

## REQUEST TO PLAN MEMORANDUM

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**DATE:** August 31, 2026

**TO:** Chief Academic Officers, Montana University System

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

**RE:** September 2026 Request to Plan Proposals

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The campuses of the Montana University System have proposed new academic programs or changes under the Request to Plan process authorized by the Montana Board of Regents. The proposals are being sent to you for your review and approval. If you have concerns about a particular proposal, you should share those concerns with your colleagues at that institution and try to come to some understanding. If you cannot resolve your concerns, raise them at the Chief Academic Officer's conference call Wednesday, September 2nd. Issues not resolved at that meeting should be submitted in writing to OCHE by noon on Friday, September 4, 2026. If no concerns are received, OCHE will assume that the proposals have your approval.

### **Requests to Plan**

#### **University of Montana Missoula:**

- Request to plan Studio Art and Media Arts Concentrations in the Baccalaureate and Graduate Art Degrees  
[Item #226-1001-R0926](#)
- Request to plan the Center for Transformative Health, Resilience, Innovation, Vitality and Engagement (THRIVE)  
[Item #226-1002-R0926](#)

**Montana University System**  
**REQUEST TO PLAN FORM – ACADEMIC PROGRAM**

**ITEM 226-1001-R0926**

**September 2026**

**Request to Plan Studio Art and Media Arts Concentrations in the Baccalaureate and Graduate Art Degrees**

|                                                                    |                                                                                            |                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Program Title:                                                     | <b>Bachelor of Fine Arts in Art (BFA):<br/>Concentrations in Studio Art and Media Arts</b> | Planned 6-digit CIP code:<br><b>50.0702</b>              |
|                                                                    | <b>Masters of Fine Arts in Art (MFA):<br/>Concentrations in Studio Art and Media Arts</b>  |                                                          |
| Campus, School/Department:                                         | <b>University of Montana – Missoula, School of<br/>Art and Game Design</b>                 | Expected Final Submission Date: <b>December<br/>2026</b> |
| Contact Name/Info: <b>Steve Krutek / steven.krutek@mso.umt.edu</b> |                                                                                            |                                                          |

This form is meant to increase communication, collaboration, and problem-solving opportunities throughout the MUS in the program/center/institute development process. The completed form should not exceed 2-3 pages. For more information regarding the program/center/institute approval process, please visit <http://mus.edu/che/arsa/academicproposals.asp>.

**1) Provide a brief description of the new program.**

The School of Art and Game Design is engaged in a comprehensive revision to the undergraduate and graduate curriculum in Art and Media Arts. The current BFA in Art and BFA in Media Arts will be consolidated into a single BFA in Art. The current MFA in Art and MFA in Media Arts will be consolidated into a single MFA in Art. Adding these concentrations in Studio Art and Media Arts to the consolidated degrees will allow us to continue to recruit students interested in creating art using the diverse forms and practices that encompass studio art and media arts while uniting the programs under a single shared foundation of practice and disciplinary knowledge as required by the accreditation standards of the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD).

**1.a. How many total credits will be required for the degree? How many credits in the major/minor?**

The Bachelor of Fine Arts is 120 credits. NASAD Standards require 60% to 65% of total course work to art or media arts, 10% to 15% to art history and analysis, and 25% to 35% to general studies which meet BOR standards for a Bachelor of Practice.

The Master of Fine Arts is 60 credits and is considered a terminal degree. NASAD Standards require that most of the curriculum (typically 60–70% or more) is dedicated directly to studio practice, critique, creation, and the development of a professional body of work in studio art or media arts. The remaining credits will be shared with graduate-level coursework in art history, critical theory, visual media, or related cognitive academic areas.

**2) Describe the need for the program. Specifically, how the program meets current student, state, and workforce demands. (Please cite sources).**

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The School of Art and Game Design currently maintains six separate degrees across two closely related fields: a BA and BFA in Art, a BA and BFA in Media Arts, an MFA in Art, and an MFA in Media Arts. This bifurcation of shared curriculum across parallel degree lines complicates advising, obscures the relationship between studio and digital practice for prospective students, and requires the school to maintain duplicative curricular infrastructure at a time of constrained resources.

