



Education and Local Government Interim Committee

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60th Montana Legislature

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February 5, 2008

Commissioner Sheila Stearns
P. O. Box 203201
46 North Last Chance Gulch
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Dear Commissioner Stearns:

At the December meeting of the Postsecondary Education Policy and Budget subcommittee (PEPB) you acknowledged that the Montana University System (MUS) is lacking a strategic vision for two-year education and that it is the responsibility of the MUS, through its governing body the Board of Regents, to take the lead in examining a new concept for two-year education that would assist the legislature in upcoming decisions.

Based on this statement, the PEPB is anticipating that your presentation at the March 2008 meeting will include some specific themes that will be part of the Board of Regents' strategic plan for two-year education, including an analysis of the current governance and funding structures, as well as providing the subcommittee with any options under consideration by the Board for a new paradigm for two-year institutions.

The subcommittee was very pleased to hear this commitment and are very interested in this strategic vision as part of our continuing interim deliberations as part of PEPB as well as the Education and Local Government Interim Committee (ELG).

The legislature also needs this information for immediate consideration as the PEPB will be required to make a recommendation to the ELG concerning the possible establishment of the Bitterroot Valley Community College (BVCC) at the PEPB meeting in June. The ELG will then make its recommendation regarding the BVCC at its final meeting in September. Based upon our timeframe, we have serious concerns about whether the committee will have this strategic planning information in time, given your two-year education strategic planning chart.

We have allocated an hour and one-half to the two-year strategic vision for MUS at that meeting, and we want to be sure that this time is well spent and begins to provide the legislators on the PEPB and ELG with specific information they will need for the decisions to be made in June.

Therefore, we anticipate that the March PEPB meeting will include an in-depth discussion of two-year education, including institutional models, system wide governance, funding, and comprehensive strategy directions, as well as an explanation of the proposed 2011 budget initiatives (which is also listed as an additional agenda item).

To ensure that the March meeting will provide PEPB members with the initial framework for PEPB and ELG to make decisions in June about the BVCC and the 2011 budget initiatives, we have asked staff to forward to you the following list of general and specific questions for your March 13, 2008 presentation to the PEPB.

1. How does two-year education fit into the overall mission of the MUS, specifically the separate but related roles of two-year transfer degrees intended to lead to four-year enrollment versus work force development?
2. What is the ideal two-year institutional model that the MUS is looking for in the future; the community college model, the college of technology, the higher education learning center, some other hybrid model, etc? Why?
3. If the future vision includes all of these models, how does the MUS plan to coordinate these diverse models that include distinct funding and governance mechanisms into the most effective two-year education delivery system? (this question starts from the premise that the existing two-year “system” is not meeting the needs of Montana, given proposals for new institutions and the data from the listening sessions)
4. Is the current system wide MUS governance model sufficient for a strong two-year education system or should there be changes to the system wide governance model? If so, what are those changes?
5. If no changes are proposed to the current two-year structure, how does the University of Montana learning center in Hamilton and the MSU Bozeman two-year education program outlined in the 2011 budget initiatives fit into the existing structure, given that these are neither colleges of technology nor community colleges?
6. The Regents have presented that a primary problem with two-year education is one of public perception. If true, how does the creation of a higher education learning center in Hamilton and the recently released MSU-Bozeman budget initiative to create a “start-up model” for two-year education on that four-year campus address this perception problem?
7. Related to the 2011 budget initiatives, why is there no new funding initiative for expanding Missoula campus programs to the Bitterroot Valley through the proposed higher education learning center at Hamilton? How will that learning center be funded?
8. What is the future of MSU-Northern at Havre, specifically the two-year programs on that campus, given the ongoing enrollment and budget trends? How is this to be contemplated in the strategic plan for two-year education?

9. If the missions of the colleges of technology and community colleges now similarly emphasize workforce development and a "point of entrance" for transfer into 4-year institutions, is the rationale for continuing the differing governing and funding structures still valid? Do the Regents support continuation of the 1.5-mill county levy on the five counties where the colleges of technology are located?
10. How are changing enrollment trends that see increases at the two-year institutions and decreases at the four-year institutions addressed in the strategic vision?

Once again, the committee will be making its recommendations and requesting legislation at the June meeting, based upon discussion and information at our March meeting and final presentation of a two-year strategic vision in June.

Should you have any questions about any of this, please feel free to contact either of us.

Thank you so much for the commitment you have shown toward these issues during the PEPB interim process and for your continuing assistance to the legislature through the remainder of the interim.

Very truly yours,

Senator Bob Hawks
Chairman, PEPB

Senator Rick Laible
Chairman, ELG

CC: PEPB subcommittee members
Jan Lombardi, Office of the Governor
ELG committee members
Lynn Morrison-Hamilton, Board of Regents Chair
President George Dennison, University of Montana
President Geoff Gamble, Montana State University

MONTANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
Responses to Questions Above – Presented at PEPB Meeting

March 13, 2008

PEPB Questions:

11. How does two-year education fit into the overall mission of the MUS, specifically the separate but related roles of two-year transfer degrees intended to lead to four-year enrollment versus work force development?

