

Montana Western STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2033

MONTANA READY

Montana Western will be ready to serve Montana students, ready to graduate students who can address the problems of the future, and ready to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

MISSION

The University of Montana Western's distinctive Experience One model engages students in authentic disciplinary practices to promote intellectual growth and transformative skills. By leveraging our block scheduling model, small classes, personal relationships, and our rural setting, we empower students to lead, serve, and thrive throughout Montana and beyond.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

The primary purpose of the University of Montana Western is the development of lifelong learners that serve the public good as teachers, researchers, artists, entrepreneurs, agricultural leaders, healthcare professionals, environmental stewards, and as citizens.



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6 VALUES

INTERDISCIPLINARY IMMERSION

Through its distinct block scheduling and interdisciplinary approach, UMW fosters integrated, immersive learning experiences within and across disciplines that equip our students with a broad knowledge base and diverse set of skills in preparation for life in a rapidly changing world.

MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS

UMW promotes a sense of belonging and community through its small class sizes and dedicated faculty and staff who are attentive to individual student needs and aspirations in the context of the greater good. Through tailored support for their intellectual and personal well-being, UMW students are embraced as members of a larger campus community along their academic journey.

PERSONAL FULFILLMENT

Through free inquiry, exploration, and critical reasoning within a community of scholars, UMW strives to equip students with the knowledge, freedom, and courage to pursue what it means to live the good life (eudaimonia) and flourish as individuals and as democratic citizens.

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Through its distinct Experience One model, which engages students and faculty in actively exploring the knowledge, purposes, and practices in every field of study, UMW delivers academic excellence in teaching and research that immerses students in the real-world experiences of authentic disciplinary practices. Students develop the tangible and enduring skillsets needed for adapting to the constantly evolving intellectual, economic, and social environments of today's world.

CRITICAL REASONING

UMW prepares students to critically evaluate ideas and evidence and cultivates an audacity to question in their search for the truth. Their ability to critically reason will not only contribute to innovation in employment but democratic engagement.

TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

UMW fosters self-exploration and new ways of thinking that broaden students' perspectives and understanding of the world. Through their academic journey, individual students discover particular ways they can make a distinctive contribution to society and the public good.



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3 GOALS

Institutions of higher education face three primary challenges today: providing students with the necessary skills for success in an ever-evolving global marketplace; regaining the public trust; and, most importantly, remaining steadfast in their support and promotion of the core values upon which our universities were established. Yet, meeting these challenges is further complicated by the practical constraints of adequate funding, which is increasingly tied to student enrollment. With current projections that the number college-age students will decline nationwide over the next decade, universities face the apparent dilemma of either continuing business as usual and risk declining enrollment and, thereby, financial ruin, or of realigning programs and curricula to the ebb and flow of market demands and, thereby, forfeit the fundamental values of higher education that focus on the intellectual development of the individual student to the end of service to the greater good of society.

There is a third possibility that maintains the market relevance of higher education while preserving its enduring values. Rather than maintaining the status quo or trying to meet unpredictable market forces, universities can choose to embrace their central social mission to educate students for not only the challenges of today, but those of the future, and to generate new knowledge that leads to innovation, exploration, and enhancement of the public good. To this end, the UMW community aims to achieve the following goals.

GOAL #1: PREPARE OUR STUDENTS FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Grounded in an understanding that college success is built on solid academic preparation in foundational skills (e.g., reading, math, science, time management, communication, etc.) and on the expectation that students will be ready to apply these skills in their academic experiences, meeting this goal will require the following:

- *A first-year seminar for incoming freshmen that frames expectations for academic success, builds students' readiness and agency, and engages students in the larger campus community.*
- *Increased support for transfer students that improves the transfer process, facilitates campus engagement, and instills a sense of belonging once on campus.*
- *Targeted approaches to support foundational skills and successful gateway course completion.*
- *Professional development for faculty and staff to develop understanding of and tools for working with students in experiential, immersive courses.*
- *General Education revitalization that emphasizes the importance of a foundational education in the liberal arts regardless of major.*

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3 GOALS

GOAL #2:

FOSTER OUR STUDENTS TOWARD GRADUATION

When students are academically prepared, they can thrive in programs designed to provide immersive opportunities to apply skills and knowledge in real-world situations.

This goal can be met by:

- *Developing program strategic plans aligned to the University's strategic plan.*
 - *These plans will:*
 - *Include a mission statement about how programs serve Montana and the greater good*
 - *Establish program-specific values and goals*
 - *Explore postgraduate career opportunities*
 - *Leverage culminating experiences*
 - *Define/foster Senior project/capstone*
 - *Maintain discipline-specific standards and excellence*
- *Promoting the UMW Honors Program as a means for students to enhance and enrich their education through interdisciplinary study.*
- *Establish Graduate Outcomes that should be met by any student earning a degree from UMW. These outcomes can include skills, qualities, knowledge, competencies, etc., that are expected, regardless of program.*

GOAL #3: SUSTAIN OUR INSTITUTION

To ensure that the resources necessary to meet goal #1 and #2 are available, it is critical to plan toward a sustainable institution with a clear understanding of our role as a regional, comprehensive university.

Meeting this goal will require:

- *Non-academic unit strategic plans aligned to the University's strategic plan.*
 - *These plans will provide a particular vision of how units are aligned to the academic values and mission of the institution.*
 - *Additionally, these plans will:*
 - *Establish program-specific values and goals*
 - *Describe professional engagement/development to maintain industry standards*
 - *Define areas for collaboration to support faculty, staff, and students*
 - *Prioritize operationalizing units (document policies, procedures, and practices)*
- *Optimizing Strategic Enrollment Management with data-informed approaches to marketing, recruiting, and retention, with a particular focus on serving Montana.*
- *An updated Master Plan that is aligned to this Strategic Plan*
- *A strategic plan for Community Engagement*