Consolidating to one BFA and one MFA, each with Studio Art and Media Arts concentrations, preserves the disciplinary identity that students seek while unifying the programs under the shared foundation of practice and disciplinary knowledge. Students will continue to enter and graduate in a chosen area of practice. The concentration will appear on the transcript, so the credential remains legible to graduate programs and employers. In parallel, we will be revising the BA in Art to be our materials-based, on-campus BA and remove the online modality. The BA in Media Arts will move to an online-only modality and be exclusively offered to distance students.

Student demand is present but is currently distributed across degree lines in ways that understate program strength and aggregate student outcomes. Fall headcounts at UM Missoula over the last three years totaled 360 in 2023, 396 in 2024, and 366 in 2025 across Art, Media Arts, and Game Design and Interactive Media. Growth in Game Design and Interactive Media, from 19 in Fall 2023 to 54 in Fall 2025, indicates rising interest in technologically mediated creative practice, which the Media Arts concentration is designed to serve alongside the school's specialized game design work.

Workforce context supports both concentrations. The Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account, developed by the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis and reported by the Montana Arts Council, attributes approximately \$2.24 billion in value added and 16,540 jobs to Montana's arts and cultural sector in 2022. The Montana High Tech Business Alliance identifies Media Arts and Communications as one of eight sub sectors in its 2025 review of in demand Montana occupations, citing roles that require portfolio-based preparation in digital content creation, video, and design. Nationally, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects approximately 5,000 annual openings for special effects artists and animators through 2034, driven primarily by replacement demand, and reports a median annual wage of \$99,800 as of May 2024.

The same BLS projections analysis attributes slow growth in this occupation partly to generative AI's capacity to automate production tasks, which makes grounding in studio fundamentals a workforce asset rather than a legacy requirement. Housing both concentrations within a single degree and a single foundational core ensures that students in Media Arts develop the compositional judgment, material understanding, and critique practice of studio art alongside their technical training, and that students in Studio Art gain fluency with digital tools. These conditions favor graduates who combine durable creative judgment with current technical fluency, which is the intent of the concentration structure.

- Montana Arts Council, Creative Economy State Profile (NEA and BEA Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account data): [https://art.mt.gov/economic\\_development](https://art.mt.gov/economic_development)
- Montana High Tech Business Alliance, 31 Hot Montana Jobs for 2025: <https://www.mthightech.org/news/special-report-31-hot-montana-jobs-for-2025>

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- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, Special Effects Artists and Animators: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/arts-and-design/multimedia-artists-and-animators.htm>

**3) Describe how the program fits with the institutional mission, strategic plan, and the existing MUS and institutional portfolios-(refer to the most recent institutional Academic Priorities and Planning Statement. <https://www.mus.edu/che/arsa/AcademicPlanningAndPriorities/academic-priorities.html>).**

The proposed structure aligns directly with UM's Priorities for Action. Consolidating four degrees into two with clearly named concentrations simplifies advising, shortens time to a declared pathway, and reduces the risk that students accumulate credits in the wrong degree line before identifying their focus. These are student success and retention outcomes, and they respond to the Academic Priorities and Planning Statement's emphasis on coherent, legible degree pathways and portfolio stewardship within existing resources.

The change also strengthens UM's portfolio. Rather than presenting prospective students with four adjacent and easily confused credentials, the school will present one undergraduate professional degree and one terminal graduate degree, each with two recognizable concentrations. This clarifies UM's distinct identity in visual and media arts and supports effective recruitment and marketing messaging.

Finally, the proposal advances institutional effectiveness and accreditation. A unified degree with concentrations permits shared program learning outcomes at the degree level with concentration specific outcomes nested beneath them, which improves assessment design and reporting under both NASAD standards and NWCCU expectations for meaningful, program level assessment of student learning and post-graduation outcomes.

**4) Review the MUS academic degree program inventory for similar, adjacent, and/or preparatory programs (<https://www.mus.edu/findaprogram/>).**

A review of the MUS academic degree program inventory identifies the closest adjacent programs at Montana State University Bozeman, which offers degrees in Art through the School of Art and in Film and Photography, including Integrated Lens Based Media. Comparable creative media offerings also exist at Montana State University Billings. The proposed change does not create a new program or expand UM's footprint. It consolidates existing UM degrees, so it reduces rather than increases apparent duplication within the system.

