

ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENTS

DATE: September 10, 2026

TO: Montana Board of Regents

CC: Commissioner of Higher Education
Chief Academic Officers

FROM: Joe Thiel, Deputy Commissioner for Academic, Research, and Student Affairs

RE: 2026/27 Academic Priorities and Planning Statements

Contained in this memorandum are the 2026/27 Academic Priority and Planning Statement submissions from Montana University System campuses and Montana's community colleges. These statements are meant to inform the Montana Board of Regents regarding institutions' academic directions, internal academic prioritization processes, and upcoming academic proposals.

- **Dawson Community College**
- **Flathead Valley Community College**
- **Miles Community College**
- **Montana State University Billings**
- **Montana State University Bozeman**
- **Great Falls College Montana State University**
- **Montana State University Northern**
- **The University of Montana Missoula**
- **Montana Technological University**
- **The University of Montana-Western**
- **Helena College University of Montana**

Dawson Community College

ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT

Academic Year 2026-2027

The Montana University System (MUS) Board of Regents (BOR) has requested additional context to support the decisions they make regarding “Requests to Plan” for new academic programs and research centers/institutes. **Toward that end, we ask that each institution submit a report addressing all questions listed below, not to exceed four pages, no later than 5 p.m. on Monday, August 3, 2026 to aking@montana.edu.**

Separately, please fill-in the Forthcoming Academic Proposals spreadsheet describing academic programs or research centers/institutes that you anticipate may proceed to the “Request to Plan” portion of the approval process in the next year. Please include contact information for a campus lead on each anticipated proposal. A proposal need not be listed in this report to proceed to the “Request to Plan” stage. However, listing proposals likely to move forward is an appreciated courtesy intended to encourage early communication and collaboration.

1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.

In tandem with its mission and strategic priorities, Dawson Community College continues to strengthen our community by providing quality education and empowering diverse learners to achieve their educational goals. This is achieved through our four Strategic Priorities:

Provide Quality Education: DCC offers courses and support for students to achieve their educational goals.
Strengthen Our Community: DCC provides opportunities for individual growth and industry development throughout the region.

Enhance Our Effectiveness: DCC uses data to develop and maintain consistent processes and systems for continuous improvement and sustainability.

Advance Access and Equity: DCC commits to building the foundation needed to create a diverse, equitable and inclusive culture.

2. Provide a brief description of the process used determine these academic priorities.

Dawson Community College determines its academic priorities through a collaborative mission-driven process.

DCC’s leadership, faculty, staff, and Board of Trustees work together to ensure academic priorities align with the college’s mission to provide quality, accessible, and workforce-relevant education. Various career and technical programs use community and industry input through advisory boards.

DCC also utilizes institutional research, student success data, accreditation reports, and labor market information to assist in monitoring enrollment trends, student outcomes, and transfer/workforce placement rates.

Through our accreditation with the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, DCC ensures a process of continuous improvement for program reviews and assessment of student learning outcomes. Faculty, staff, and administration contribute to the college through committees and working groups that identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for growth.

All efforts are conducted as part of a multi-year strategic planning cycle that utilizes annual reviews, to ensure that DCC can respond to evolving educational, economic, and community needs.

3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.

At this time, DCC is not actively pursuing the development of any new major academic programs. Instead, the institution is concentrating its efforts on enhancing and expanding key partnerships that directly support its mission and strategic priorities.

This includes deepening articulation agreements with four-year institutions to ensure smoother transfer pathways for students, increasing collaboration with regional high schools to broaden access to dual enrollment opportunities, and strengthening relationships with industry partners to create more aligned and responsive workforce training and educational experiences.

These collaborative initiatives are intentionally aligned with DCC's four strategic priorities, which guide the institutional planning and decision-making efforts. This targeted approach allows DCC to remain flexible and responsive to both community needs and the evolving landscape of higher education, without the resource strain of launching new standalone programs.

4. Provide a description outlining how program modality, student population served, and campus partnerships factor into new academic or research programming.

While DCC may not be actively pursuing any new programs for the coming academic year, program modality, student population served, and campus partnerships remain an important focus as we strengthen other areas.

Program modality is assessed based on student needs, geographic access, and instructional capacity. In a rural region like eastern Montana, flexible modalities are often essential to serve working adults, high school dual-enrolled students, and those in remote areas. This is achieved through online and other distance education modalities.

Recent efforts in dual enrollment and short-term credentialing reflect the college's responsiveness to emerging student populations and workforce shifts.

Rather than developing entirely new standalone programs, DCC leverages partnerships to enhance the relevance and sustainability of its offerings. Articulation agreements, dual enrollment partnerships, and collaboration with industry partners all contribute to DCC's ability to remain impactful without duplicating efforts or straining institutional resources.

5. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.

Not applicable for this academic year.

6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.

DCC completed and submitted a Financial Resources Review in the fall of 2025 to update the commission on the financial status and update on the progress of past missed audits. From this report, a recommendation was given to have financial audits up-to-date by the spring of 2027.

DCC will spend this year ensuring that financial audits are current, along with starting preparations for the accreditation visit, currently scheduled for the spring of 2029.

7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).

Not applicable at this time.

Flathead Valley Community College

ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT

Academic Year 2026-2027

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1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.

The mission of Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC), as approved by the Board of Trustees, is to “promote excellence in lifelong learning, focused on student success and community needs.”

FVCC’s academic priorities are workforce and transfer programs. These priorities meet the needs of business and industry, enable students to seamlessly transfer to a four-year institution and ensure student success. FVCC’s academic priorities are directly related to and support our mission and institutional strategic plan.

2. Provide a brief description of the process used determine these academic priorities.

Academic priorities are identified through a collaborative process. FVCC collaborates with business, industry, faculty, and transfer institutions to ensure academic priorities meet stakeholder needs. Data analysis of proposed priorities includes required resources. Academic priorities are reviewed by faculty, administrative and leadership committees and then by the Board of Trustees.

3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.

FVCC has received repeated requests from surrounding communities to explore programs in dental hygiene, airframe and power programming, aviation mechanics, veterinarian technician, ultrasound tech, respiratory therapy, a culinary certificate, and broadband training. The college is exploring the requirements and resources needed for each of these programs.

4. Provide a description outlining how program modality, student population served, and campus partnerships factor into new academic or research programming.

Considerations of modality, student population, and community partnerships are a natural part of our decision-making processes regarding academic programming. These considerations flow from the interdisciplinary nature of the key committees on campus—from the individual program level where programs sit within a broader division up to the executive leadership level, academic affairs, student affairs, workforce and community partnerships work hand in hand to analyze the key elements of what will make a program, and students, successful.

5. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.

As part of the program review process, FVCC continually reviews programs to determine continued need. These reviews may result in a recommendation for a program moratorium or termination. For AY2026-2027, no programs are being considered for moratorium or termination.

6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.

In January 2026, the new mission fulfillment scorecard was shared widely with the college community at the spring all-employee in-service and published online at fvcc.edu/data. Additionally, in support of continuous improvement and to strengthen ongoing assessment efforts, FVCC transitioned to eLumen's Insights for Canvas this summer, launching a small pilot to better facilitate the assessment and reflection of student learning through course, program, and institutional learning outcome attainment.

In Spring 2026, FVCC submitted its Year Six Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review (PRFR) self-evaluation report to NWCCU. In June, the Commission informed FVCC that no findings were identified by the evaluation committee's review. Looking ahead, FVCC's Year Seven Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness is scheduled for April 14-16, 2027.

7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).

The current Strategic Plan expires at the end of the spring semester 2027. FVCC will have a new president as of the beginning of 2027; the new president will lead discussions around the next Strategic Plan in the spring semester.

Miles Community College

ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT

Academic Year 2026-2027

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1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.

Miles Community College’s academic priorities are grounded in its mission to prepare students for success and provide lifelong learning through equitable access, quality programs, outreach, and partnerships. For AY 2026–2027, MCC will focus on student success, workforce development, academic quality, access, and institutional effectiveness in alignment with our Vision 2028.

- *Student success and completion.* MCC will strengthen advising, academic support, first-year transition, gateway course success, credit momentum, dual-enrollment conversion, and completion pathways to support student readiness, persistence, transfer, and employment.
- *Workforce-responsive education.* MCC will prioritize academic and workforce offerings aligned with regional needs, including health sciences, nursing and allied health, agriculture and equine studies, business and information technology, trades, transportation, and customized training.
- *Academic quality and relevance.* MCC will continue strengthening program review, student learning assessment, curriculum alignment, transfer pathways, advisory board engagement, and data-informed/data-inspired decision-making.
- *Access and delivery.* MCC will use face-to-face, hybrid, online, dual enrollment, and workforce-focused delivery models where they expand access while maintaining learning outcomes, student support, licensure expectations, and program quality.
- *Applied improvement and institutional research.* Leveraging our NWCCU mid-cycle visit, MCC will emphasize institutional research, program evaluation, labor-market analysis, and student achievement data to inform planning and continuous improvement.

2. Provide a brief description of the process used determine these academic priorities.

Academic priorities are determined through an integrated planning process that connects strategic planning, unit planning and assessment, program review, accreditation expectations, budget development, and

workforce/community input. The process is intentionally collaborative and includes academic leadership, faculty, staff, student support leaders, institutional effectiveness personnel, advisory committees, senior leadership, and, where appropriate, external partners.

