



Montana State University Billings (MSUB)

Mid-Cycle Report

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
(NWCCU)

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Introduction:

Montana State University Billings (MSUB) implements continuous evaluation at a variety of levels throughout the institution. University-level evaluation is conducted through the implementation of the current strategic plan. Academic programs are evaluated through the Academic Program Review (APR) process and student learning is evaluated at the program, course, and student levels. In most instances, these processes are informed by data provided by the Office of Institutional Research (IR). By embedding data into these processes, and many others, MSU Billings faculty and staff have productive discussions that are guided by the analysis of evidence. These evaluative and iterative processes ensure that MSU Billings offers relevant and useful services to the students and surrounding community. This mid-cycle report has provided the opportunity to reflect on these institutional efforts, specifically helping to identify challenges and successes, as well as helping us focus on an intentional path forward.

Mission Fulfillment: *The institution provides an executive summary of no more than three pages, which describes the institution’s framework for its ongoing accreditation efforts. This might include evidence of institutional effectiveness, Core Themes, or other appropriate mechanisms for measuring fulfillment of its mission.*

To meet the MSU Billings institutional mission of delivering “transformative education that empowers students from diverse backgrounds to succeed”, MSU Billings identifies priorities through strategic planning. The [current strategic plan \(2019-2026\)](#) was informed by a variety of stakeholders—both internal and external to MSUB—using an iterative process. The details of the development of the current strategic plan are outlined in the most recent [ad hoc report \(April 2020\)](#). As a comprehensive regional university, MSU Billings prioritizes a transformative experience for all students. This is accomplished through a variety of efforts. The following will highlight some of the exciting and important MSUB priorities that work to fulfill the mission.

The [strategic plan framework](#) articulates MSUB’s mission, vision, and four Core Themes. The Core Themes are as follows:

- I. Build educational programs to support student needs
- II. Progressively grow the university
- III. Strengthen relationships with the community to enhance partnership opportunities
- IV. Unify, invigorate, and engage in MSUB’s structure and culture

Guided by the mission statement, the Core Themes establish a strong foundation to direct the work of the institution. Each Core Theme contains a major objective and sub-objectives that operationalize the work. At MSUB, each sub-objective has been assigned a lead or co-leads to shepherd the work. The sub-objective leads developed [action plans](#) in consultation with the identified team members. The action plans identify the metrics, timeline, and details of the work to be completed. Sub-objective leads seek regular feedback from key partners and are empowered to adjust the action plans, as needed, allowing for a dynamic process, and ensuring the work remains current and relevant.

There are often necessary changes and updates to strategic plans, and a few events that emphasized the need for the most recent review are worth noting. The COVID-19 pandemic had a forceful impact at MSUB. In addition, MSUB experienced leadership changes at both the Chancellor and Provost levels, having interims serve until permanent hires could be obtained. As the new Chancellor and Provost began their roles in spring 2021 and summer 2021 respectively, both expressed their intent to stay the course of the current strategic plan. Chancellor Hicswa has made it clear that the current plan is comprehensive and focused, and she did not have intentions of creating a new strategic plan. This was a welcomed approach and reinforced the continued relevance and appropriateness of the strategic plan to guide MSUB forward.

The impacts of the pandemic, however, shaped new perspective and adjusted priorities for MSUB. A close review of the strategic plan in spring 2021 brought about productive conversations and helped MSUB further refine and focus the work of our strategic priorities. This open dialogue helped MSUB pare down some sub-objectives and revise others. Without compromising the spirit and intent of the original strategic plan (keeping the core themes and major objectives in place), these adjustments have reinvigorated MSUB's strategic planning work. Examples of strategic planning revisions and accomplishments include, but are not limited to:

Theme I: Build educational programs to support student needs

1.4 Reimagine general education to enhance student learning was revised to ***Review and strengthen*** general education to enhance student learning

Discussions between the General Education Committee, the Academic Senate, and the faculty co-leads for this sub-objective led to the decision to adjust this sub-objective. Faculty weighed the advantages and disadvantages of overhauling the General Education curriculum. Most faculty desired to make incremental changes, informed by better data and best practices, rather than introduce many changes at one time. The faculty determined that this is not the right time to overhaul General Education. The focus of their work, rather, is on developing cohesion to the curriculum, better communicating the purpose and intent of the General Education curriculum for faculty and students, and to create a more manageable process for evaluating student learning. The result of these discussions was to *review and strengthen general education*, rather than *reimagine*.

