

# MUS 2-YEAR COMMISSION: FINAL REPORT TO THE 2021 LEGISLATURE

## THE COMMISSION'S WORK

The MUS 2-Year Commission was created by [House Bill 754](#) (Vinton; 2019) and is technically called the Montana University System 2-Year Restructuring Review Commission. The restructuring refers to the incorporation in 1995 of what were historically known as “vo-tech centers” into the Montana University System (MUS) and are now known by various names as 2-year campuses. See graphic on page 4.

The commission was tasked with reviewing the reasons for the 1995 restructure and considering whether a different structure might strengthen 2-year postsecondary education in Montana and, in particular, career and technical education (CTE).

At the beginning of the 2019-2020 interim, Montana’s economy was generally thriving, and unemployment was at a near record low with the main economic concern being a shortage of skilled workers. Strengthening workforce training and better aligning industry and education were central in many policy conversations. While much in our world and economy changed in the Spring of 2020 with COVID-19 and unemployment increased dramatically, in many ways the need for a well-aligned and nimble workforce development system is more vital than ever to ensure a strong Montana, and 2-year campuses will certainly play a central role.

The commission held seven meetings over the course of the interim, and it heard from representatives of Montana’s 2-year campuses as well as from the community and tribal colleges, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, the Department of Labor and Industry, the Montana Chamber of Commerce, and multiple industry sectors. After reviewing the [history of vocational education in Montana and the 1995 restructuring](#) and hearing from 2-year campus leaders, the commission pivoted from considering changes to the governance structure to examining ways to strengthen 2-year programs and especially CTE programs within the current structure. This pivot is reflected in the commission’s work and its findings and recommendations on pages 2-3.

This short report will focus on the commission’s findings and recommendations; for a full record of the commission’s work, including a list of commission members, links to documents

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and presentations, and meeting minutes and videos, please go to <https://leg.mt.gov/committees/other-groups/mus-2-year-commission/>.

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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When the findings (numbers) and recommendations (letters) below are not directed at a specific entity, the commission intends them to be directed at any of the potential policymakers and policy implementers with influence over 2-year postsecondary education in Montana.

- 1. Students and 2-year campuses typically do not receive much financial support in pursuing/offering shorter-duration credential and noncredit workforce training programs.**
  - a. Seek federal financial aid changes to allow Pell Grants and/or other forms of federal financial aid to support shorter-duration credential and noncredit workforce programs
  - b. Find a way to provide state support for shorter-duration credential and noncredit workforce programs; consider restructuring the funding model to incentivize community and 2-year colleges to establish non-credit workforce training programs and acknowledge nontraditional students who attend part time as well as lifelong learners
  
- 2. Postsecondary CTE programs often cost more to start and operate than non-CTE programs.**
  - a. Encourage investment in providing start-up funds for 2-year campuses for new CTE programs that demonstrate industry need and support
  - b. Provide more state support for higher-cost CTE programs at 2-year campuses
  
- 3. With a rapidly changing economy and workplace, alignment between education and industry is essential and requires ongoing focus.**
  - a. Encourage a sector partnership/industry alliance approach in aligning workforce and education to develop a skilled worker pipeline (like the Montana Photonics Industry Alliance); encourage the Department of Labor and Industry to utilize existing staff to support this effort; support industry recommendations for curriculum at K-12 and 2-year postsecondary programs
  - b. Promote work-based learning opportunities for students
  - c. Move to a postsecondary education system that includes and rewards credit and noncredit stackable, industry-recognized credentials, and other credentials, certificates, and degrees based on competency

or proficiency standards; work-based learning; prior learning assessment; and learning, teaching, and assessment strategies using multiple technologies

- d. Encourage the Board of Regents to afford 2-year campuses greater flexibility in terms of program creation and expansion

**4. Too few students are aware of or encouraged to pursue postsecondary CTE programs at 2-year campuses.**

- a. Continue and expand collaborative statewide outreach efforts like the [College and Career Readiness Portal](#) to increase postsecondary participation in associates degree programs, nondegree credential programs, and workforce training programs, including apprenticeship and military
- b. Consider the top four recommendations from the [Montana Chamber of Commerce Workforce Development Survey](#):
  - i. Incentivize school districts to emphasize all career pathways
  - ii. Require school districts to incorporate workforce readiness skills into curriculum
  - iii. Strengthen career advising in middle school and high school
  - iv. Require business and economics education in middle school and high school
- c. Request that the Board of Public Education (BPE) examine the school counselor-to-pupil ratio
- d. Request that the BPE explore ways in which K-12 career counseling can be strengthened (can the model shared by Billings Public School be replicated in a way that strengthens career counseling while preserving or even enhancing school counselors' ability to provide noncareer counseling services?)
- e. Encourage the industry to advertise, recruit, and hire graduates from 2-year institutions