During the planning cycle, MCC reviews Vision 2028 goals and metrics; Board of Trustees expectations, enrollment, retention, completion, transfer, and labor-market data; program learning assessment results; advisory board recommendations; student and employer needs; staffing and facility capacity; fiscal sustainability; and accreditation requirements. Proposed academic priorities and potential new initiatives are discussed through Academic Affairs leadership structures, faculty curriculum processes, advisory boards, and institutional planning conversations before moving forward through the appropriate internal, Board, Montana University System, and accreditation processes.

3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.

MCC anticipates pursuing exploratory and developmental work in several areas that support its academic priorities. These initiatives may proceed at different levels of readiness, and proposals that require formal approval will move through institutional governance, Board review, MUS Request to Plan processes, and accreditation/substantive change review as applicable.

- *Health sciences and allied health pathways.* MCC intends to continue assessing regional healthcare workforce needs beyond nursing and may explore stackable certificates, short-term credentials, and pathway options in allied health, pre-health, medical office/clinical support, phlebotomy, medical assisting, or related fields where employer demand, clinical capacity, faculty availability, and sustainability can be demonstrated.

--Specifically, we plan to submit a proposal for a Certificate of Applied Science in Medical Assisting and possibly an AAS in Allied Health with varying credentials in EKG, phlebotomy, and Nursing assisting.

- *Workforce and CTE expansion.* The College will continue developing responsive workforce and CTE programming, including customized training, short-term credentials, and partnership-based offerings in areas such as transportation, welding, agriculture, business operations, and other regional priorities identified by employers and advisory boards.

--Specifically, we will plan to create a Trade Fundamentals and Entrepreneurship min-credential with courses we already offer in Welding for those who seek to run their own welding business.

- *Career exploration and early college pathways.* MCC will continue strengthening career exploration, dual enrollment, and work-based learning opportunities so that high school students, undecided students, and adult learners can make informed academic and career choices before committing significant time and financial resources.

4. Provide a description outlining how program modality, student population served, and campus partnerships factor into new academic or research programming.

Modality decisions are based on access, learning outcomes, student support needs, workforce requirements, faculty capacity, and compliance expectations. Programs with clinical, laboratory, field, equipment, or hands-on competency requirements will continue to rely on face-to-face or hybrid delivery. Online delivery will be considered when it supports student access, completion, and instructional quality, particularly for rural and place-bound students. For example, the CAS in Medical Assisting will be hybrid for these reasons. Dual enrollment and off-campus or partner-supported delivery will be used when quality, faculty qualifications, course rigor, and student support can be maintained.

MCC's academic planning is shaped by the students it serves: recent high school graduates, dual-enrollment students, transfer-intending students, CTE students, student-athletes, working adults, first-generation students, rural and place-bound learners, and individuals seeking reskilling or upskilling. New academic programming must demonstrate that it meets a defined student need and includes appropriate advising, academic support, career guidance, and clear program maps.

The College will continue to rely on K-12 partners, regional employers, healthcare facilities, workforce and economic development organizations, CTE advisory boards, transfer institutions, community organizations, and other Montana colleges where collaboration improves access, reduces duplication, strengthens clinical or work-based learning capacity, or supports shared regional workforce goals.

5. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.

MCC does not anticipate a broad departure from its mission or core academic portfolio. However, the College will be more selective about investing in programs, sections, modalities, or initiatives that do not clearly align with Vision 2028, regional workforce needs, student completion, transfer demand, academic quality, or fiscal sustainability.

6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.

Spring 2026, MCC completed its NWCCU Mid-Cycle Review. The College will use the results of the Mid-Cycle process to strengthen mission fulfillment, student achievement, academic assessment, program review, and evidence-based planning.

The College is preparing for an upcoming Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) site visit scheduled for October 2026.

Additionally, MCC will continue exploring future NACEP accreditation to further strengthen the quality, consistency, and oversight of its dual enrollment offerings.

7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).

MCC will continue implementing Vision 2028 during AY 2026-2027 and will use annual reporting, unit planning, assessment, and budget development to evaluate progress toward strategic goals. While a full institutional strategic plan revision is not anticipated during AY 2026-2027, a major academic planning activity for the coming year will be development of a Master Academic Plan aligned with Vision 2028, Board expectations, accreditation standards, workforce needs, student success priorities, and fiscal realities. This planning process will help MCC clarify program portfolio priorities, pathway opportunities, course scheduling and modality strategies, transfer and workforce alignment, faculty and staffing needs, facilities and technology implications, and metrics for academic quality and student success. This work will also position MCC for the next stages of institutional strategic planning as Vision 2028 approaches completion.

Montana State University Billings

ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT

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1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.

MSU Billings recently completed listening sessions and data collection for the institution’s strategic vision. The process began in fall 2025. Data analysis was conducted through summer 2026 and a new strategic advancement and position will be shared at the Chancellor’s State of the University address in the fall. The value statements and initiatives included in the strategic vision will guide and inform the academic initiatives going forward.

MSUB continues to implement focused retention strategies, guided by the initiatives outlined in the [Retention and Graduation Plan 2022-2027](#). As part of its Innovation Project, MSUB embarked on a robust Process Reimagine & Redesign (PRR) project to enhance student centered practices to ensure smooth articulation from applicant to graduate. One particular area of emphasis is advising. In June, twelve MSUB faculty and staff attended the NACADA Advising Summit in Bozeman. In concert with the recommendations of the PRR project as well as the new strategic plan, the campus will explore strategies to continually enhance MSUB’s advising model and procedures.

The rapid expansion of dual enrollment (DE) has prompted the need to enhance internal support mechanisms and expand staffing. To meet increasing demand, an associate dean position was added to City College to provide further oversight and support for this unique and growing population. MSUB will offer continuing professional development opportunities for High School Connections DE teachers, including an onboarding workshop at City College in mid-August, and optional workshops through the Center for Teaching and Learning. MSUB will continue to enhance the Faculty Liaison mentorship program, where High School Connections teachers are paired with an MSUB faculty member and receive collegial support regarding course design, rigor, grading and assessment, and MSUB policies.

Healthcare programs continue to be a strength and institutional priority, as the campus is geographically located in the regional healthcare center. This includes physical and mental health services. MSUB emphasizes Biomedical and Health Sciences with a focus on undergraduate research. Faculty research programs include neuroscience, cancer biology, microbiology, immunology, molecular biology, analytical chemistry, biochemistry, plant systematics, strength and conditioning, kinesiology, and science education while providing hands-on training opportunities for undergraduate researchers and students enrolled in biology and chemistry laboratory courses.

The city of Billings also serves as a financial hub for the state. The College of Business provides students with theoretical and practical understandings of the business activities associated with accounting practices, management principles, marketing strategies, and financial investments. In doing so, the college helps students from diverse backgrounds transform themselves into local, regional, national, and international business leaders. Research priorities in the college investigate regional, national, and international business concerns, with particular strengths in circular economies, supply chain management, transitional innovations, and corporate strategies. Faculty-led trips to Antwerp, Germany and Portugal, allowed students to participate in international business incubators.

Areas of research in College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences include musical composition, arranging and performance, art research and exhibition, American and European literary and historical research, creative writing with a focus on drama, fiction, nonfiction and poetry, psychological research including neuroscience, innovations in positive psychology, virtues analysis, and adolescent psychology, graduate student wellness, communication patterns, environmental concerns and GIS training locally and internationally, the effects of weather on satellite communications, medical sociology, hunting and poaching in Montana, political polling and analysis, and Native American and indigenous studies.

2. Provide a brief description of the process used determine these academic priorities.

MSUB's efforts to increase student retention and graduation rates were guided by the current strategic plan, informed by institutional and peer comparator data. Despite the progress that has occurred, MSUB remains below average when compared to peer and aspirant institutions. Increasing retention and graduation rates will remain a priority for MSUB until rates are aligned or above those averages.

Other academic initiatives referenced above were informed by state-level initiatives and internal conversations. The timing of the current strategic plan, that ended this year, and working to identify new priorities for strategic advancement also informed the academic initiatives outlined in response to question #1.

3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.

MSUB is exploring a secondary education minor to accompany teacher education majors in content areas (English, History, Music, etc.). Students would pair the secondary education minor with their major to gain the knowledge and skills needed to serve as educators. Processes for evaluating students would also yield more meaningful and actionable data, having clearly defined outcomes for the minor and the majors (these already exist).

While not a new program, the Reading faculty are exploring an accelerated pathway (3+2) for the Reading Master's degree. These conversations are in the early stages.

In May 2027, the College of Business will host a conference on community resilience that will emphasize energy and water as the key resources that will define the regional economy. International, national, and regional speakers are already committed, and the format is designed to help community members find business research partners for investigations into improved resilience: <https://www.msubillings.edu/building-community-resilience/>

4. Provide a description outlining how program modality, student population served, and campus partnerships factor into new academic or research programming.

N/A

5. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.

MSUB anticipates potential changes in academic offerings through the annual program review process implemented by the Commissioner's office. The annual program review is intended to flag programs that do not meet metric thresholds. This process will initiate collaborative and frank discussions about program demand and viability.