The subtle adjustment in language to the sub-objective has made a big impact on the direction of the focus on General Education. The faculty serving on the General Education Committee have drafted program-level learning outcomes for General Education. The existing learning outcomes were guiding curriculum at the course level but not creating a more integrated vision of student outcomes for the General Education program. Having numerous learning outcomes created several challenges, one of which was managing student learning assessment. With the [current drafted General Education program learning outcomes](#), collecting and analyzing student learning data should become more manageable, meaningful, and actionable. In the 2021-22 academic year, the faculty on the General Education Committee will work to finalize the learning outcomes after obtaining additional feedback from department chairs and faculty. Once approved by the Academic Senate, the outcomes will be mapped to the existing General

Education curriculum to create a seamless process for evaluating student learning. The curriculum map will also help identify potential learning and/or curricular gaps. From there, the outcomes and curriculum map will help to inform the development of an assessment plan for general education. We are excited about these collaborative developments and look forward to showcasing the results of this work in our Year Seven (Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness, EIE) report and visit.

1.3 Elevate programmatic offerings to be responsive to student and community needs

Part of the work of this sub-objective was developing and implementing a [sustainable academic program review \(APR\) process](#). The process was developed in summer 2020 and implemented in academic year 2020-21. Programs from nine departments were reviewed in the first year. This continuous improvement process evaluates [programs on a seven-year cycle](#). MSUB's robust APR process is timed to coincide with the Montana Board of Regents Program Review cycle. This review process includes a self-evaluation by program faculty, [a peer review from an outside evaluator](#), review by the Dean, and a meeting between the faculty, dean and provost that culminates with an action plan. The action plans produced enable faculty in the program to prioritize decision-making for their units. The outcomes of the academic review process include strengthening synergies that exist between academic departments and student success units, re-envisioning advising through a collaborative assessment of student success models, revising and updating course-maps, and expanding student access to various course modalities.

Objective 1: Educate - Ensure a high level of effective teaching and learning across the curriculum.

The MSU Billings Center for Teaching and Learning will enter the program planning process, to be considered at the September Montana Board of Regents meeting, with a request to plan in Fall 2021. A taskforce, including faculty, staff and student stakeholders recommended a faculty-led center that will serve as an umbrella for all faculty development programming. The future [MSU Billings Center for Teaching and Learning](#) will support academic priorities including collaboration for restructuring curriculum and programs, and online teaching and learning. The new Center for Teaching and Learning will integrate the existing e-Learning department with a faculty-led center that will promote innovation and excellence in teaching and learning. MSU Billings sees great potential for continued emphasis in online teaching and learning to support students who work in our community and care for family members, as well as addressing the needs of Eastern and Central Montana. The Center will also be a conduit for offering [new faculty orientation](#). The Center will play a key role in student success initiatives related to inclusive, equity-minded, and growth mindset pedagogy. Informed by data, the Center will offer programming for courses with high DFWI rates. These teaching and learning efforts directly support the MSU Billings mission and strategic plan with a particular focus on objectives 1.1 Develop and implement best practice teaching techniques, 1.2 Enhance development opportunities to empower faculty as educators and scholars, 1.3 Elevate programmatic offerings to be responsive to student and community needs, 1.4 Review and strengthen general education to enhance student learning, and 2.2 Improve student retention and graduation rates.

MSUB is very excited to see this Center come to fruition, as this is one way in which we can ensure a high level of effective teaching and learning and enhance student success.

Theme II: Progressively grow the university

Revised 2.1 and 2.2 enrollment and retention targets: The original targets for enrollment and retention are being revised by the Chancellor and Provost, in consultation with campus constituents. The original goals were aspirational, and acknowledging the impacts of COVID-19, the targets were no longer feasible. Instead, MSUB will work to set incremental targets over time. We will use our [institutional and peer and aspirant comparison data](#) to determine realistic and achievable targets. While some progress has been made, this continues to be an area that presents challenges. MSUB is committed to increasing enrollment and retention, despite these challenges. A comprehensive enrollment plan will guide this work with five-year as well as year-over-year targets. Strategies will be implemented to support enrollment growth. The plan will be data-informed, tracking and strategically addressing enrollment headcount, student full-time equivalents, revenue generated by enrollment, and resources needed to sustain growth. Targets and strategies will be aligned to intentionally address enrollment for all student sub-populations including undergraduate, graduate, full-time, part-time, first-time-freshman, transfer, Native American, in-state, out-of-state, and international students. We will use similar strategies to improve retention and graduation rates. A slight increase in the [first-time, full-time retention rate](#) was observed in the most recent institutional data, however, when compared to our peer and aspirants, it is evident we have opportunities to further improve. We aim to increase the retention rates by developing a comprehensive plan that sets targets and implements effective strategies. Following two retreats in summer 2021 focusing on the myriad strategies required to ensure institutional focus on retention and graduation, a cross-divisional team will work with campus constituents to formulate the MSUB retention and graduate plan, which will include target retention and graduation rates, strategies, as well as metrics. The development of the targets will be informed by [institutional retention and graduation data](#). With a leadership team in place experienced in increasing enrollment, retention rates, and graduation rates, combined with our dedicated faculty and staff, MSUB is poised to make progress and we hope to share success stories in the Year Seven EIE report.