- a. Describe any opportunities for collaboration you have identified or initiated either within the institution or between MUS institutions (i.e. articulation, course-sharing academic programs and creating pathways between degrees). Include potential contacts and their institutional affiliation.**

Internal collaboration opportunities identified to date include the following:

- Continued shared coursework between the Media Arts concentration and the school's Game Design and Interactive Media curriculum, allowing students in each area to draw on the other's technical and studio courses without duplicating instruction.
- Coordination with the School of Journalism on production, documentary, and digital storytelling coursework where curricular overlap already exists.

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- Coordination with the School of Music, Theatre, and Dance on shared production, design, and performance media courses, and on collaborative student projects that draw across the College of the Arts and Media.

Between institutions, the school will initiate conversation with the MSU School of Art and the MSU School of Film and Photography regarding course sharing and student mobility, particularly for specialized upper division media production coursework that may be difficult for either campus to sustain independently.

**b. What are current enrollment numbers in similar programs for the last three academic years?**

The fall headcounts for both undergraduate programs at UM and MSU are:

UM Missoula

Art: Fall 2023: 170 | Fall 2024: 159 | Fall 2025: 152

Game Design/Interactive Media: Fall 2023: 19 | Fall 2024: 46 | Fall 2025: 54

Media Arts: Fall 2023: 171 | Fall 2024: 191 | Fall 2025: 160

MSU Bozeman

Art: Fall 2023: 323 | Fall 2024: 266 | Fall 2025: 270

Film and Photography: Fall 2023: 279 | Fall 2024: 259 | Fall 2025: 253

Integrated Lens Based Media: Fall 2023: 42 | Fall 2024: 50 | Fall 2025: 42

**c. Describe any significant new financial resources (faculty, staff, facilities, and/or curricula) needed to launch and sustain the program.**

Our new concentrations and additional courses will be delivered by current faculty using a rotating schedule of offerings to avoid the need of hiring additional faculty or of additional financial resources. Any new courses will comfortably fall within the skill set of our current faculty, thus reducing the need for remediation or additional study to instruct the students sufficiently.

Signature/Date

Flagship Provost\*:  3 August 2026

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**Flagship President\*:**



**6 August 2026**

\*Not applicable to the Community Colleges.

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**ITEM 226-1002-R0926**

**September 2026**

**Request to Plan the Center for Transformative Health, Resilience, Innovation, Vitality, and Engagement**

Center/Institute/Unit Title: **Center for Transformative Health, Resilience, Innovation, Vitality, and Engagement (THRIVE)**

Campus: **University of Montana-Missoula**

Expected Final  
Submission Date: **May 2026**

Contact Name/Info: **James Caringi, Ph.D., [james.caringi@umontana.edu](mailto:james.caringi@umontana.edu)**

This form is meant to increase communication, collaboration, and problem-solving opportunities throughout the MUS in the center/institute development process. The completed form should exceed 2-3 pages. For more information regarding the center/institute approval process, please visit <http://mus.edu/che/arsa/academicproposals.asp>.

**1) Provide a brief description of the new center/institute (unit).**

**Purpose:** THRIVE is a proposed interdisciplinary research center at the University of Montana focused on trauma and developmental adversity across the lifespan and on translating that research into measurable gains in health, organizational effectiveness, workforce well-being, and community resilience.

**Objectives:** THRIVE will (1) coordinate interdisciplinary research on trauma, adversity, and resilience; (2) advance implementation science, evaluation, and technical assistance; (3) strengthen competitiveness for external funding; (4) expand student research and community-engaged learning; and (5) support the behavioral- and public-health workforce.

**Anticipated activities:** Externally funded research; evaluation and technical-assistance contracts; pilot funding and grant development; graduate assistantships, fellowships, and mentored student research; and convening of university, community, Tribal, and agency partners.

**Structure:** Directed by James Caringi, Ph.D., reporting to the Dean of the College of Health; housed within the College of Health / School of Public and Community Health Sciences; and guided by an internal and external advisory council (see Question 4).