6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.

Institutional Accreditation: In academic year 2025-26, MSUB prepared the campus for, and hosted the NWCCU for a comprehensive Year 7 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness review during the fall semester. The visit and review were successful, resulting in three recommendations and three commendations. The NWCCU requires follow up on the three recommendations through an Ad Hoc report only (no visit) in spring 2027. MSUB's leadership and campus are confident in the ability to fulfill these recommendations in a timely manner. In addition to the Ad Hoc report due in spring 2027, MSU Billings will host an NWCCU evaluator in

fall 2026 for the Prison Education Program (PEP). The campus is in the process of preparing the report. The NWCCU Annual report, due August 1, 2026, has been submitted.

Program Accreditation: During academic year 2025-26, MSU Billings hosted a few program-level accreditation visits. Student Health Services hosted a team of reviewers from AAAHC, and the Paramedic program hosted the CAAHEP team for a successful visit. During the upcoming academic year, the Clinical Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling program will undergo review by CACREP (fall 2026), and the Diagnostic Medical Sonography program plans to submit a self-study to undergo its initial review for accreditation by the JRC-DMS. The Psychology department is in the very early stages of seeking accreditation for the master's program through the APA (self-study submission by Spring 2028 term). The faculty are working with the office of Assessment and Accreditation to develop the initial application.

7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).

As MSUB's current strategic plan is set to expire in 2026 (Students First: 2019-26), the campus worked with a local consultant team, Kaleidoscope Group, to facilitate feedback sessions during fall 2025 and spring 2026 semesters to begin developing future priorities. Surveys were also used to collect feedback in advance of the sessions. Sessions were conducted on both University campus and City College campus, involving employees, students, alumni, and community stakeholders. A strategic planning work group, with campuswide and community representation, helped encourage attendance at the feedback sessions. Kaleidoscope Group organized the data collected from the surveys and sessions in early summer 2026. Drafted value statements and action items have been shared with select campus groups for feedback. The final strategic plan is set to be unveiled at the State of the University in fall 2026 and at the September BOR meeting.

Montana State University

ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT

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1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.

Programs and program changes proposed for the upcoming year are workforce and state demand driven. New programs and certificates will focus on the rural nursing, engineering and precision agricultural sectors. Minor changes to programs will also be directly addressing workforce needs brought forth by industry partners. This year’s priorities will continue to focus on assessing and streamlining current academic programs, addressing alignment with updated BOR Policy 301.11 and assessing our current advising practices to increase persistence and graduation rates for all MSU students (MSU Choosing Promise strategic plan – Goal 1.1.6).

Research interdisciplinary areas include prioritizing rural needs for education and nursing, advancement of technology for statewide economic development, and communication of science through the arts. MSU will be seeking approval for the Montana Geospatial Insights and Solutions Institute, Quantum Collaborative Research and Education, as well as ramping up development of the MSU Interdisciplinary Institute on Artificial Intelligence (MSU Choosing Promise strategic plan – Goals 2.1.1, 2.2.1, 3.2.3)

Plans are established with the Deans and Academic Affairs to review the above academic priorities beginning in August in consideration of the new strategic plan that is in development.

2. Provide a brief description of the process used determine these academic priorities.

Academic priorities are informed using data from annual program assessments, 7-year program reviews or external accreditation reviews (reported to OCHE), employer’s needs, student interest, and fiscal and market analysis in conjunction with industry demand metered through advisory committees. These data resources inform departmental, college, and university discussions and ultimately requests to the Provost and the Executive Team that determines the final academic priorities for the year. Proposals for programs, centers, and institutes are developed by faculty, staff, students, and administration usually within a given

department and proposed through the campus approval process including department, college, university, and university administrative leadership and committees.

3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programming that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.

MSU will continue to focus on our top priorities which are persistence, time to degree, and graduation rates of our students. Departments are revamping program curricula, streamlining degree pathways, addressing high DFW courses, and reducing curricular complexities, including excessive prerequisites. With the development of a new strategic plan, MSU will plan for new academic or research programming over the coming year based on the projects and foci of the strategic plan. MSU will be submitting approvals for two programs whose RTPs were approved in the last year. With the reduction of new academic program proposals, departments will continue to prioritize assessment and improvement of existing programs.

4. Provide a description outlining how program modality, student population served, and campus partnerships factor into new academic or research programming.

In general, program modality, student population served, and campus partnerships are standard questions on the forms in the approval process for new academic programs or research centers. Student populations served and campus partnerships are a critical portion of these submissions. Each committee and council weigh these factors in their decision to approve/disapprove.

MSU favors in-person modality and online sections are only considered where student demand dictates for particular courses. No course is offered only online (no in-person sections) unless it is part of an online program, which primarily serves Montana's rural place-bound population. This year, Academic Affairs is prioritizing revision of the process for online section and online program approval as well as reviewing the standards and adherence to federal compliance requirements to improve support and quality of our online offerings.

5. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.

MSU continuously reviews low to no enrollment programs and program options, with mission and employer demand in mind. Termination of two programs was initiated last year after their 7-year program review. We anticipate a consolidation of MSU's Biological Sciences program options to remove confusion for the students. New programs at the 3-year mark are also reviewed based on enrollment predictions and corrective action is planned where programs are falling short.

6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.

MSU submitted the requisite annual report to the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) in July 2025 and in July 2026. We continue to make progress on addressing the 3 recommendations from the reaffirmation in March of 2025.

1) Establish an advising assessment process. This year MSU formed a standing advising assessment committee (Campus Advising Assessment Team), developed a regular faculty advising assessment process that requires reporting from each department, collected information and reported on current practices, and Advising Commons assessed their orientation, freshman, and sophomore advising practices.

2) Review the appropriateness of current comparator institutions and utilize comparative data for setting benchmarks. University Data and Analytics established a data warehouse that can be easily accessed for comparative data. A process for regular generation of comparative data is being established for comparative evaluation with peer universities. The process and selection of peer comparators is in review with the Executive Council. University Data and Analytics is leading the formation of a Data Governance and Strategies Council to establish clarity in our processes requiring data analysis and review.

3) Assess all programs. Several offices and units are establishing an annual assessment process for their programs. Academic Technology & Outreach, Testing Services, and Student Success (includes admissions, registrar, access and success, advising commons, career services, dean of students, financial aid, student wellness, and veteran services) are slated to report on their assessments in the coming year. These assessments are valuable to evaluating our institutional effectiveness and will provide directional insight for the new strategic plan.

In the upcoming year, we are preparing for a mid-cycle self-study and site visit in Fall 2027. Please note, with NWCCU's proposal to shift to an 8-year cycle, MSU's mid-cycle accreditation visit may be moved to Fall 2028 (proposal will be voted on July 7-10 commission meeting and schools notified thereafter).

NWCCU will be voting on clarifying updated standards at the January 2027 commission meeting. We anticipate reviewing the updated standards and ensuring our practices and documentation align with the updated standards.

7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).

MSU's current strategic plan, Choosing Promise, expires in 2026. President Tessman initiated a process in January 2026 to shape MSU's next strategic plan. The timeline for the new strategic plan is as follows:

February – May, MSU Campus Stakeholder Listening Sessions for students, faculty, staff and community members.

February – July, Gallatin Valley Community and State Stakeholder Listening Sessions.

August – September, Public Feedback and Final Listening Sessions on Draft Statements and Plans.

October – November, Final Preparations and Drafting of Final Strategic Plan.

November 19, 2026, Presentation and Roll-out of Strategic Plan at the MUS Board of Regents.
Meeting hosted at MSU.

DRAFT

Great Falls College Montana State University

ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT

Academic Year 2026-2027

The Montana University System (MUS) Board of Regents (BOR) has requested additional context to support the decisions they make regarding “Requests to Plan” for new academic programs and research centers/institutes. **Toward that end, we ask that each institution submit a report addressing all questions listed below, not to exceed four pages, no later than 5 p.m. on Monday, August 3, 2026, to aking@montana.edu.**

Separately, please fill-in the Forthcoming Academic Proposals spreadsheet describing academic programs or research centers/institutes that you anticipate may proceed to the “Request to Plan” portion of the approval process in the next year. Please include contact information for a campus lead on each anticipated proposal. A proposal need not be listed in this report to proceed to the “Request to Plan” stage. However, listing proposals likely to move forward is an appreciated courtesy intended to encourage early communication and collaboration.

1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.

Great Falls College’s current academic priorities are driven by our 2022–2027 Strategic Plan and our institutional mission to support student success, meet regional workforce needs, and provide accessible, high-quality education. Current institutional efforts are focused on achieving the metrics identified under Pillar 1: Inclusivity of the strategic plan: Clear the path for students to accomplish their educational goals. Specifically, departments and programs are working to do the following as outlined in the plan:

- Increase the proportion of degree-seeking students who complete college-level math and writing within one year
- Increase the proportion of pre-program health science students who complete pre-requisite courses within one year
- Increase the proportion of students who complete a credential within 150% of normal time
- Reduce equity gaps

The college is continuing to refine and support the three stackable credentials related to Veterinary care - Veterinary Office CTS, Veterinary Assistant CAS, and Veterinary Technician AAS - started in Fall 2024. The program is offered in a distributive model enabling students to remain in their home communities while completing the program through partnerships with local veterinarians.