Theme III: Strengthen relationships with the community to enhance partnership opportunities

Removed 3.1 Expand and strengthen relationships with potential employers to meet workforce needs and 3.5: Strengthen partnerships with educational communities to cultivate a community of learning. Conversations with the campus community determined these sub-objectives were primarily focused at a unit-level, rather than university-level outcomes. Several changes have occurred and now the work of these sub-objectives is better suited at the unit level. For example, sub-objective 3.1 was working towards creating a consistent approach for students interested in internships. As of fall 2020, MSUB has a dedicated Career and Employment Services office with a Director and staff. With the advent of this new office and resources, the work of internships was more effectively implemented from this unit, rather than having it conducted at the university-level. After removing these two sub-objectives, Core Theme III contains three sub-objectives. The primary focus of the remaining sub-objectives is on building better relationships with the Billings community and improving relationships with specific

subpopulations in the community. With the hiring of a Director for the Native American Achievement Center, and an interim Director for the Military and Veterans Success Center, MSUB dedicates the necessary resources to continue making progress for student populations of interest.

Theme IV: Unify, invigorate, and engage MSUB's structure and culture

Removed 4.1: Develop the next iteration of MSUB's infrastructure master plans

With input and guidance from Montana's Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE), this sub-objective was removed. Committed to efficient and judicious use of our campus resources, we determined that it was not prudent at this time to create a new infrastructure master plan. Rather, MSUB has decided to review the most recent master plan and implement incremental adjustments as needed to meet ongoing and emerging needs. This adjustment to the plan has not in any way impeded MSUB's continued investments in campus infrastructure in support of student success. A new Yellowstone Science and Health Building is scheduled to open in September 2021, adding instructional spaces for all modalities (lecture, lab, collaborative), individual and core research spaces for faculty and students, offices for faculty and staff, and collaborative spaces for students. Instructional spaces in this new building benefit from the latest collaborative technology tools in support of student learning (HyFlex, connected classroom, collaborative classroom, etc.). Our Center for Teaching and Learning (formerly e-Learning) has actively engaged with faculty to ensure effective and pedagogy-informed use of the new technology.

Revised 4.2: Develop and implement a clear communication, branding, and marketing plan

This subobjective is being revised. The original intent for this subobjective was to work towards creating an appropriate identity for MSUB, while answering the question, "Who are we?" The work will include marketing and communication, but not be the sole focus. Through various discussions, it was determined that a revision to this subobjective is needed. As we adjust the focus of this work, we continue marketing and advertising with Ruffalo Noel Levitz (RNL) and Amplified Digital (digital and social media advertising). We are running television and streaming commercials, YouTube video ads, email marketing campaigns, and digital retargeting ads. We create monthly print ads with powerful student and alumni profiles and quotes in local magazines like Yellowstone Valley Women and Simply Local. We maintain partnerships with the regional newspaper, the Billings Gazette and local TV stations (KTVQ and KULR8) to help promote new and positive accomplishments of the university. Marketing, advertising, and communication efforts will continue to be informed by conversations related to MSUB identity.

Removed 5.4: Create a more sustainable campus environment

After discussions with the team working on implementing actions for this sub-objective and the campus leadership, the decision was made to remove this sub-objective. It was not made lightly, as sustainability is an important effort to many on our campus. However, MSUB and the community of Billings, do not have the resources to augment existing sustainability efforts at this time. MSUB hopes to reconsider including this work in the next iteration of university strategic planning.

The above changes and the progress made to date, showcase dynamic and positive processes for prioritizing the work of the mission. This process has been informed by faculty, staff, students, and the administration. The Chancellor's Cabinet met for a [planning session on August 16-17, 2021](#). Part of this planning session included the development of an [operational plan for Cabinet for the upcoming year](#), informed by the strategic plan. Following the Chancellor's Cabinet retreat, and to foster deeply connected cross-divisional partnerships, the Provost and the Vice Chancellor for Student Access and Success held [a joint retreat](#) to help further refine and solidify the goals and action plans for academic year 2021-22. Institutional data was [presented](#) and discussed. As noted above, one outcome of these planning retreats is to constitute a cross-divisional Retention and Graduation Council, whose charge will be to develop a comprehensive retention and graduation plan for MSUB. The plan will set five year and year-over-year target rates and will [align strategies in support of retention and graduation](#). We are proud of the work we have accomplished and are excited to continue to carry out the work of the MSUB mission through our intentional strategic planning in the years to come.