**5. Coordination between K-12 and the MUS could be improved, especially regarding CTE.**

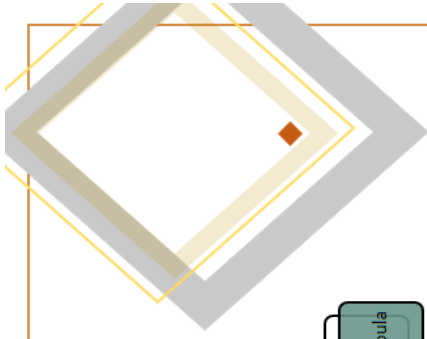
- a. Strengthen dual enrollment opportunities for high school students pursuing postsecondary CTE programs and certifications
- b. Highlight and continue efforts at coordination, especially those like the Perkins V effort led by the Commissioner of Higher Education in partnership with the Office of Public Instruction, the Department of Labor and Industry, the Department of Commerce, and multiple private industry partners

**6. Vibrant workforce development programs at 2-year campuses provide a valuable long-term benefit to individuals and the state of Montana as a whole.**

- a. Encourage appropriators (the Legislature, the Board of Regents, campuses) to view funding for workforce programs as an investment, “spending money to make/save money”

# Public Postsecondary Education in Montana: Structure, Relationship, and Governance

Prepared for the MUS 2-Year Commission by Pad McCracken, Legislative Research Analyst, August 2019 (revised April 2020)



"Flagship" 4-year research university  
Independent accreditation and budget

"Embedded" 2-year college  
Dependent accreditation and budget  
(Bitterroot College is in a sense twice-embedded)

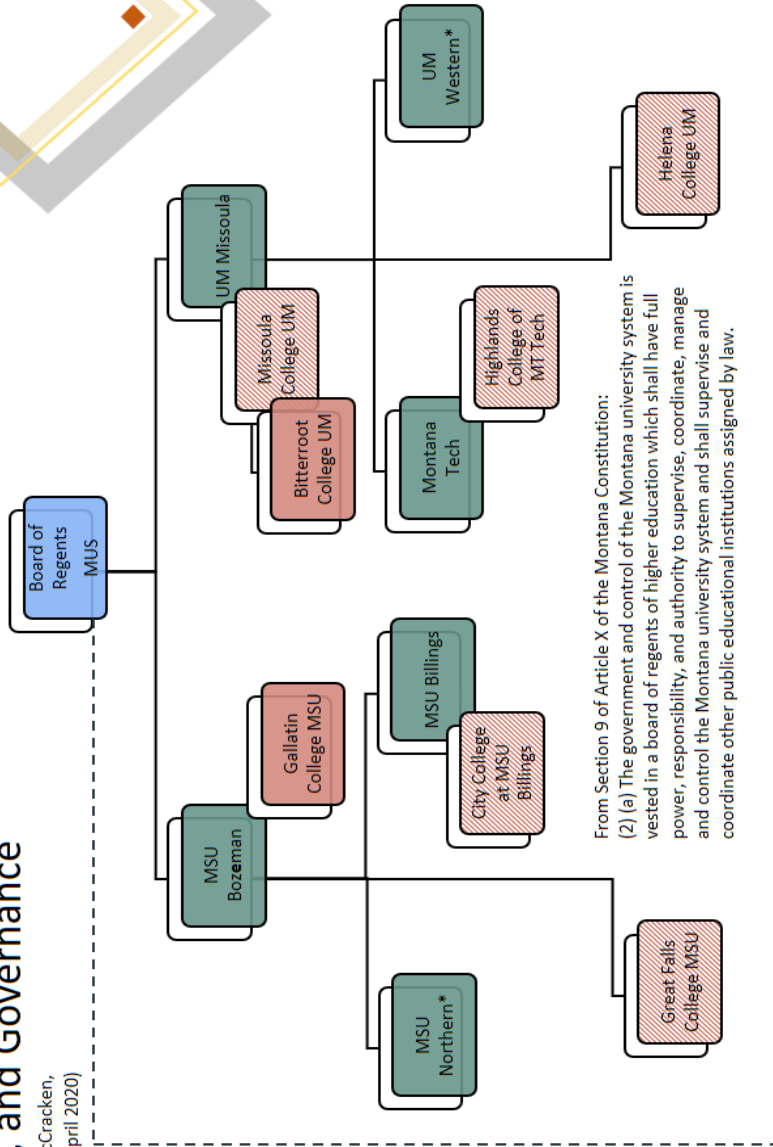
4-year regional/specialty university  
Independent accreditation and budget  
\* Northern and Western offer 2-year programs

"Embedded" 2-year college  
Dependent accreditation and budget

"Standalone" 2-year college  
Independent accreditation and budget

2-year community college  
Independent accreditation and budget  
Receives state funding outside MUS "lump"  
Supported by various local levies  
Governed by locally elected trustees under supervision and coordination of the regents

2- and 4-year tribally controlled college  
Independent accreditation and budget  
Receives state funding only through reimbursement for resident nonbeneficiary students pursuant to [20-25-428, MCA](#)



From Section 9 of Article X of the Montana Constitution:  
(2) (a) The government and control of the Montana university system is vested in a board of regents of higher education which shall have full power, responsibility, and authority to supervise, coordinate, manage and control the Montana university system and shall supervise and coordinate other public educational institutions assigned by law.

= historic vo-tech centers and statutory 1.5 mill levy on county (\$ to state general fund)

- Flathead Valley Community College
- Dawson Community College
- Miles Community College

- Blackfeet Community College
- Chief Dull Knife College
- Aaniih Nakoda College
- Fort Peck Community College
- Little Big Horn College
- Stone Child College
- Salish Kootenai College