In addition, Great Falls College is implementing and expanding opportunities to deliver specific high demand healthcare programs via distance options, such as the Dental Hygiene program in the Swingle Center on the MSU campus for the first time this past year. Surgical Tech and Physical Therapy Assistant are also currently being offered in Bozeman. The college has applied for a Rural Health Transformation Program grant that would enable the college to add two additional instructional sites for the Dental Hygiene program.

The college continuously evaluates regional workforce data and employer needs to expand its programs, including non-credit validated skills training.

Two additional priorities are to expand dual credit opportunities in sectors identified in the 406 JOBS report and to better support the college's online students.

2. Provide a brief description of the process used to determine these academic priorities.

Great Falls College's StAR (Strategic Analysis and Reporting) Committee regularly monitors and reports on the college's progress towards meeting its strategic plan goals. The committee notified the College Council of the need to particularly increase efforts to meet the metric of increasing the proportion of degree-seeking students who complete college-level math and writing within one year. This topic is now a top priority for the General Studies Division.

Data also revealed students in the veterinary tech-related programs were not persisting at the same rates as students in other programs; therefore, the curriculum, communication, and support systems have all been adjusted to better prepare and support students.

Similarly, data revealed the college's online students not succeeding at the same rates as other students. In response, Admissions created welcome packets with tips specifically for those students, the role of the distance success coach was expanded, onboarding efforts were improved, and a training module for online instructors was created.

In addition to college data, Great Falls College monitors state reports, such as 406 JOBS, and Montana Department of Labor & Industry workforce data to look for opportunities to meet regional workforce needs, as stated in the college's mission statement.

3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.

As for new programs, Great Falls College reviewed state labor force data as well as regional need and will be pursuing approval for credentials in both hospitality and paralegal studies. Both areas meet the college's mission statement and academic priorities to "meet regional workforce needs, and provide accessible, high-quality education." The college is also exploring opportunities to expand its business and trades programs, again to meet regional workforce needs. The initial exploration includes discussions with Great Falls Public Schools around how to share resources – including space and instructors.

One initiative underway is to create dual credit pathways for students, particularly in alignment with high demand sectors identified in 406 JOBS, in which students would complete certain coursework at the high schools in the mornings and then join college students in the afternoons to complete dual credit coursework on the college campus. Such work aligns with the state's initiatives as well as the college's own Strategic Enrollment Plan which includes increasing the number of dual enrolment students who matriculate to the college.

4. Provide a description outlining how program modality, student population served, and campus partnerships factor into new academic or research programming.

At Great Falls College, the development of new academic programming is guided by a thoughtful, collaborative process that considers three key factors: the needs of our student population, the most effective program delivery modalities, and opportunities for institutional and community partnerships.

Student Population Needs

Each proposed program begins with an assessment of the student populations we aim to serve—whether traditional students, adult learners, working professionals, or high school dual enrollment participants. We evaluate regional demand, barriers to access, and opportunities for student success to ensure new offerings are responsive and inclusive.

Program Modality

Program delivery methods are carefully selected to meet the needs of our diverse student body, including online, hybrid, and face-to-face learning experiences. The college recognizes many students are place-bound and need distance options given the geographic distance between colleges and universities in the state.

Partnerships with Institutions and Industry

Before launching new programs, the college assesses similar offerings at other Montana University System institutions and explores potential collaboration. The college also looks for transfer opportunities to the 4-year universities. In addition, the college gathers feedback from industry and community stakeholders through advisory boards to ensure programs are aligned with workforce needs and provide clear employment pathways for graduates.

Through this integrated approach—balancing modality, student demographics, and strategic partnerships—Great Falls College ensures that new academic programs are relevant, accessible, and impactful, in full support of our institutional mission and academic priorities.

5. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.

The college's internal academic program review process identified the CAS in Health Information Coding and the AAS in Health Information Technology as being of concern, largely due to decreasing enrollments. Both programs have submitted action plans and will continue to be monitored.

6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.

Institutional Accreditation

Great Falls College submitted an Ad Hoc report to NWCCU in February. In response to the 2025 Mid-Cycle visit, the Commission provided a Letter of Action on August 11, 2025, with updated language for the two recommendations originally made after the April 2022 EIE visit and requesting an ad hoc report to report progress on Recommendation 1:

Recommendation 1: Spring 2025 Mid-Cycle Review – Continue to develop and implement a systematic evaluation and inclusive planning process that informs and refines effectiveness and assigns resources, including the assessment of program and institutional learning outcomes (2020 Standards 1.B.1, 1.C.5, 1.C.6, 1.C.7).

Significant progress toward fulfilling this recommendation has been made, and no further reports were requested by NWCCU.

Programmatic Accreditation

Over the past year, the Health Science Division has successfully advanced accreditation efforts across multiple programs. The Associate of Science in Nursing (ASN) program received approval for candidacy from the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN), marking a significant step toward full accreditation. The Veterinary Technology program was granted Initial Accreditation by the American Veterinary Medical Association Committee on Veterinary Technician Education and Activities (AVMA/CVTEA). The Dental Hygiene program received institutional approval from NWCCU for the expansion site located on the Montana State University Bozeman campus. Additionally, the Surgical Technology program completed its accreditation site visit through the Accreditation Review Council on Education in Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting (ARC/STSA) and subsequently received renewed accreditation without recommendations.

Looking ahead, several programs have important accreditation activities planned. Both the Dental Hygiene and Respiratory Therapy programs have submitted self-studies in preparation for upcoming site visits. The ASN program is scheduled for its initial ACEN site visit during the spring semester. The Dental Hygiene program will host both the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) and NWCCU Ad Hoc site visits in the fall term. The Respiratory Therapy program anticipates a site visit during the 2026–2027 academic year as part of its accreditation cycle.

7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).

This fall, the college will begin the process of creating its next strategic plan, which will begin in AY2028. The preparation this year includes gathering input from the campus and community regarding the college's mission, vision, and values. The feedback could result in a revised mission statement, if warranted, being submitted to the Board of Regents in spring 2027.

The campus will also be gathering input and drafting Mission Fulfillment Indicators (MFIs) this year. For a full timeline, see Appendix A.

Appendix A: Strategic Planning Timeline

		Strategic Planning Timeline																							
		2026				2027				2028															
		Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Laying Groundwork	Deliverables																								
	Responsible																								
	Campus-wide SOARs with community input	through 10/30																							
	Present draft of mission, vision, & values to College Council			by 12/4																					
	Campus feedback of draft				by 12/21																				
	Campus approval of mission, vision, & values					1/8																			
Getting Focused	Board of Regents review & approval of new mission statement (if applicable)					Presented at March BOR																			
	Present draft of MFIs to College Council						by 4/2																		
	Campus feedback of MFIs							by 4/23																	
	Campus approval of MFIs								5/7																
	Present draft of pillars & strategic plan goals to College Council									by 6/4															
	Campus feedback of pillars & strategic plan goals										by 8/25														
	Final report of Forging Futures																								
	Campus approval of pillars & strategic plan goals												9/3												
	Present draft of strategic plan metrics														by 12/3										
	Campus feedback of strategic plan metrics																by 1/7								
	Campus approval of strategic plan metrics																		2/4						
Driving Action	One-page strategic plan																								
	Units and committees align new goals to the revised strategic plan																			by 4/30					
	Identify strategic initiatives																								
	Implement the next strategic plan																								

SOAR= Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results brainstorming
MFI = Mission Fulfillment Indicators

MSU-NORTHERN

ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT

Academic Year 2026-2027

The Montana University System (MUS) Board of Regents (BOR) has requested additional context to support the decisions they make regarding “Requests to Plan” for new academic programs and research centers/institutes. **Toward that end, we ask that each institution submit a report addressing all questions listed below, not to exceed four pages, no later than 5 p.m. on Monday, August 3, 2026 to aking@montana.edu.**

Separately, please fill-in the Forthcoming Academic Proposals spreadsheet describing academic programs or research centers/institutes that you anticipate may proceed to the “Request to Plan” portion of the approval process in the next year. Please include contact information for a campus lead on each anticipated proposal. A proposal need not be listed in this report to proceed to the “Request to Plan” stage. However, listing proposals likely to move forward is an appreciated courtesy intended to encourage early communication and collaboration.

1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.

MSU-Northern provides higher education to students for professional and technical careers through an institution dedicated to teaching and the pursuit of knowledge. The University serves the Hi-Line and the State of Montana as the only four-year, public institution of higher education in the northern half of the state; thereby providing access to quality education for underserved populations in numerous areas with a high degree of rurality. In this spirit, MSU-Northern’s academic plans focus on the needs of the region and of our students, providing a vehicle for significant upward social and economic mobility. The University’s current academic portfolio includes programs from the certificate to the master’s levels that provide students with the skills necessary to succeed in a variety of fields including Business, Agriculture, Criminal Justice, Education, Physical and Mental Healthcare, the Trades, Automotive and Diesel Technologies, Social Science, and the Arts, to name a few.