Student Achievement: *The institution provides a brief overview of the student achievement measures it uses as part of its ongoing self-reflection, along with comparative data and information from at least five institutions it uses in benchmarking its student achievement efforts. In providing the overview, the institution may consider including published indicators including (but not limited to) persistence, completion, retention, and postgraduation success student achievement measures. Additionally, the report must include the widely published indicators disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, first generation college student, Pell status, and any other institutionally meaningful categories that may help promote student achievement and close equity gaps, i.e., barriers to academic excellence and success amongst students from underserved communities.*

The Office of Institutional Research (IR) is the powerhouse of generating usable data at MSUB. While there are many data sources, the institutional Student Achievement data are organized and disseminated primarily by IR. The following will provide an overview of the types of data that are available to the public and the campus community. Some of these data are integrated into processes and other datasets are being developed to support and inform new and existing processes.

Data Overview:

External (public) Data:

The [IR website](#) is where MSUB shares institutional information externally. This site contains basic institutional information such as the MSUB Quick Facts, Common Data Set, and overview of results from national engagement and student satisfaction surveys. In addition, the site includes direct links to Montana University System Data and Reports, US Department of Education Scorecard, and the National Center for Education Statistics College Navigator, which allow users to compare MSUB to other institutions.

Additional links on the MSUB website for sharing information with the public are listed below:

- [Career Services Graduate Survey Data](#)
- [Consumer Information Directory](#)

Internal Data:

Data have been available in various forms and located in various places over the years. Starting in spring 2021, the IR intranet website (password protected) is a location to share more detailed institutional information with links, instructions, and documentation. Content on the [MSUB Intranet](#) can be accessed by all MSUB employees, using their University login credentials. The accessibility of the data is of high importance, as we want all employees to have access to actionable data to advance our strategies and make data-informed decisions. This IR site currently has the following content (screenshots of the content are linked below):

- [Census Data](#) – By term, starting spring 2021, standard MSUB reports updated with census snapshot data including the following: Overall Enrollment Trends, Final Year-to-Year Enrollment Comparison, Retention, and Subpopulations of Interest.
- Student Course Evaluations – overview of student course evaluation process with timelines and faculty directions to access reports and increase response rates.
- Internal Studies – location to post internal studies for wider internal MSUB access.
- [National Survey of Student Engagement](#) – survey administration details and MSUB results.
- [Peer and Aspirant Institutions](#) – description of selection process and current peer and aspirant institutions, IPEDS Data Feedback Report comparing MSUB to these institutions for various metrics, and MSUB prepared trend comparisons reports of selected IPEDS items.
- [Performance Based Funding](#) – description of Montana University System Performance Based Funding system, metrics, and results.
- [RNL Student Satisfaction Inventory](#) – administration details and MSUB results, including targeted presentations.

In addition to the MSUB Intranet, Box is used to share static reports within the MSUB campus community. In the [All Campus Information\Institutional Research folder](#), standard institutional reports are posted as they become available. Reports posted to this location include enrollment, registration tracking, completions, DFWI reports, results from studies and surveys, IPEDS reports, retention and graduation rate reports, and peer and aspirant institution information.

Tableau Server is used to share dynamic dashboards and reports within the MSUB campus community. Filters allowing special focus on MSUB populations of interest are currently being incorporated into all standard dashboards. Populations of interest are those student groups used in Montana University System Performance Based Funding metrics and/or identified in the MSUB Strategic Plan. They include gender, military affiliated, non-traditional age (UG), first generation (UG), FAFSA filed, Pell Eligible EFC (UG), Hispanic, Native American, and International. There are many dashboards; the more significant and widely used ones are listed below (screenshots of the content are linked below):

1. [Academic Program Review](#) – new fall 2020
2. [Five Year Enrollment](#)
3. [NSSE Dashboard](#)

4. [City College SSI Dashboard](#)
5. [University Campus SSI Dashboard](#)
6. [Strategic Plan Enrollment](#)
7. [Strategic Plan Retention](#)
8. Persistence and Graduation Rates (coming soon!)

Use of Data:

Data are accessible in a variety of formats, well-defined, and integrated into important MSUB processes and practices. The data are disaggregated by specific subpopulations, where appropriate, and offered in comparison with data from our peer and aspirant institutions. Obtaining more engagement with the data is ongoing. Processes like APR and strategic planning are helping to increase data awareness and usage by connecting people to the data and encouraging analysis. Regular data training sessions are being developed and offered for deans, associate deans, and department chairs to ensure sustained focus on data-informed strategies. As these processes mature, more faculty and staff will be empowered to make strategic and informed decisions using the many types of institutional data available.

