enrollment, transfer, and cross-registration student populations.

f. e-Learning Report and Panel

Interim Deputy Commissioner Thiel gave an overview of the panel and what they do to help distance learning students. He introduced Eric Vorkoeper, Chair of the Advisory Council, and Vice Chair, Samuel Giordanengo.

Chair Vorkoeper said the last e-learning academic report was generated in 2022 and the new report shows the progress that has been made over the past three years. They discussed the growth of online education, out of state online enrollment trends, how a wider range of students are served with distance education, how the MUS distance education program works, investment updates, and future initiatives. Discussion followed.

g. Student Leadership Panel

Student Panelists Johathan Wamsley, Kiaya Doney, and Danielle Cahill, shared their journeys leading to college, their experiences along the way as students, and the degrees they are pursuing. Discussion followed.

## **Two Year and Community College Committee | 04:01:37**

### **ACTION | 04:03:53**

a. Request for Authorization to Revise Board of Regents Policy | MUS/OCHE ITEM 224-103-R0526 | Attachment #1

Director of Transfer and Special Projects, Angela DeWolf King, reviewed the proposed policy revision regarding the MUS Single Admissions File. The proposed changes seek to move the single admissions file to an electronic format, remove the fee associated with the single admissions file, and specify what information needs to be included when the file is being submitted on behalf of the student.

### **INFORMATION | 04:53:12**



a. Policy 301.13, Application for Graduation or Degree Requirement Check Sheet | Attachment #1

Director DeWolf King presented the proposed changes to the Degree Requirements Checklist policy. She said these proposed changes, which will likely be voted on at the July Board of Regents meeting, will bring this policy in line with changes made in July 2025. In October 2023, the U.S. Department of Education announced that, effective July 1, 2024, institutions participating in Title IV financial aid programs are prohibited from withholding student transcripts in certain circumstances. In July 2025, the Montana Board of Regents approved revisions to Policy 940.21 to comply with these federal requirements.

b. Transfer Update

Director DeWolf King provided a transfer update to the Board of Regents. She discussed transfer data in the system, work accomplished this year by the Transfer Advisory Council, and plans for 2026-27 academic year transfer work.

c. Class 8 Licensure

Director of American Indian/Minority Achievement and K-12 Partnerships, Dr. Angela McLean, summarized the upcoming Board of Public Education changes to the Class 8 educator license. McLean said the BPE had drafted a new rule creating a licensure exception for college faculty who teach dual enrollment classes. She added that the BPE planned to repeal the existing Class 8 license and that this process would likely conclude before the beginning of the 2026-27 academic year. McLean said that these changes were designed to grow access to dual enrollment courses.

d. Workforce Pell | Attachment #1.

Interim Deputy Commissioner Thiel presented on Workforce Pell, including key facts, a federal timeline, approval process for programs, program eligibility criteria, and accountability measures. He said it is expected to take some time before there are a substantial number of programs gaining eligibility through this process. He said the Lumina Foundation has provided the MUS with support to improve infrastructure for non-credit and short-term training.

Public Comment | *04:40:09*

MSUN Assistant Professor of Theater and Communications, Grant Olson, discussed a proposal to plan a BA in Community Arts Production. He shared a letter of support from the Arts Council.

MSUN student, Sam French, shared her support of the BA in Community Arts Production.

MSUN Director of Recruitment, Shaughn McKeon, commented in support of the BA in Community Arts Production and shared survey results showing support from around the state.



# Montana University System

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MSUN alumnus, Arlene Rice, commented in support of the proposed BA in Community Arts Production and the benefits it will bring to students and communities around the state.

Prevention Specialist for Hill, Blaine, and Glacier Counties, Mark Cichosz shared his support for the BA in Community Arts Production and the gaps that this program will fill with well-rounded professionals.

New Media Broadcasters employee, Kyle Leeds, commented in support of the BA in Community Arts Production and how it will benefit the media and community service industry in Havre and communities across Montana.

Havre resident, Jerry Malkuch, commented in support of the BA in Community Arts Production.

## **Committee Reports & Action | 05:02:01**

- Budget, Administration and Audit Committee

### **CONSENT | 05:02:10**

#### **Staff Item:**

- a. Labor Agreement; OCHE/MUS ITEM 224-101-R0526 | Attachment #1

#### **Facility Items:**

- b. Request for Authorization to Replace the Elevator at the Music Building; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1008-R0526 | Attachment #1
- c. Request for Authorization to Replace the Roof on the Interdisciplinary Science Building (ISB); UM Missoula ITEM 224-1009-R0526 | Attachment #1
- d. Request for Authorization to Renovate and Address Deferred Maintenance at the Molecular Biosciences Building; MSU Bozeman ITEM 224-2003-R0526 | Attachment #1
- e. Request for Authorization to Renew and Modify a Ground Lease for the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Department Located at 1400 S. 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Bozeman; MSU Bozeman ITEM 224-2004-R0526 | Attachment #1

A motion for approval of consent items a.- e. was made by Regent Jasper; motion passed (7-0).