For the coming academic year, MSU-Northern’s academic priorities will continue to focus on programs related to education and industrial workforce development as those are areas of critical need across the Hi-Line and throughout the state. Specifically, with the current shortage of qualified workers, the University is deepening its investment in providing access to high-quality programs in Education, Behavioral Health, and Workforce Foundations. The focus on these areas is in direct alignment with the mission of the University and will increase the capacity of the institution to respond to the current social and economic climate.

2. Provide a brief description of the process used determine these academic priorities.

Currently, the process to determine academic priorities includes the collection of data and feedback from the institution’s many advisory boards as well as a review in enrollment trends; all within the context of the University’s mission and strategic plan. Discussion is had at the programmatic and College levels and the resulting recommendations are reviewed at the administrative level.

3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.

Over the past year, MSU-Northern increased its focus on healthcare education and received approval from the Board to plan an AS in Integrated Health Sciences. This program includes several embedded industry certificates, a strong emphasis on co-op or apprenticeship opportunities, and is stackable with both the university's career certificate in Healthcare Foundations and the university's four-year Integrated Health Sciences degree.

The other major focus for the university over the past year was on the development of small, stackable credentials in Graphic Design, Geospatial Technology, Healthcare Foundations, and Workforce Foundations (forthcoming). These are stand-alone certificates that offer opportunities for upskilling among working adults as well as additional, in-demand skills development among dual enrollment and traditional students.

For the coming year, the focus for MSU-Northern will be to strengthen its existing programs and to explore key opportunities in Education, Industrial Technology, and Behavioral Health in order to better serve students, community members, and industry partners.

4. Provide a description outlining how program modality, student population served, and campus partnerships factor into new academic or research programming.

MSU-Northern remains committed to providing accessible, high-quality educational opportunities to students from the most rural region in the state. As a result, program development takes into account the place-bound circumstances of potential students. Recently, this has led to an increase in dual enrollment offerings where lab time can be completed on high school campuses. As a result, two of the university's new career certificates were developed with place-bound, dual enrollment students in mind.

5. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.

The university has developed a new, rigorous academic program review process that will be implemented during AY26-27. This process will guide institutional decisions based on the identification of those areas where investment and/or redesign is likely to be most beneficial; thereby strengthening existing programs.

6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.

Institutional Accreditation:

During AY25, the institution submitted a Year-One Ad Hoc report to NWCCU addressing the four recommendations made by the Commission during the university's Year-Seven comprehensive review. The result of this submission was a decision by the Commission to find all but one of the institution's outstanding recommendations satisfied. For AY27, the university has submitted its midcycle report to

NWCCU and is planning for an on-site visit in October 2026. This work is in addition to all inventory and annual reporting required by the Commission.

Program Accreditation:

The university has been working closely with OPI on the re-accreditation of its initial and advanced education programs. This work will culminate in an OPI site visit in October 2026.

7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).

MSU-Northern is in the process of assessing its progress on its All N 2023 – 2033 Strategic Plan. This year, it is anticipated that the data collection processes related to the assessment of strategic plan goal achievement will be refined in order to ensure long-term sustainability. Additionally, trends in KPIs will be examined to determine whether there is a need for any adjustments in policies, procedures, initiatives, or resource allocation with respect to the institution's achievement of its goals for the coming year.

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA-MISSOULA

ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT

Academic Year 2026-2027

1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution's current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.

Balancing UM's dual identity as an R1 research institution *and* high-access institution with an embedded two-year college remains the organizing frame for the coming academic year. Faculty capacity is the dominant structural constraint across the university. Aligning our academic portfolio with these constraints continues to be a priority for the academic year while also ensuring that we have the flexibility to innovate within our current curriculum and stand-up programs where we see sustainable demand in the current regional market. We will also be working college by college to codify transparent academic unit operating procedures to ensure equitable understanding of workload expectations across teaching, research, and service. In addition, we will be implementing our revised program assessment framework now called the biennial *Student Learning Assessment* in the spring. Maintaining our R1 status continues to be an ongoing priority as well as a challenge and building a reliable framework for timely PhD completion and well as exploring research preparation across professional doctoral degrees will continue to inform our success in this area. There is continued momentum in AI integration across our curriculum, student services, and research enterprise with several projects underway in support of this year's annual playbook. Finally, we will continue to build out our student learning assessment framework

2. Provide a brief description of the process used determine these academic priorities.

These priorities were derived from the FY27 College Strategic Outlooks, synthesized by the Provost's Office, cross-walked against the university's Annual Playbook objectives, which will be used to develop the FY27 Academic Affairs Playbook. Several outlooks were authored by interim or transitioning deans. Priorities from these units carry provisional ownership and may be revised by permanent leadership over the course of the coming academic year.

3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.

- The College of the Arts and Media will launch a career certificate in Human-Centered AI as well as undertake a major revision of the Art and Media Arts curriculum in the School of Art and Game design. In addition, as student outcomes and return on investment continue standards are anticipated at the federal and accreditation levels, career preparation will continue to be a priority in the arts. "Arts-plus-wellness" continues to be an area of exploration across the College of the Arts and Media, the College of Health, and the College of Science.
- The Franke College of Forestry and Conservation is moving their GIS certificate online. They are also moving forward with professional master's degrees in conservation to stand alongside the existing research graduate programs. The Graduate School and FCFC recently received an NSF S-STEM grant to support this program.
- The College of Science will continue to work towards a shared model for teaching data science across disciplines as a curricular response to the coming AI workforce shift.
- Missoula College is exploring proposed partnerships with Choice Aviation, Helena College, and DLI regarding CTE programming opportunities.
- The College of Humanities and Social Sciences is exploring expanding existing concentrations and certificates in biological anthropology and forensic science into a full baccalaureate degree. This

includes expanding research and practical training for students through partnerships with state and local crime labs and the potential to create a research "body farm" for faculty and students to do fieldwork.

- The Alexander Blewett III School of Law I is in the planning stages for the proposed online/hybrid JD program as well as a Masters of Indian Law and Policy.

4. Provide a description outlining how program modality, student population served, and campus partnerships factor into new academic or research programming.

- Bachelor of Applied Science has been revitalized to create clearer pathways for a wider range of learner, including consideration of accelerated or reduced-credit degree option for adult learners, students with prior learning, and those seeking efficient completion pathways. Two tracks were developed and supported by Faculty Senate over the past year: Health Services Administration and Skilled Trades Management.
- We are continuing to expand our online offerings to position UM as regional leader in distance education. This includes updating our procedures for establishing and administering online programs to ensure both quality and availability of coursework.
- We are continuing to solidify Missoula College's role as the access/completion engine for local workforce needs. The college continues to expand non-credit offerings with local partners. They are currently exploring partnerships with Choice Aviation and Helena College to potentially expand flight training to the Bitterroot Valley. There is still donor interest in expanding nursing education, and clinical placements across allied health programs continue to be a challenge.
- Native American student success and Tribal partnership commitments (Playbook Objective 1.3) as a defined population-served priority.
- Educational Initiatives and Invitation (EII) is working with Missoula College and Admissions to improve our approach to administering Dual enrollment and better defining our K-12 partnership strategy.
- We are also undertaking a Graduate and professional enrollment strategic planning process, linked to the Academic Portfolio Review of graduate programs and the recent GA reallocation process.

5. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.

The University will be aligning our Academic Portfolio Review process with the BOR Ongoing Program Review pilot this fall. Previous reviews have been focused at the credential level. While we will continue to monitor all programs, given the BOR approach and upcoming OBIII Earning premium metrics, we will be taking a close look at our offerings at the four-digit CIP level. We anticipate adopting the OCHE thresholds for any future campus review of all programs. We have also requested an Undergraduate Program Health Check from EAB as a secondary review which will be available by mid-August. EAB will provide 4-digit CIP-level data comparing UM's program completions, growth, and market share against peer institutions, along with earnings-risk analysis tied to proposed federal ROI/gainful-employment thresholds and labor-market/AI-exposure alignment for our largest programs. The impacts of AI on student recruitment and program value propositions will also be evaluated, and may impact decisions for curriculum changes, or moratorium and termination.

6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.

- UM is currently undergoing its NWCCU mid-cycle review and will have a site-visit in October 2026.
- Occupational Therapy (OTD) and Physician Associate Studies (MPAS) are newer healthcare programs currently in provisional or early accreditation status.
- Alexander Blewett III School of Law (JD) holds accreditation from both the American Bar Association (ABA) and the American Association of Law Schools (AALS). Its next site visit is scheduled for Fall 2026.
- The Phyllis J. Washington College of Education has submitted a self-study and will have a site visit from the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) in February 2027.

7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).

The Strategic Operating Rhythm will continue as previously established, and the university's 2026-2027 Annual Playbook will be published in August. The 2026-2027 Academic Affairs Playbook will focus on these three broad projects:

- Draft College Operating Procedures under the university's Academic Unit Operating Policy
- Implement the redesigned Student Learning Assessment (SLA, formerly Program Assessment) in late fall 2026.
- Prepare for BOR on-going program review and federal earnings measures: UM's Academic Portfolio Review and Program Review procedures are being adapted to meet the proposed revisions. We will prepare curricular data strategies to address the revised NWCCU standards related to ROI and coming for Student Tuition and Transparency System (STATS) and Earnings Accountability.