In addition to available data, some areas of campus are making concerted efforts to identify gaps and implement interventions. The recent decision to separate the Office of Advising and Career Services was in part, motivated by a goal of expanding TRIO/SSS advising practices to more MSUB students, including the creation of a new TRIO program at City College in 2021. MSUB observed that intrusive advising, as implemented with TRIO/SSS students, was highly effective at [increasing freshmen cohort fall to fall retention](#) (the green cells in the linked table demonstrate 5% or more above the overall 5 year combined retention rate of 54% and the red cells in the table demonstrate 5% or more below). Using this data, MSUB dedicated the resources to expand these effective advising practices to all students. One notable change from adopting this practice is the increase in the length of time students meet with professional advisors. The newly dedicated advising staff also observed, through institutional data, that nearly 300 students were identified as not being retained from fall 2020 to fall 2021. This decline was concerning. A team of staff from Advising, the Academic Support Center, and the Registrar's Office created and implemented a plan to contact each of the nearly 300 students to determine if they intended to return and offer support to help them return. We are actively engaging with these students, providing appropriate help and support to retain as many as possible, in addition to learning about and strategizing for the reasons that lead to non-retention.

The Native American Achievement Center (NAAC) staff observed an increase in Native students enrolled at City College in spring 2021 but a decline in retention for Native students. Some of the decline can be attributed to the pandemic, as COVID-19 severely impacted Native American communities and our students. However, some interventions are already being implemented. The NAAC staff conducted six separate phone outreach campaigns. The first was in December 2020 and January 2021 to contact students who were not yet registered for the spring 2021 semester. The second campaign, in February 2021, involved making calls to students to see how the transition to online learning was going and to inform them of the MSUB CARES Act funds application. The third was a well-check initiative in which all registered and non-registered Native students were called to make sure they were aware of the August 19 fall semester start date, CARES Act funds, and other valuable information. While the NAAC staff have

identified an area where more student support is needed, and have begun to offer more support, it will take an institution-wide effort to implement appropriate strategies and interventions.

MSUB is in the process of broadening and organizing a comprehensive institutional effort towards identifying and closing equity gaps. The good work of our Office of Institutional Research has laid a solid foundation with making the data available in usable formats. [Disaggregated data by subpopulations of interest, compared to MSUB's peer and aspirants](#), provide the necessary resources to identify gaps and set achievable targets. Our new Chancellor and Provost are committed to this effort. In academic year 2021-22, in alignment with our strategic plan (Theme II, Objective 2.2), MSUB will create and implement a comprehensive plan to increase retention and graduation rates. A cross-divisional Retention and Graduation Council will be constituted to formulate and implement the plan, seeking engagement and feedback from all stakeholders. The plan will be holistic and comprehensive taking into account the entire student experience and support structure, including academic preparation, student support services, student health and well-being, student engagement, removal of academic and administrative barriers, and improvement in campus [processes](#).

The plan will set five-year targets for retention and graduation rates as well as incremental annual targets to ensure ongoing, sustained, and continuous monitoring of outcomes, evaluation of the efficacy of strategies and, as needed, adjustment of strategies. The development of the targets will be informed by [retention and graduation data](#). While we intend to significantly improve retention and graduation rates for all students, particular time and effort will be devoted to closing the equity gaps among various student populations. We will be intentional in implementing appropriate strategies for different student subpopulations (e.g., first-generation, veteran, Native American, etc.). We will ensure that retention and graduation strategies are informed by appropriate data, implemented by the right teams, and tracked for all student populations in an ongoing manner. We strive to create an institutional culture and knowledge where all faculty, staff, and administrators know the data and intended targets and strategies. We are poised to make great progress over the next couple of years, but we must remain focused and committed to providing a transformative learning experience for all students.

Assessment of Student Learning: *The institution must provide programmatic assessment of at least two programs as evidence of a continuous process of improvement. The programs should be broadly representative of institutional efforts (and as a result programs that are approved by a CHEA-recognized programmatic accreditor are discouraged for this report).*

In academic year 2019-2020, MSU Billings established [university standards for program level assessment](#). These standards were created to help guide the culture of program assessment to use student learning data to inform pedagogical and curricular successes and improvements. With the development of these standards, a process was also established, beginning with having each [College identify the preferred annual reporting month](#). The university standards and the reporting cycle helped set expectations for faculty and provide a reasonable timeline to report student learning data for academic programs. To encourage a meaningful process, shared governance, and transparency, [a faculty assessment and accreditation committee](#) was formed in academic year 2020-2021. Two faculty members from each college serve on the University level committee and provide peer feedback to other program faculty on assessment of student learning efforts. The committee applies a [rubric](#) that was designed using the University Standards for Program Assessment to provide the feedback.

Finally, the program assessment process was integrated into the academic program review (APR) process. This ensures that every seven years, when programs undergo APR, program assessment of student learning is considered during the review, among a host of other items.