### **ACTION | 05:03:04**

- a. Request for Authorization to Name the Space Comprising the Auxiliary Gyms Located in the Adams Center to the Steve and Shirley Nelson Training Center; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1006-R0526 | Attachment #1

A motion for approval of action item a. ITEM 224-1006-R0526 was made by Regent Southworth; motion passed (7-0).

- b. Request for Authority to Increase Spending for McGill Hall WPEM Addition; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1007-R0526 | Attachment #1 | Attachment #2



A motion for approval of action item b. ITEM 224-1007-R0526 was made by Regent Hoyer; motion passed (7-0).

- c. Request for Authorization to Increase ASUM Fees; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1011-R0526 | Attachment #1 | Attachment #2 | Attachment #3

A motion for approval of action item c. ITEM 224-1011-R0526 was made by Regent Bough; motion passed (6-1).

Regent Jasper thanked the ASUM senators for attending the meeting and advocating for their position on the proposed fees. He expressed support for the \$10 general fee but did not support the transportation fee, citing concerns about the efficiency of the transportation system and the need for a fee increase.

- d. Request for Authorization to Construct Housing Improvements; MSU Bozeman ITEM 224-2005-R0526 | Attachment #1

A motion for approval of action item d. ITEM 224-2005-R0526 was made by Regent Jasper; motion passed (7-0).

- e. Request for Approval of the FY 2027 Tuition and Mandatory Fee Rates; Flathead Valley Community College ITEM 224-301-R0526 | Attachment #1

A motion for approval of action item e. ITEM 224-301-R0526 was made by Regent Spoon; motion passed (7-0).

- f. Request for Approval of the FY 2027 Tuition and Mandatory Fee Rates; Dawson Community College ITEM 224-201-R0526 | Attachment #1

A motion for approval of action item f. ITEM 224-201-R0526 was made by Regent Hoyer; motion passed (7-0).

- g. Staff Item; OCHE/MUS ITEM 224-100-R0526 | Attachment #1

A motion for approval of action item g. ITEM 224-100-R0526 was made by Regent Jasper; motion passed (7-0).

Academic, Research and Student Affairs | 05:07:17

**CONSENT** | 05:07:22

**Emeriti Faculty:**

- a. Herron; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1003-R0526
- b. Humphrey; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1004-R0526



- c. Lee; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1005-R0526
- d. Vonessen; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1012-R0526
- e. Harrison; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1013-R0526
- f. Kinch; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1014-R0526
- g. Dalenberg; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1015-R526
- h. Shooshtari; UM Missoula ITEM 224-1016-R0526
- i. Stickney; MT Tech ITEM 224-1501-R0526
- j. Cairns; MSU Bozeman ITEM 224-2001-R0526
- k. Ruff; MSU Bozeman ITEM 224-2002-R0526

## **Tenure Faculty:**

- h. MT Tech; ITEM 224-1500-R0526
- i. Helena College; ITEM 224-1900-R0526
- j. UM Western; ITEM 224-1600-R0526
- k. MSU Bozeman; ITEM 224-2000-R0526
- l. MSU Extension; ITEM 224-2400-R0526
- m. MSU Billings; ITEM 224-2700-R0526
- n. MSU Northern; 224-2800-R0526
- o. Great Falls College MSU; ITEM 224-2900-R0526

## **Other:**

- p. Request for Approval to Appoint a Faculty Member on Continuous Tenure to the Committee on Service OCHE/MUS ITEM 224-102-R0526

A motion for approval of consent items a.- p. was made by Regent Hoyer; motion passed (7-0).

### **ACTION | 05:08:17**

- a. Request to Plan Items | OCHE Executive Summary | Supporting Documentation

A motion for approval of action item a. Request to Plan Items was made by Regent Jasper; motion passed (7-0).

- b. Request to Plan the James C. Kennedy Waterfowl and Wetlands Center UM Missoula ITEM 224-1002-R0526 | Attachment #1

A motion for approval of action item b. ITEM 224-1002-R0526 was made by Regent Bough; motion passed (7-0).