Montana Technological University
Academic Priorities and Planning Statement
Academic Year 2026-2027

The Montana University System (MUS) Board of Regents (BOR) has requested additional context to support the decisions they make regarding “Requests to Plan” for new academic programs and research centers/institutes. **Toward that end, we ask that each institution submit a report addressing all questions listed below, not to exceed four pages, no later than 5 p.m. on Monday, August 3, 2026 to aking@montana.edu.**

Separately, please fill-in the Forthcoming Academic Proposals spreadsheet describing academic programs or research centers/institutes that you anticipate may proceed to the “Request to Plan” portion of the approval process in the next year. Please include contact information for a campus lead on each anticipated proposal. A proposal need not be listed in this report to proceed to the “Request to Plan” stage. However, listing proposals likely to move forward is an appreciated courtesy intended to encourage early communication and collaboration.

1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.

As put forth by Chancellor Johnny MacLean in his 2025 Convocation Address, Montana Technological University’s academic priorities are organized through the Four-Lane Highway Framework: Natural Resources; Infrastructure; Health and Wellbeing; and Leadership and Workforce Development. Together, these priorities advance Montana Tech’s purpose to rise to meet America’s emerging needs by preparing the next generation of STEM leaders, while supporting the institutional strategic plan, Deliberately Distinct, and its goals of student success, programs of distinction, and a healthy and vibrant campus ecosystem.

- **Natural Resources:** Strengthen nationally distinctive education and applied research in mining, critical minerals and materials, geology, metallurgy, environmental science and restoration, and energy systems. Priorities include interdisciplinary pathways, pilot- and demonstration-scale research, responsible resource development, and deeper partnerships with industry and national laboratories.
- **Infrastructure:** Expand workforce-aligned programs and applied learning in construction, civil infrastructure, smart manufacturing, automation, energy and grid systems, broadband, cybersecurity, cloud computing, and other cyber-physical systems. Montana Tech will connect Highlands College credentials with bachelor’s and graduate pathways wherever feasible.
- **Health and Wellbeing:** Strengthen rural and workforce health education, nursing and allied-health pathways, occupational safety and health, preventive wellness, and coordinated student-support systems. Academic and Student Affairs will jointly advance peer mentoring, advising, counseling, belonging, and experiential learning as contributors to persistence and completion.
- **Leadership and Workforce Development:** Launch the Montana Tech STEM Leadership Program and embed communication, teamwork, ethics, adaptability, entrepreneurship, AI literacy, and applied problem-solving across curricular and co-curricular experiences.

Across all four lanes, the University will prioritize hands-on and experiential learning, interdisciplinary collaboration, responsible use of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies, modernized laboratories and

learning environments, and measurable student outcomes. Research investments will emphasize areas where Montana Tech can produce distinctive national impact—especially energy, critical materials, environmental stewardship, infrastructure resilience, rural health, and workforce development—while creating meaningful undergraduate and graduate research opportunities.

2. Provide a brief description of the process used determine these academic priorities.

The priorities were developed through an iterative, evidence-informed process led by Academic Affairs and aligned with the Chancellor’s Four-Lane Highway framework and Montana Tech’s strategic plan. The process integrated institutional data, academic program review findings, enrollment and workforce trends, student-success indicators, research strengths, facilities and resource considerations, and state and national workforce needs.

Deans, department heads, faculty, Student Affairs, Highlands College, research leadership, enrollment and student-success staff, and other campus partners contributed unit-level roadmaps and proposals. These were synthesized with existing planning materials, including the Research Roadmap; natural resources, energy, computing, physics, health and wellness, leadership, Student Affairs, and Highlands College roadmaps; and the work of the Artificial Intelligence Working Group. Industry partners, alumni, community organizations, state agencies, the Montana University System, and national laboratory collaborators also informed priorities through advisory groups, partnership discussions, workforce feedback, and sponsored-project development.

Proposed academic initiatives continue through established shared-governance and approval processes, including departmental review, the Curriculum Review Committee, Faculty Senate, institutional leadership, and, when required, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education and Board of Regents. Implementation priorities are then assessed for mission fit, demonstrated demand, student benefit, academic quality, available expertise, facilities, sustainable funding, and measurable contribution to strategic-plan indicators.

3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.

During 2026-2027, Montana Tech will focus first on implementing recently approved energy programs: the Undergraduate Certificate in Nuclear Energy, the M.S. in Nuclear Energy, and the Ph.D. in Energy Engineering and Science. These programs directly advance the Natural Resources and Infrastructure lanes by connecting the University’s historic strengths in engineering, energy, materials, and resource systems with emerging needs in nuclear power, grid reliability, energy conversion, subsurface systems, and critical-material supply chains. Curriculum, faculty expertise, simulation-based learning, internships, and graduate research will be strengthened through the University’s formal partnership with Idaho National Laboratory and collaboration with other academic and industry partners.

Additional program development will proceed selectively and subject to demand and resource analysis. Near-term opportunities include a B.S. in Environmental Science; a flexible B.S. in General Science; standalone M.S. degrees in Civil and Mechanical Engineering; certificates or micro-credentials in data science, GIS, mineral processing, environmental management for mining operations, and AI-related fields; smart manufacturing and automation programming; revised construction and civil engineering technology pathways; and workforce credentials in broadband, heavy equipment, and infrastructure technologies. In health and wellbeing, the

University will explore interdisciplinary wellness programming, graduate pathways in occupational health, nursing and nursing education, and paramedic education.

The University also intends to launch the Montana Tech STEM Leadership Program, including a pilot cohort, leadership seminars, mentorship, interdisciplinary projects, and community engagement. Research development will emphasize energy and critical materials, environmentally responsible extraction and restoration, infrastructure resilience, applied AI and data systems, and rural health. Collectively, these initiatives will expand graduate education, experiential learning, externally supported research, and pathways into high-demand technical professions.

4. Provide a description outlining how program modality, student population served, and campus partnerships factor into new academic or research programming.

Modality decisions will be made program by program, based on learning outcomes, laboratory and field requirements, student demand, access, and instructional quality. Programs that depend on specialized equipment, clinical practice, fieldwork, simulation, or team-based applied learning will remain primarily in person. Online, hybrid, evening, summer, and intersession delivery will be expanded where it improves access without weakening experiential learning. Stackable certificates and micro-credentials will provide flexible entry points, while selected graduate and professional programs may use hybrid or online delivery to serve working adults and place-bound learners across Montana.

New programming is intended to serve traditional undergraduates, transfer students, graduate students, adult learners, current employees, veterans, rural and first-generation students, dual-enrollment students, and learners seeking rapid reskilling. Clear pathways between Highlands College and four-year programs will allow students to move from short-term credentials and associate degrees into bachelor's and graduate study. Flexible general-science, data science, GIS, leadership, and energy credentials will also enable students in multiple majors to add workforce-relevant expertise without extending time to degree unnecessarily.

Partnerships are central to both curriculum design and delivery. Academic departments, Highlands College, Student Affairs, Career Services, Athletics, research centers, and the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology will continue to collaborate across the four lanes. External partners—including Idaho National Laboratory, Montana State University, employers, healthcare providers, K-12 schools, community organizations, government agencies, and professional associations—will contribute specialized instruction, internships and clinical placements, applied research questions, equipment and facilities, advisory input, mentorship, and sponsored projects. These partnerships will help Montana Tech scale expertise responsibly and keep new offerings closely aligned with workforce and community needs.

5. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.

Montana Tech has not identified a predetermined list of programs for termination in 2026-2027. The University will, however, apply greater discipline to proposals and existing offerings that fall outside the Four-Lane Roadmap, duplicate other programs without a clear market or mission rationale, have persistently low enrollment or completion, rely on unsustainable instructional arrangements, or cannot demonstrate sufficient student and workforce benefit.

Resources may be redirected from low-demand course rotations, redundant concentrations, outdated curricular content, and stand-alone initiatives that can be integrated more effectively into interdisciplinary degrees, certificates, or shared service models. The University will generally defer new programs that require substantial permanent resources before demand, faculty capacity, facilities, and external support are established. Where a program shows continuing weakness (as measured by our Deans' Productivity Report), academic program review will be used to determine whether the appropriate response is revitalization, consolidation, temporary moratorium, teach-out, or termination.

Any disinvestment decision will follow faculty governance, collective bargaining obligations, Board of Regents policy, accreditation requirements, and appropriate student-protection and teach-out processes. The intent is to focus limited resources on programs of distinction and high-impact student pathways while preserving access to foundational disciplines that are essential to Montana Tech's STEM mission.

6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.

Montana Tech remains institutionally accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). During 2025-2026, the University prepared and submitted an Ad Hoc Report and hosted an NWCCU peer-evaluator visit in April 2026. The review addressed three recommendations from the Spring 2024 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness: implementing a systematic evaluation and planning process to inform effectiveness and resource allocation; implementing an effective system for assessing learning quality in all programs; and making disaggregated student-achievement data available and documenting its use in strategy and resource decisions. This work built on the Spring 2025 Ad Hoc Report addressing mission-fulfillment goals and published-information review.

In 2026-2027, Montana Tech will respond to any Commission guidance arising from the 2026 review and prepare for the Spring 2027 Mid-Cycle Review, which includes continued attention to the use of assessment results to improve student learning. The University will continue implementing its institutional-effectiveness framework, refining strategic-plan indicators and dashboards, documenting resource-allocation decisions, publishing disaggregated student-achievement data, and strengthening assessment of program learning outcomes.