The Mission of the Montana University System is to serve students through the delivery of high quality, accessible postsecondary educational opportunities, while actively participating in the preservation and advancement of Montana's economy and society.

Two-year education in the MUS is a critical component of the System's overall mission. The individual missions within the colleges of technology as well as the community colleges represent the traditional five-pronged mission of two-year institutions throughout the United States. The expectation that the Board of Regents holds for two-year institutions and the areas of focus exhibited by all two-year campuses in the MUS included the following:

- Occupational/technical degrees and programs
- General education & transfer degree programs
- Developmental education (including, as needed, Adult Basic Ed.)
- Job training
- Continuing education

In the future, especially in Montana's future, the historic five prongs need to be revisited and revised to reflect the learning needs of Montanans in the 21st century. Among those needs are:

- A lifelong learning emphasis that responds to the need for:
 - alternative/enhanced/ accelerated learning opportunities for high school students
 - short-term skills upgrades and continuing education for workers in technical and professional fields
 - post-retirement Montanans seeking supplemental wage-earning opportunities
- An emphasis on K-12/higher education collaboration that encourages each sector to extend its resources and expertise to the other to "develop the full educational potential" of all Montanans.
- An emphasis on community/regional-responsiveness that brings learning to the learner in formats that are highly accessible, engaging, and well-supported with academic services (e.g., library, financial aid, advising, tutoring).

12. What is the ideal two-year institutional model that the MUS is looking for in the future; the community college model, the college of technology, the higher education learning center, some other hybrid model, etc? Why?

The ideal model for two-year institutions in the future will have these attributes:

- A comprehensive mission incorporating the historic five prongs of two-year education, but emphasizing partnerships, seamless/continuity, and accessibility, rather than programming niches (transfer, career/technical, etc.)
- Consistency in mission across two-year institutions throughout the Montana University System and incentives to standardize what can and should be standardized.
- Use of the resources of other MUS campuses to achieve economies of scale, expand access, and avoid duplication of programs, services, and effort. Among these resources are the "borrowing" of other campuses' degree programs, through a refocusing and revitalization of the Higher Education Center concept.

- The autonomy to emerge as distinct institutions with the key “community college” attributes – a service orientation to students, businesses/industry sectors, and communities; flexible and nimble responses to workforce needs; and innovative approaches to improving access and quality in postsecondary learning.

Critical challenges to address in the creation of that model include:

- Striking the right balance between the administrative links to the four-year campuses and the autonomy needed to address workforce demands.
- Developing consistent approaches to general education, the transfer core, two-year degree design, tech prep, dual credit, etc., so that two-year education can be promoted knowledgeably and accurately and students throughout Montana have access to the same benefits of two-year education.
- Clarifying/redefining the role of the Higher Education Center so that all campuses of the Montana University System have access to the postsecondary opportunities – two-year, baccalaureate, and graduate-level—that the demand in their area can support.
- Creating strong partnerships with Montana school districts to ensure that all Montana kids have access to learning experiences that develop their full educational potential and the resources in both K-12 and higher education – facilities, programs, and people – are optimally deployed to assist in that development.

13. If the future vision includes all of these models, how does the MUS plan to coordinate these diverse models that include distinct funding and governance mechanisms into the most effective two-year education delivery system? (this question starts from the premise that the existing two-year “system” is not meeting the needs of Montana, given proposals for new institutions and the data from the listening sessions)

The answer to Question #2 outlines the changes the MUS will make to clean up its own house with respect to two-year colleges, higher education centers, and extended programming, whether two-year, four-year, or graduate level. Effecting those changes may require some changes in reporting lines and funding models within the Montana University System. At this point, it is too soon to say what they would be.

14. Is the current system wide MUS governance model sufficient for a strong two-year education system or should there be changes to the system wide governance model? If so, what are those changes?

If we are able to effect the changes described in the answer to Question #2 without a change in system-wide governance, we will do so. If we cannot effect those changes without a change in system-wide governance, we will make the necessary changes. Governance is, after all, a means, not an end. The end we seek is described in the answer to Question #2.

15. If no changes are proposed to the current two-year structure, how does the University of Montana learning center in Hamilton and the MSU Bozeman two-year education program outlined in the 2011 budget initiatives fit into the existing structure, given that these are neither colleges of technology nor community colleges?

Both the UM Higher Education Center and MSU Bozeman two-year education program are aimed at increasing access to postsecondary education opportunities in communities. Both initiatives provide that access by extending existing programs provided by established campuses of the Montana University System to areas previously unserved or under-served by the MUS. Both are designed to achieve economies of scale through links to the curricular, administrative, and fiscal resources of established MUS institutions. Both plans hinge on a functionally flexible response to regional needs. Finally, both plans are very much works in progress. As the model for two-year education described in the answer to Question #2 is developed, each of the extended programs may take a different shape.