**2) Describe the need for the center/institute. Specifically, how the center/institute meets current student, state, and industry research or community engagement needs. (Please cite sources in an addendum to this document).**

Montana has among the nation's most severe behavioral-health and trauma-related burdens yet lacks coordinated infrastructure to translate its scientific strengths into practice.

**State and community need:** Montana's age-adjusted suicide rate was 26.8 per 100,000 in 2024 (USAFacts, 2026) and has ranked among the five highest nationally for three decades, first from 2019 to 2022 (Montana Free Press, 2024); youth 10-14 die at about three times the national rate. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), the Center's core focus, are common: about 69 percent of adults in Montana and neighboring Mountain West states reported at least one ACE ("Gender differences," 2026), and nationally American Indian/Alaska Native adults report four or more at 32.4 percent, the highest of any group (Swedo et al., 2023). Burdens fall hardest on rural and Tribal communities.

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**Workforce and access need:** Fifty of Montana's 56 counties are Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas, and about one-third of Montanans live in rural or frontier areas (Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, 2021). Meeting this need requires evidence-based, trauma-informed models and rigorous evaluation in rural and Tribal settings - the work THRIVE coordinates.

**Institutional and research need:** UM has nationally recognized strengths in population health, clinical and translational research, implementation science, and developmental adversity across the Center for Population Health Research (CPHR), the Montana Clinical and Translational Research Center (MCTRC), and the Developmental Adversity, Resilience, and Transformation (DART) Lab, but no center that integrates them to compete for large, multi-investigator awards and sustain community and partnerships.

**Student need:** Students have few structured opportunities for mentored, interdisciplinary, community-engaged research on trauma and resilience; THRIVE will expand assistantships, practica, doctoral fellowships, and community-based learning.

**3) Describe how the center/institute fits with the institutional mission, strategic plan, and the existing MUS and institutional portfolios (refer to the most recent institutional Academic Priorities and Planning Statement).**

**Mission and strategic fit:** THRIVE advances UM's mission as Montana's flagship, R1 research university and aligns with UM's strategic framework: the Annual Playbook objective to build partnerships and leverage research and economic development for community, state, and global needs; the Priorities for Action commitment to research and service; and the Office of Research and Creative Scholarship's Research Strategy Playbook priorities for interdisciplinary, externally funded research and sustained R1 status.

**Fit within the research portfolio:** Within UM's portfolio THRIVE occupies a distinct, coordinating position: CPHR contributes population-health research and data capacity, MCTRC clinical and translational infrastructure, and the DART Lab research on developmental adversity and resilience. THRIVE complements rather than duplicates them, providing the interdisciplinary layer that assembles cross-unit teams for larger, multi-investigator awards no single unit can lead, and likewise complements related efforts across the MUS and region.

**Contribution to academic programs:** THRIVE contributes to graduate and undergraduate education through mentored research, assistantships, doctoral fellowships, practica, and community-engaged coursework with the School of Public and Community Health Sciences, the College of Health, and affiliated departments.

**4) Describe any opportunities for collaboration you have identified or initiated either within the institution or between MUS institutions (i.e. articulation, course-sharing, research collaboration). Include potential contacts and their institutional affiliation.**

THRIVE will strengthen collaboration within UM, across the MUS, and statewide, and expand regional and national partnerships. Committed collaborators are distinguished from those anticipated pending formal agreement.

**Within UM:** Faculty in the School of Public and Community Health Sciences, College of Health, CPHR, MCTRC, and the DART Lab, with psychology, social work, education, pharmacy, biomedical sciences, law, business, and forestry as projects warrant.

**Partnerships with College of Education centers:** Several Phyllis J. Washington College of Education units share THRIVE's mission. The National Native Children's Trauma Center (NNCTC), a National Child Traumatic Stress Network member providing trauma-focused healing and training for Native children, families, and communities, aligns directly with THRIVE's trauma, adversity, and Tribal focus; the Center for the Advancement of Positive Education (CAPE), the Montana Safe Schools Center (MSSC), and the Institute for Early Childhood Education add expertise in well-being, school-based behavioral health, and early childhood development.