Two-Year and Community College Committee | 05:09:07

### **ACTION | 05:09:09**



# Montana University System

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- a. Request for Authorization to Revise Board of Regents Policy | MUS/OCHE ITEM 224-103-R0526 | Attachment #1

A motion for approval of action item a. ITEM 224-103-R0526 was made by Regent Jasper; motion passed (7-0).

### Appeal | 05:09:41

Chair Buchanan explained the process related to appeals. He called for a motion to hear the appeals. No motion was made to hear the appeal, and therefore the Commissioner’s decisions were upheld.

### Election of Officers | 05:10:57

Commissioner Christian discussed the process according to Article IV of the by-laws.

Regent Buchanan made a nomination for Regent Bough to serve as Board Chair; motion passed (7-0).

Regent Hoyer made a nomination for Regent Southworth to serve as Vice Chair; motion passed (7-0).

Meeting Adjourned at 3:18 pm

Approved by the Board of Regents on

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Clayton T. Christian  
Commissioner of Higher Education  
and Secretary to the Board of Regents

\_\_\_\_\_  
Todd Buchanan  
Chair, Board of Regents

# APPENDIX

**From:** [Madalyn Eglan](#)  
**To:** [Casanovas, Jasmine](#)  
**Subject:** Public Comment  
**Date:** Wednesday, May 20, 2026 2:51:31 PM

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**\*\*External Sender\*\***

Hi!

I am a current staff and non-tenure faculty member at MSU - Bozeman. I want to submit a public comment about the ongoing struggles of NTT faculty and staff to support our growing student body on low wages. As a land grant institution we support a wide variety of students with different needs. As the university continues to grow, we are watching staff wages, NTT wages, and the number of staff and NTT positions remain stagnant. I would love to hear in future meetings and communications how the Board of Regents plans to support these positions (who do much of the heavy lifting for student success) in an increasingly unaffordable city with a student body that continues to hit record numbers of enrollment.



- Steve Zabel, Chair  
*Bozeman*
- Jason Pyette, Vice-Chair  
*Havre*
- Angella Ahn  
*Bozeman*
- Sarah Calhoun  
*White Sulphur Springs*
- Sean Falcon Chandler  
*Harlem*
- Corwin Clairmont  
*Ronan*
- Troy Collins  
*Hamilton*
- Todd Connor  
*Fort Benton*
- Christopher Dudley  
*Clancy*
- Chuck Fulcher  
*Great Falls*
- Wylie Galt Gustafson  
*Conrad*
- Julie Mac  
*Whitefish*
- Cat McIntyre  
*Glasgow*
- John L. Moore  
*Miles City*
- Bridger Pierce  
*Missoula*

February 9, 2026

Joe Thiel  
Deputy Commissioner  
Academic Research, and Student Affairs  
Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education

Dear Deputy Commissioner Thiel,

I write in support of MSU Northern’s new degree in Community Arts Production, and to provide some context that highlights its importance for rural Montana.

This innovative new degree program is designed to meet a particular and growing need: to provide students who want to stay in their rural communities with the skills to step into leadership positions in their hometowns, and to flourish there.

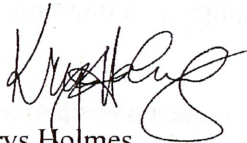
As a state agency, the Montana Arts Council works with community leaders, arts organizations, schools, and funders across Montana. I frequently hear an expressed need for skilled, innovative, energized young leaders who can take our nonprofits and community-pillar organizations into the future. Our small towns across Montana struggle to find and keep knowledgeable, energetic leaders who have community-building, financial, management, and creative expertise. Many high-school graduates with those broad interests either leave the state or settle in at home and make do.

Our rural youth need the combination of skills that the Community Arts Production degree is designed to develop: how to operate a community-based nonprofit business; community organizing and collaboration; working with artists and the arts to achieve community goals in youth engagement, public health, downtown economic vitality, and human well-being; producing successful public events; marketing and business management; grant writing; budgeting; and how to work with local business leaders, government, and funders. Young Montanans graduating with this degree will be equipped to take on the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup>-century life in rural areas with creativity, skill, and support.

The Community Arts Production degree is at heart a workforce development program. From where I sit, I believe the program will be sustainable into the future, and will attract traditional and non-traditional students from across the state. As jobs and communities evolve, and as rural Montana continues to lose educated youth to jobs elsewhere, this program meets a growing need across northeast Montana to provide the skills and expertise to cultivate a new generation of rural leaders.

I commend the Commission for supporting this innovative program. I believe rural schools across the country will look to it as a model, and I am excited to see it come to fruition.

Sincerely,



Krys Holmes  
Executive Director  
Montana Arts Council