16. *The Regents have presented that a primary problem with two-year education is one of public perception. If true, how does the creation of a higher education learning center in Hamilton and the recently released MSU-Bozeman budget initiative to create a “start-up model” for two-year education on that four-year campus address this perception problem?*

Your point is well-taken. It is difficult to create a positive public perception – or even a consistently negative one – when the models for two-year education and higher education centers are as diverse as they are in Montana. Even when two-year campuses have the same basic name – e.g., college of technology – the curricular emphases and programming can be markedly different.

The first step is to define what two-year colleges and higher education centers are. The second is to make the changes in each setting that align with those definitions. When those changes are in place, we will be able to speak with one voice and with a shared understanding of what all two-year colleges (and higher education centers) are and do. Until then, our lack of consistency will doom any effort to promote two-year education.

There is another cause for the confused public perception of two-year education and that is the history of our colleges of technology. Although they have been part of the Montana University System for over 20 years now, the fact is that many citizens, even in the communities that have a “COT,” still regard them as “vo-techs.” Worse, most Montanans were never really too sure what vo-techs were. Their general impression was of “a last resort” training opportunity for individuals whose academic preparation and potential for success in higher education were minimal, if extant. Most Montanans, especially the most well-educated who are most likely to take an interest in higher education, still do not understand that, as Miles Community College touts, a two-year college is a place where a student of *any* ability can “start here ... go anywhere.” We must build confidence in our communities and in our citizens that 2-year education is a viable, low-cost entry point to a four degree.

17. *Related to the 2011 budget initiatives, why is there no new funding initiative for expanding Missoula campus programs to the Bitterroot Valley through the proposed higher education learning center at Hamilton? How will that learning center be funded?*

The Hamilton Higher Education Center (HHEC) is in its first year of operation and is off to a successful beginning with growing enrollments. The first courses were offered in Summer, 2007, enrolling five students. In Fall, 2007, 28 students registered in five courses, and this Spring, 55 students are enrolled in eight courses. The offerings in the first year have included mostly courses from the College of Technology, but also courses from the College of Arts and Sciences and two graduate-level courses from the School of Education. The strategy for the first year of operation has been to offer a breadth of courses to determine what areas hold the greatest interest for students in the Hamilton area. Based on the results, the University is assembling its schedule of course offerings for the entire next year (summer, fall, spring) so that students can plan ahead. The courses to be offered next year fall into three categories: 1) transition-to-college courses that either fulfill General Education requirements or prepare students for college-level work; 2) professional courses in Education or Business; and 3) courses of general interest to the Hamilton population.

At this stage, a major budget initiative for the HHEC is premature. The resources currently available to The University of Montana, including tuition from the Hamilton courses, have been used to support instructional costs, administrative support, a physical office presence, and necessary support services. The Director of the HHEC, Dr. Frank Laurence, has raised significant private funds for scholarship support. The available resources have been sufficient to support the start-up phase and will provide for the next two years of development and growth. At that time, consideration will be given to a funding initiative, informed by two to three years of experience in providing education in the Hamilton area.

18. *What is the future of MSU-Northern at Havre, specifically the two-year programs on that campus, given the ongoing enrollment and budget trends? How is this to be contemplated in the strategic plan for two-year education?*

MSU - Northern is in the process of "right-sizing" its academic programming to align its resources and available revenue with demand on the hi-line. The campus is exploring alternative delivery systems for its two-year programs, moving away from credit-bearing, full-semester course delivery to compressed learning modules aligned with industry needs and nontraditional students' preferences. Additionally, MSU - Northern will play a significant role in bringing four-year and graduate degrees to two-year campuses like MSU - Great Falls, the tribal colleges and the community colleges in eastern Montana, as demand warrants.

19. *If the missions of the colleges of technology and community colleges now similarly emphasize workforce development and a "point of entrance" for transfer into 4-year institutions, is the rationale for continuing the differing governing and funding structures still valid? Do the Regents support continuation of the 1.5-mill county levy on the five counties where the colleges of technology are located?*

Yes, we do support the continuation of the 1.5-mill county levy in any county where a college of technology is located. As the Montana Supreme Court has observed and our own data confirm, these counties benefit disproportionately from the presence of a two-year education institution in the midst. A Higher Education Center is not as extensive in programming or as permanent in nature as a college of technology, and its offerings are sustained on a program-by-program basis by the demand of local residents and their willingness to pay to bring these programs to their communities.

20. *How are changing enrollment trends that see increases at the two-year institutions and decreases at the four-year institutions addressed in the strategic vision?*

While enrollment trends have favored two-year institutions in the past ten years, the MUS projects declining enrollment at nearly every institution throughout the system over the next ten years, including both four-year and two-year institutions. While it is a goal to increase participation at the lower-cost two-year institutions, the anticipated increase in enrollment is not intended to pull students from four-year campuses. Instead, strategies are aimed at increasing enrollment in the areas of early college access, re-entry of non-traditional students, and remotely located individuals using distance learning. Also with the transferability of credits becoming seamless between two and four-year institutions, student flow from two-year to four-year should increase.