What follows are the requested examples of program level assessment at MSU Billings. MSU Billings is a regional comprehensive university with an embedded community college. The examples here include one from City College (2-year program) and one from University campus (4-year program). Each program presented contains the most recent and relevant program student learning documents. Assessment plans and reports are common documents for academic programs at MSUB. The Assessment and Accreditation committee members are working through the various program documents and providing feedback, eventually to all academic programs.

- a. City College example: [Accounting Technology, AAS](#)
 - i. This example includes the assessment plan, most recent assessment report, and feedback generated from the University Assessment and Accreditation committee (UAAC) to the program. This example represents programs that have received feedback from UAAC in order to fine-tune and improve the use of student learning data.

- b. University campus example: [History, BS 2021 Annual Report](#)
 - i. This example includes the most recent assessment report, as the program is in a curricular revision period. This example is representative of several MSUB programs. As a result of outcomes from the Strategic Program Alignment (SPA) process, many programs are revising curriculum and as a result, making necessary changes to program assessment efforts. This program has recently revised the program learning outcomes and will work to develop and implement a new assessment plan in the coming year.

Moving Forward: *The institution must provide its reflections on any additional efforts or initiatives it plans on undertaking as it prepares for the Year Seven Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness Report.*

As mentioned earlier in this report, the priority for the upcoming year will be developing comprehensive, institutional plans to increase retention and graduation rates. The development of these plans is directly correlated with the work of the MSUB strategic plan (Theme II, sub-objective 2.2). Related to this work, are a few emerging initiatives worth noting.

MSUB recently joined [Montana 10 \(MT10\)](#), a state-funded scholarship and student success program. MT10 is designed to improve retention by identifying specific barriers that students face and provides evidence-based supports to meet those needs. The Montana 10 Framework consists of the following:

- Financial Supports: scholarships, textbook stipends, and monthly incentives
- Academic Momentum: full time schedule and corequisite math and writing tutoring

- Purpose & Belonging: high touch advising, career development, orientation, and freshmen seminar

[In Year 1 of Montana 10, a 91% fall to spring retention of MT10 scholars](#) was achieved at the University of Montana. MSUB is eager to benefit from this initiative and integrate these efforts and resources into the institutional retention and graduation plans.

In addition to Montana 10, MSUB is also joining efforts with other Montana State University campuses (Bozeman, Great Falls, and Northern) to roll out the use of EAB Navigate, a powerful retention platform. Navigate includes tools for scheduling, a mobile application, an early-alert system, and predictive analytics for students at risk. The timing of implementing Navigate is well suited for supporting the work of increasing retention efforts and seeing all students through to completion.

The recently formed Advising 360 committee has taken a holistic approach and is following the through-line of the student experience at MSUB to identify institutional barriers and areas where we can offer more support for our students. Co-led by the Director of Advising and the Director of Career and Employment Services, the Advising 360 committee is evaluating the MSUB student experience from the point of entry at new student services to completion and obtaining professional employment. One notable change that has already occurred is that Career and Employment Services assigns a Career Specialist to each student once enrolled at MSUB, helping draw the connection from academic program to employment. This change is intentionally designed to assist students with achieving their academic and professional goals. The work of the Advising 360 committee is directly related to the work of strategic planning Theme II, sub-objective 2.2 to improve retention and graduation rates.

MSUB is participating in the National Student Clearinghouse's Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP). The MSUB IR team submitted data to the PDP in early August 2021. The PDP's interactive data dashboards and metrics will be complementary to MSUB's in-house data dashboards. We anticipate using this information in combination with the peer and aspirant data created using IPEDS data to identify equity gaps. The partnership with the PDP aligns with our institutional priorities of increasing student access and success. The data from the PDP will enhance existing practices and inform institutional plans to increase retention and graduation rates.

The ongoing work from projects like Montana 10, Advising 360, and the PDP fit naturally with the broader initiative of developing comprehensive retention and graduation plans, with an emphasis on identifying and closing equity gaps. We see this work as important to supporting our institutional priorities.

Addendums: *Follow up on prior recommendations.*

Recommendation 2: *Demonstrate a commitment to stabilize its administrative team and provide effective leadership and management, with appropriate levels of responsibility and accountability, for the major support and operational functions and units to foster fulfillment of its mission (Standard 2.A.9; 2.A.11).*

MSU Billings continues to work toward maintaining a stabilized leadership team. In April 2020, during the NWCCU ad hoc visit and report, MSU Billings was proud to report that our leadership team was stable and all leadership roles, but the College of Business Dean position, were filled permanently. Unfortunately, Chancellor Edelman resigned due to health issues in July 2020. Montana State University President Cruzado was quick to act and within a week of the announcement, named Dr. Rolf Groseth, former MSUB Chancellor as MSUB's interim Chancellor. This quick and thoughtful decision helped bring much-needed stability for the faculty, staff, and students. Dr. Groseth, having previously served as Chancellor of MSUB for over four years, was able to step in, re-establish relationships and continue important campus initiatives. His knowledge of MSUB culture and practices was critical to helping maintain stability during the summer and fall 2020 terms.

