



August 5, 2014

To: Montana University System Board of Regents

From: Mary Ann George, Chair of Montana University System Staff Association

Dear Chairman Tuss, Vice-Chair Robinson, and Regents,

My name is Mary Ann George, Library Technician II at Helena College of The University of Montana. MUSSA (Montana University System Staff Association) recently held elections, and I was elected MUSSA Chair and Maria Mangold, Academic Advisor at the University of Montana, was elected Vice-Chair. We are replacing outgoing Chair, Christy Aamold, Risk Management and Safety Coordinator at Montana State University Billings, and Vice-Chair, Shana Wold, Administrative Assistant to the AES Director at Montana State University.

On behalf of the MUSSA organization, we would like to thank you for your time and attention at our breakfast meeting on Wednesday, May 21st in Havre.

At our May 2013 meeting with the Regents in Great Falls, MUSSA was tasked with surveying classified staff's perspective to identify best practices in the area of student success. MUSSA conducted a survey of the MUS classified staff in May 2014. The report we presented to you in May 2014 provided the most common observations and concerns of all campuses that responded to our survey request. Recapping the information MUSSA provided to the Regents in Havre, MUSSA defined student success, discussed what things have a positive impact on student success, what obstacles to success students face, and listed some areas upon which higher education could focus in order to have a positive impact on student success. Those focus areas are:

- Continue to permeate a culture of "putting the students first."
- Educate frontline staff and faculty, who are often the first to direct struggling students to helpful resources regarding advising, mentoring, tutoring, financial assistance and education, mental health support services, career services, college and life management, and campus and community engagement.
- Provide additional frontline staff.
- Provide strong certificate and two-year degrees that are very marketable in our communities and continue development of articulation agreements with four-year schools.
- Improve relationships with and assistance to local high school teachers and counselors.
- Provide coordinated student services.

MUSSA's take-away from the meeting was how clearly our observations from campus to campus were also identified as issues by the Regents! MUSSA members' discussion quickly focused on the area of advising, and we heard what Regents said regarding the emphasis you, too, place on advising. To that end, MUSSA is pursuing ways to improve advising state-wide through the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) state conference to be held in Missoula on April 8-9, 2015. Although the logistics are still being planned, the conference's title and theme will include "Best Practices." MUSSA will work with the conference planning committee members and faculty development coordinators to encourage staff and faculty participation at the NACADA conference. MUSSA will also disseminate advising "Best Practices" identified at that conference to all MUS campuses and to the Regents. We welcome your attendance at this conference. Please anticipate a "save the date" invitation.

We don't yet know what the Regents took away from this meeting. What are your thoughts on how we, as classified staff, can help you improve student success? How can MUSSA assist in the goals and future of higher education in Montana? Besides working with NACADA to improve Advising, what other research or follow-up would help the Regents? What further MUSSA input would the Regents find appropriate and valuable? MUSSA can provide perspective and thoughts at the staff level from all eight higher education institutions and would welcome the opportunity to assist you.

We look forward to hearing from each of you with feedback and thoughts on how we can move forward together.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann George, MUSSA Chair
Maria Mangold, MUSSA Vice-Chair