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**Across the MUS:** THRIVE's principal MUS partner is Montana State University, the state's other flagship. Its counterpart, MSU's Center for American Indian and Rural Health Equity (CAIRHE) - a Board of Regents-designated state center and NIH-funded COBRE working on mental health, trauma, addiction and resilience, and rural and American Indian health equity - closely complements THRIVE. As COBRE-model, community-based, Tribal-engaged centers they can collaborate rather than duplicate through joint multi-investigator grants; shared infrastructure and data-sharing under common governance and community-based participatory research protocols; coordinated Tribal engagement respecting sovereignty; and shared early-career training (e.g., CAIRHE's Promoting Indigenous Research Leadership program). More broadly, THRIVE will engage MSU's regional campuses, UM's affiliated regional and two-year colleges, and Montana's tribal colleges for student research pathways, articulation, and course-sharing.

**External and community partners:** Existing: The Resolve Program (UM-Providence Health). Anticipated: the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, healthcare systems, behavioral-health providers, state and local public-health agencies, educational institutions, and nonprofit and philanthropic organizations. Engagement with Tribal Nations and organizations will proceed only through invitation and appropriate data-governance and sovereignty agreements.

**National collaborators:** National leaders in trauma and ACE research, including Drs. Martin Teicher and Kyoko Ohashi (McLean Hospital / Harvard Medical School) and Drs. Robert Anda and David Brown (public health and ACE research) and others.

**Advisory council:** An advisory council of university faculty, community and agency partners, and, by invitation, Tribal representatives, consistent with BOR Policy 218. Advisory council members have not been finalized, however the previously mentioned experts are likely to be invited to join as advisors.

**5) Describe any significant new financial resources (staff and/or facilities) needed to launch and sustain the center/institute. How do you anticipate supporting this new center/institute/unit**

THRIVE will launch primarily by leveraging existing University infrastructure, expertise, and active funding, with modest incremental resources rather than significant new appropriations; consistent with Board of Regents expectations, the estimates below reflect actual anticipated costs.

**First-year resources:** Initial activities build on existing DART Lab resources - currently funded by one primary and one secondary committed private donor - and coordination with CPHR and MCTRC. DART Lab personnel are also supported through the Resolve Program (UM-Providence), MCTRC, and CPHR.

**Continuing resources and sustainability:** Ongoing support will come from externally funded research grants, state and federal contracts, foundation and philanthropic support, evaluation and technical-assistance activities, and facilities-and-administrative (indirect) cost recovery. The director, James Caringi, Ph.D., has a nearly twenty-year record of federal funding at UM.

**Value of center status:** Center designation lets THRIVE serve as the institutional home for multi-investigator proposals, hold and coordinate contracts and subawards, provide a single point of contact for external and Tribal partners, and sustain shared infrastructure across funding cycles - positioning UM to compete for larger awards while building on existing investments.

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Signature/Date

Chief Research Officer:



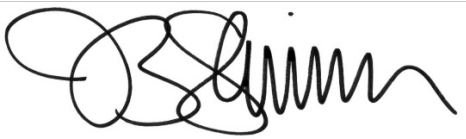
5 August 2026

Flagship Provost\*:



4 August 2026

Flagship President\*:



6 August 2026

\*Not applicable to the Community Colleges.

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**Addendum – References (Question 2)**

*Formatted in APA style (7th edition).*

Gender differences in the association between adverse childhood experiences and health risk behaviors in the Mountain West. (2026). *AJPM Focus*. Advance online publication. [https://www.ajpmfocus.org/article/S2773-0654\(26\)00027-1/fulltext](https://www.ajpmfocus.org/article/S2773-0654(26)00027-1/fulltext)

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Swedo, E. A., Aslam, M. V., Dahlberg, L. L., Niolon, P. H., Guinn, A. S., Simon, T. R., & Mercy, J. A. (2023). Prevalence of adverse childhood experiences among U.S. adults — Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2011–2020. *MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 72(26), 707–715. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7226a2>

USAFacts. (2026). *How many people die by suicide in Montana each year?* <https://usafacts.org/answers/how-many-people-die-by-suicide/state/montana/>