President Cruzado worked with the Montana Office of Commissioner of Higher Education to quickly begin a search process for a permanent Chancellor. This process included several open forums that were held in-person and virtually. The open forums provided an opportunity for MSUB faculty, staff, and students to provide feedback on the qualities and characteristics of our next Chancellor. It was a collaborative process that resulted in hiring Dr. Stefani Hicswa as MSUB's Chancellor. MSUB's faculty, staff and students were energized by the naming of Chancellor Hicswa. She began her role as Chancellor of MSU Billings in January 2021. Dr. Hicswa is a Montana native. She served as the President of Miles City Community College for seven years and President of Northwest Community College in Powell, WY for seven years. Her knowledge of the region, combined with her strengths in increasing retention and graduation rates, are a great fit for MSUB. The swift actions of President Cruzado and the Board of Regents allowed us to persist with only minor disruptions to campus initiatives and, overall, resulted in a fantastic outcome.

In late November 2020, Provost Arnold announced her resignation. With this announcement, interim Chancellor Groseth worked quickly to find an internal interim candidate. MSU Billings was fortunate to have a familiar face in the Provost office. Dr. Susan Balter-Reitz, former Vice Provost, agreed to serve as the interim Provost. As a long-standing faculty member and academic leader at MSU Billings, Dr. Balter-Reitz began her interim role in January 2021. A national search was launched in early spring 2021 for a permanent Provost. An internal committee conducted virtual and in-person interviews. Dr. Sep Eskandari was offered the position and began his role in July 2021 as the permanent Provost of MSU Billings. The campus is energized by the new leadership serving in the Chancellor and Provost positions.

Unfortunately, the MSUB academic leadership team recently experienced departures in three Dean positions. Interim deans are serving in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CLASS), the College of Business (COB), and the College of Education (COE). The interim Dean of CLASS, Tami Haaland, is a long-standing faculty leader from the English Department. She is well respected by the faculty. She

recently agreed to also serve as the interim Dean of COE. The interim Dean for COB, Edward Garding, served as interim Dean in the past. To provide additional support to the interim deans, both the COE and COB interim Deans have interim Associate Deans appointed to help support and advance the day-to-day tasks as well as long-term goals. These roles are filled with long-standing MSUB faculty and administrators. Their knowledge of the MSUB culture is helping to maintain stability while we await permanent hires. The decision to hire interims for a year was motivated by the timing of the new Provost starting in July. The interim dean and associate dean positions will provide the Provost and Chancellor, in consultation with the faculty of each college, the time to evaluate necessary staffing, explore efficiencies and develop a plan for hiring permanent leaders for the Colleges. To visually reference what is described, [a copy of the MSUB organizational chart](#) is provided.

MSU Billings has made progress in stabilizing the leadership team, yet there is still work to be done. We aim to fulfill this recommendation by the Year Seven (EIE) visit.

Recommendation 4: *Develop a plan to monitor its internal and external environments and to inform and guide its strategic direction, including review and revision of its mission, core themes, core theme objectives, goals or intended outcomes of its programs and services, and indicators of achievement (Standard 5.B.3).*

MSUB has developed structures for monitoring internal and external environments and fulfills the expectations of standard 5.B.3 using several strategies. Strategic planning, continuous program review, and program assessment of student learning are the primary drivers for monitoring internal and external environments. These evaluative processes occur at various levels of the University and help to ensure MSUB fulfills its mission. The narrative that follows describes how these efforts have shaped recent MSUB history and how they will continue to inform our future.

Through [strategic planning](#), MSU Billings utilizes the four Core Themes to inform internal and external environments. [Each Core Theme has objectives and sub-objectives](#) that specify the direction of the work. Each sub-objective uses an action plan to articulate the details of the work. [Action plans](#), including metrics, for each sub-objective of the strategic plan have been developed and continue to be revised, as needed. In addition to the strategic planning process being developed by both campus and Billings community members, the Core Themes encompass both internal operations and external relationships. This helps ensure that as strategic planning is implemented, MSUB has a continuous feedback loop from both internal and external constituents. As noted on page 9 of [the April 2020 Peer Evaluation Ad Hoc Year Seven report](#), “the strategic plan and related action plans are being used to monitor the university’s internal and external environments—and to move forward on multiple fronts.” MSUB has made tremendous progress, using intentional strategic planning to guide and ensure fulfillment of the Core Themes and the MSUB Mission.

Directly related to the work of the strategic plan, and to stay informed by our external environments, MSUB administrators, faculty and staff are increasing efforts to engage with the Billings community. Chancellor Hicswa joined the Board for the Billings Chamber of Commerce and maintains a leadership position on the Chamber’s Diversity and Equity initiative, of which MSUB is a major sponsor.