Academic program review will be a major component of this work. Revised program-review processes, templates, training, and Canvas-based resources will support the next review cycle, with program submissions scheduled during Fall 2026. Montana Tech will also continue supporting discipline-specific accreditation and approval activities in engineering, nursing, occupational safety and health, business, and other professionally accredited or regulated programs.

7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).

The primary strategic-planning activity for 2026-2027 will be implementation and operationalization of Deliberately Distinct rather than wholesale revision of the strategic plan. Academic Affairs will translate the Four-Lane Roadmap into sequenced initiatives, responsible leads, resource requirements, timelines, and measurable outcomes. Annual unit plans, budget development, academic program review, enrollment

planning, facilities priorities, research development, fundraising, and partnership activity will be increasingly aligned with the four lanes and the strategic-plan goals of student success, programs of distinction, and a healthy and vibrant campus ecosystem.

The University will continue refining its institutional indicators for enrollment, retention and persistence, degree completion, experiential learning, academic quality, workforce outcomes, research impact, partnerships, and campus climate. Data will be reviewed through the institutional-effectiveness structure and used to identify progress, gaps, and resource tradeoffs. Particular attention will be given to advising reform, coordinated student-success services, AI capacity and governance, implementation of new energy and leadership programs, and development of the facilities and external partnerships required to support applied learning and research.

Planning during the year will also establish a disciplined annual review cycle: assess outcomes, confirm or revise priorities, align budgets and fundraising, and report progress to campus constituencies and the Montana University System. This cycle will allow Montana Tech to adapt the roadmap as workforce conditions, enrollment patterns, technologies, and partnership opportunities evolve while maintaining a clear and stable institutional direction.

The University of Montana Western

ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT

Academic Year 2026-2027

The Montana University System (MUS) Board of Regents (BOR) has requested additional context to support the decisions they make regarding “Requests to Plan” for new academic programs and research centers/institutes. **Toward that end, we ask that each institution submit a report addressing all questions listed below, not to exceed four pages, no later than 5 p.m. on Monday, August 3, 2026 to aking@montana.edu.**

Separately, please fill-in the Forthcoming Academic Proposals spreadsheet describing academic programs or research centers/institutes that you anticipate may proceed to the “Request to Plan” portion of the approval process in the next year. Please include contact information for a campus lead on each anticipated proposal. A proposal need not be listed in this report to proceed to the “Request to Plan” stage. However, listing proposals likely to move forward is an appreciated courtesy intended to encourage early communication and collaboration.

1. **Provide a high-level overview of your institution’s current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.**

As a regional comprehensive university, the University of Montana Western (UMW) is tasked with providing “comprehensive education across the certificate, associate, and baccalaureate level in academic and professional program areas of need within the state and ... region”, to provide this comprehensive education, UMW is committed to continuing its delivery of a strong liberal arts foundation alongside a growing range of academic and professional programs, in fulfillment of the charge to “contribute to economic development, social and cultural enhancement, and civic engagement” ([MT BOR policy 219.1](#)). As the United States increasingly sees colleges and universities reducing available programs, thereby limiting student choice and, ultimately, their opportunities for personal as well as professional growth, it is UMW’s goal to remain invested in a broad range of academic options for the benefit of our students (many of whom already enter the university underprepared and with limited previous opportunities), their communities, and the region more broadly.

As part of that investment and our ongoing purpose to develop lifelong learners that serve the public good as teachers, researchers, artists, entrepreneurs, agricultural leaders, healthcare professionals, environmental stewards, and as citizens, UMW will use AY 2026-27 to evaluate each of our current program offerings with the aim of ensuring they are carefully aligned with our newly adopted strategic plan. By design, this will ensure our programs will both fulfill our role as a regional comprehensive and provide opportunities for our students to undergo transformative, intellectual and personal growth.

2. Provide a brief description of the process used determine these academic priorities.

Near the end of the 2025-2026 academic year, our faculty voted to eliminate our leadership model of employing four academic division chairs. We now operate in a system where each of our ten academic departments are coordinated by a department chair (or, in some cases, a team of program chairs). The Provost's Office works directly with the department and program chairs to determine UMW's academic priorities for the year. This structure is intentionally designed to support the organic development of priorities from the ground up, encouraging input and innovation from faculty and other academic units rather than relying solely on top-down directives. Such an approach ensures that strategic initiatives are informed by the university's own subject matter experts and their advisors and contacts in their fields, fostering a more informed, responsive, and sustainable planning process for addressing academic opportunities, emerging challenges, and student needs. The guiding document of this collaborative decision-making is the 2026-2033 UMW Strategic plan.

3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.

- a. The Department of Business and Technology is proposing a 90-credit Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) degree. It advances the University of Montana Western's academic priorities by providing an affordable, accelerated pathway for students who have already earned an Associate of Applied Science degree to complete a bachelor's degree without repeating technical coursework. By recognizing prior learning, the BAS allows students to enter or advance in the workforce more quickly while reducing the time, tuition costs, and student loan debt typically associated with a traditional 120-credit bachelor's degree. This streamlined degree pathway expands educational opportunities for place-bound, rural, first-generation, and working adult students, strengthens transfer partnerships, and equips graduates with the leadership, communication, and problem-solving skills employers need. The result is a highly skilled workforce, greater educational attainment, and increased economic opportunity for students and Montana communities alike.
- b. UMW is in the early stages of planning a certificate in construction and design that helps support UMW role in the MUS as a regional comprehensive university by meeting local needs in workforce development. It is likely that this certificate would exist within the Department of Business and Technology, but it may also be an interdisciplinary program that spans multiple departments.
- c. The Department of Fine Arts plans to develop a new Minor in Media Arts. This initiative has been under discussion for more than two years, and they anticipate beginning the Intent to Plan process during the coming academic year while developing new courses for inclusion in the catalog. The proposed minor would complement the Bank of Commerce Performing Arts Series, provide additional opportunities for students interested in integrated digital arts, and support the continued development of the Film Acting Intensive that we initiated last summer. The curriculum would emphasize project-based learning and culminate in an annual public showcase of student media work. There is also

potential for collaboration with the Fine Arts Gallery using recently acquired projection technology for immersive installations as gallery programming develops.

- d. The Department of Health and Human Performance is in the early stages of pursuing a Certificate in Strength & Conditioning to replace the current minor. Their intent is to earn accreditation through the National Strength and Conditioning Association for the program which will allow students the opportunity to sit for the NSCA's Certified Strength & Conditioning Specialist credentialing exam. The HHP department has had students successfully earning the credential over the past few years. However, beginning in 2030 their program must be accredited for graduates to attempt the exam. They have not identified any other Montana institutions seeking accreditation, so they believe a certificate is the correct pathway to make the offerings available to post-baccalaureate students in addition to UMW's undergraduates. The certificate will also be accompanied by a program fee to support administrative costs of the program (NSCA fees, faculty administrative duties). The program will continue to be offered exclusively through face-to-face course offerings.
- e. The Mathematics Department is in the early stages of developing a Center for Machine Learning and Mathematical Modeling. The mission of this center will be to develop professional opportunities related to machine learning and mathematical modeling in the regional workforce. An organization that provides consulting services in mathematical and statistical modeling will be embedded within the proposed center. This organization will offer its services on a contract basis to the entities within the public and private sectors that need statistical and mathematical expertise. In doing so, it will provide opportunities for undergraduate students to participate in professional work as part of their capstone experiences associated with their degree. Additionally, it will provide opportunities for recent graduates to begin their careers assuming a more prominent role in the mathematical and statistical modeling projects taking place at the center. Not only would this give students and recent graduates a valuable opportunity to jumpstart their careers, but it would also dramatically increase the depth of professional experience in mathematics and statistics for our future mathematics teachers.
- f. Academic departments and programs within the Humanities & Social Sciences are collaborating to reenvision the Interdisciplinary Studies major. This program already provides a flexible pathway to graduation for military students, transfer students, and any student who wants a custom degree path. They are working to strengthen the academic rigor of the degree while simultaneously reducing the cost and effort currently required to administer and assess the degree. They hope these changes can also spur on collaboration with both the General Education and Honors programs.
- g. The Biology Department, in conjunction with the Health Careers Advising Committee (representatives from biology, kinesiology, psychology, and equine science) intends to explore the possibility of developing an Associate of Science in Pre-Nursing and Health Sciences. We think such a degree pathway will help better inform and credential students intending to transfer to specific nursing programs in Montana and will aid in recruiting students that are interested in health sciences but may not be sure about BS/BA pathways in biology, kinesiology, or psychology

4. Provide a description outlining how program modality, student population served, and campus partnerships factor into new academic or research programming.

When developing new academic or research programming, UMW carefully considers program modality, the student populations served—including Montana residents, rural and place-bound students, first-generation students, and adult learners—and potential campus partnerships with local, state, and federal partners. Special attention is paid to alignment with experiential learning principles and the ability to effectively implement the Experience One model. UMW's faculty and their professional contacts also provide important guidance and insight as leaders in the curriculum process, further supporting alignment of academic development and workforce preparation with the needs of Montana and beyond.

5. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.

- a. The Department of History, Philosophy, and Social Sciences has decided to propose placing its Constitutional Studies minor on moratorium in Fall 2026. This program was conceived to fill two roles at Montana Western: first, as part of the content preparation for Social Studies Broadfield (secondary education) majors; and second, as a path to prepare students for law school. The Education Division placed the Social Studies Broadfield on moratorium beginning in AY 2022-23. From 2004 – 2020, HPSS has placed 16 students into law school, since 2020 that number has been zero. There is no longer sufficient need to justify the continuation of the program.
- b. In response to proposed updates to BOR policy 303.3 (Program Review), UMW will be carefully monitoring the performance of all its academic programs and developing plans for strengthening and supporting them in alignment with its newly adopted strategic plan.
- c. UMW will take a careful look at existing centers to determine if all of them are still aligned with the university mission and strategic plan and that they are still actively operating. This could result in a decision to place one or more centers on moratorium.

6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.

UMW underwent its seven-year accreditation review in Spring 2026. Throughout the 2026-2027 academic year, we will begin reviewing and addressing any recommendations that come out of the formal evaluation report.

7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).

At the end of the 2025-2026 academic year, UMW adopted its new strategic plan for 2026-2033. We believe this plan is strongly aligned with the priorities of the MUS, and it goes far in supporting our role as a regional comprehensive university within the MUS. During the 2026-2027 academic year, our academic and operational departments will begin aggressively building and pursuing action plans that will enable us to start achieving the goals established by our new plan.

Helena College

ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND PLANNING STATEMENT

Academic Year 2026-2027

1. Provide a high-level overview of your institution's current academic priorities (instruction and research), with a focus on how those priorities fit the institutional mission and current strategic plan.

Helena College is focused on supporting all existing academic programs and new programs currently in development to ensure they meet the needs of the students, the community, and affiliated industry partners.

Helena College is prioritizing new academic programs that lead to in-demand careers and that require a certificate or degree and licensure, in addition to academic programs that aren't already offered at another Montana college or university. An emphasis on programs that align with courses offered at Helena College and available resources, including space, will ensure that the College continues to fulfill its mission in assisting learners in achieving their educational and career goals while aligning with the guiding principles outlined in the [strategic plan](#).

Additional academic priorities include continued collaboration with affiliate partners to create seamless transfer opportunities (and possibly shared academic programs) for Montana students; a continued exploration of micro credentials and how they can be used to benefit Montana students and some Helena College programs; and continued partnerships and collaboration with K12 partners to better serve our students and our community.

2. Provide a brief description of the process used to determine these academic priorities.

Academic priorities are determined in collaboration with Helena College faculty and staff, academic program advisory councils, and with the College's community and industry partners. Data is used to assess both existing programs and to evaluate the need for new programs. Existing programs are fully reviewed every five years to ensure program productivity and financial stability. Programs that need more frequent review based on data are reviewed every 2-3 years to ensure they meet their intended outcomes.

3. Provide a description highlighting new academic or research programing that your institution hopes to pursue in the coming year, with a focus on how those new programs will support your academic priorities.

Cosmetology:

Barber program: This program will expand workforce-focused career and technical education opportunities and meet growing industry demand for licensed barbers. Barbering complements existing cosmetology offerings while providing students with an additional pathway to earn an industry-recognized credential and enter the workforce. By increasing access to hands-on training that leads to employment and potential business ownership, the Barbering program supports the College's priorities of workforce development, student success, and responsiveness to community and employer needs.

Nursing:

CNA Course: A 4-credit course with integrated Lab and clinical experiences will be developed as the next step in a pathway of healthcare opportunities after our recent roll out of the Basic Life Support certification course. The CNA course will follow the DPHHS Core Curriculum as required by the Quality Assurance Division of the Nurse Aide Registry and will include a minimum of 75 clock hours of training and 16 hours of supervised practical training.

LPN – RN Bridge Program: A 39 credit, 3 semester ASN designed for the LPN with an unencumbered MT LPN license who has worked at least 2000 hours as an LPN. The program will be a standalone cohort of LPN Bridge students with a virtual blended focused curriculum including online didactics, in person labs, and clinicals arranged in the home community of the student.

4. Provide a description outlining how program modality, student population served, and campus partnerships factor into new academic or research programming.

Cosmetology:

The Barbering Program will be delivered through in-person instruction and hands-on clinical training. It will serve traditional students, adult learners, and career changers seeking a direct pathway to licensure and employment. The program leverages existing cosmetology resources and partnerships with student services, workforce programs, and industry employers to support student success and meet regional workforce needs.

Nursing:

CNA Course: This credential provides employment opportunities to students interested in a career as a CNA, foundational experience for students who wish to pursue additional healthcare education, and an opportunity to work in a highly employable field during further college education. There has been a request from high schools in the communities and surrounding rural areas to offer this opportunity to students and interest from multiple employers to work with Education Design Labs to develop aspects of the curriculum to support their needs.

LPN to RN Bridge: There have been many inquiries regarding this opportunity from both our own former LPN students and LPNs who have attended other programs. Multiple healthcare employers have expressed support for creating this program to continue workforce development. With only one other program in the state, there is a need to expand this opportunity.

5. If/where applicable, provide a high-level overview of areas that will be somewhat less prioritized, including any areas in which your institution will consider disinvestment, moratorium, and/or termination.

We do not currently have plans to divest from, put into moratorium, or terminate any programs during this academic year.

6. Briefly describe any accreditation activities completed over the past year (e.g. reports submitted, responses received, accreditor recommendations) and accreditation activities planned for the upcoming year.

NWCCU:

In Fall 2025, Helena College submitted an ad hoc report in response to a recommendation regarding Standard 2.A.4 - *Develop, document, and implement structures for decision making that considers feedback from existing governance groups consisting of faculty, staff, administrators, and students.* The processes documented in this ad hoc report were reviewed and approved by the commission at their January 2026 meeting. In February 2026, Helena College received official notification from NWCCU that recommendation was now considered fulfilled and no further action was required.

In Spring 2026, Helena College submitted an additional ad hoc report in response to three recommendations from the Spring 2024 EIE.

1. Implement an institutional-level assessment process that informs operational planning, allowing for effective resource allocation to enhance student learning and achievement (2020 Standard(s) 1.B.1)
2. Expand assessment beyond the course level, to include program and institutional outcomes that evaluate and demonstrate the quality of learning and use the results to inform continuous improvement of student learning outcomes. (2020 Standard(s) 1.C.5;1.C.6;1.C.7)
3. Widely publish identified disaggregated indicators of student achievement and those of peer institutions and demonstrate the use of the data to inform planning, decision-making and allocation of resources. (2020 Standard(s) 1.D.2;1.D.3)

The ad hoc report was combined with a virtual visit from a team of evaluators, which was reviewed by the commission at the July 2026 meeting. We are currently awaiting a response from NWCCU.

In July, we received notification from NWCCU that our visit schedule is being adjusted to align with the new 8-year cycle which has been recently approved. Our next accreditation activity will be our mid-cycle visit in Spring 2028.

ACEN:

Helena College's Nursing program submitted a substantive change request for a new Program Director, which was approved. An annual report outlining program capacity, structure, design, faculty, curriculum details, and data such as capacity and retention was submitted and received full approval.

ACOTE:

Helena College's OTA program continues to make progress in initial accreditation through the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE). The program successfully submitted its Candidacy Application in April 2026 and anticipates a response by August 2026. Upon approval of candidacy, the program will proceed with the next required accreditation steps, including

implementation of the approved curriculum and preparation for the on-site evaluation. The program remains on track with its planned accreditation timeline and continues to work closely with institutional leadership and community partners to ensure a successful program launch and compliance with all accreditation requirements.

7. Briefly describe any strategic planning activities anticipated to occur in the coming year (e.g. revision of your campus strategic plan).

Helena College has been selected to participate in Gardner Institute's Sensemaking and Strategic Prioritization project, offered in partnership with NWCCU and with support from the Gates Foundation. The project is meant to help institutions understand their existing structures, practices, and culture in order to focus on priorities that most directly improve student success outcomes by following a data-informed and collaborative process aligned with our mission.

As a part of this project, the Gardner Institute will lead the college in the following activities:

- Two established institutional assessment tools are integrated into one survey to understand campus-wide perceptions of our current student success capacities and change readiness.
 - The Institutional Transformation Assessment (ITA) examines strengths and opportunities across key areas of student success (e.g., pathways, advising, teaching and learning, policy, leadership, culture).
 - The Readiness, Willingness, and Ability (RWA) survey captures the campus's readiness and willingness to act, ensuring plans are feasible and supported.
- Review of institutional strategic documents, such as strategic plan and accreditation reaffirmation reports.
- Review of institutional data, such as IPEDS retention and graduation rates, and institution retention and gateway course completion
- Two-day sensemaking and strategic prioritization session with campus

The following deliverables will support the college in its strategic planning efforts:

- Transformation Roadmap with priorities, milestones, and measures
- Survey summaries (ITA & RWA) for leadership and stakeholder sharing
- Concise set of institutional priorities tailored to our campus context

The college expects to use the results of this project to inform strategic planning in 2027.