Additionally, three members of the MSUB leadership team, including the Chancellor, will attend the Chamber's Diversity and Equity training. This will serve as a training the trainers, as the information acquired at the training will be shared with a broader audience at MSUB. Chancellor Hicswa also accepted the invitation to join the Big Sky Economic Development Board of Directors, specifically assisting with the Workforce Development committee. Dr. Sep Eskandari is a newly elected Board member for the Billings Symphony.

The Chancellor has been intentional in meeting with the MSUB stakeholders and community leaders (Billings' Mayor, Downtown Billings Association, Yellowstone Art Museum, Billings Symphony, etc.) to discuss potential partnerships with MSU Billings. She shares ideas of offering campus as a safe space for challenging discussions or space for community members to gather and host events. One meeting with the Director of the Yellowstone Art Museum already resulted in a successful collaboration. MSUB hosted Summer Fair 2021 on behalf of the Yellowstone Art Museum. This was an exciting collaboration in which MSUB was able to offer a space for Summer Fair and, in turn, the Fair brought community members to campus. The Northcutt Steele Gallery, MSUB's art gallery, was open for visitors during the Fair. Summer Fair was a huge success and we look forward to future opportunities to partner with the Yellowstone Art Museum.

Despite the limitations imposed by COVID-19, Dr. Hicswa has attended community events and [arranged networking lunches and dinners](#) with Billings community members. In meeting with members of the Billings community, the Chancellor observed that community members were not always aware of MSUB services and activities. As a result, the Chancellor plans to create a monthly newsletter for community stakeholders, providing updates about the campus. She is also establishing an advisory board of 7-10 community members that will meet quarterly.

MSUB faculty are actively engaged with the Billings community. Faculty document their engagement with the Billings community through the faculty evaluation process. MSUB faculty and staff responded to a recent inquiry, requesting information about service and engagement with the Billings community. In an effort to inventory the Billings/regional organizations and events that our faculty and staff serve, we asked them to respond with the information and the number of hours per year that they participate in local community service. This inquiry went out in summer and the initial responses are informative and encouraging. Over seventy-six faculty and staff reported serving 20 or more hours in the Billings community per year, and of those seventy-six, forty faculty and staff reported serving more than 50 hours per year. In addition to the impressive amount of time our faculty and staff are serving, MSUB now has an inventory of the local organizations and events that we can use to continue building relationships in our community. Community engagement will continue to inform the Billings community about MSUB and MSUB about the community needs.

Strategic Program Alignment (SPA) assisted MSU Billings with prioritizing academic offerings as well as guiding the appropriate allocation of resources. MSUB experienced several iterations of program prioritization. The most recent was a 2-phase process referred to as SPA. The first phase of SPA (2018-19), known as SPA1, was an initial review of all academic program offerings at MSUB. The Provost and Associate Provost met with each program and discussed appropriate 'charges' to further enhance the program offerings. SPA2, the second phase of the program prioritization process was implemented in

2019-2020. SPA2 used a mixed-methods approach, considering both quantitative and qualitative data to review 217 programs. The strategic program alignment process undertaken by MSU Billings from 2018-2020 provided the institution with a strong platform to make decisions in choosing areas to develop new programs. In this process, the Strategic Program Alignment committee generated a framework to guide the classification of programs as (i) maintain, (ii) integrate/invigorate, or (iii) phase out; programs were further assessed systematically and designated as candidates for intensive review based on enrollment, retention and completion trends. These processes culminated in identification of programs that will be maintained or phased out, as well as identification of needed revisions. As a result of SPA, 82 academic programs were slated for phase out/moratorium.

Future academic program priorities are expected to include more balanced, but strategic, growth initiatives. The outcomes of SPA include completing the termination/moratorium process and revising programmatic offerings to be responsive to student, community, and workforce needs. The remaining 135 programs that were selected to be maintained received specific charges to analyze curriculum with an eye towards streamlining offerings, courses, and coursework. Most programs will continue with a curricular review and likely revisions over the next year. The program directors were also asked to submit plans of study (i.e., academic roadmaps) and course rotation lists for each degree offering. These programmatic documents provide faculty an opportunity to review what is being offered and compare that to student needs. Additionally, these documents help support and enhance the work of admissions, advising, and programmatic assessment of student learning.

In addition to strategic planning, academic program review (APR) is a process in place that is used to monitor internal and external environments. With a more focused academic program list, MSUB was poised to implement a sustainable process to help ensure academic quality and to promote continuous quality improvement. In fall 2020, MSUB launched the Academic Program Review (APR) process. Rather than review all programs at once, [APR schedules programs for review every seven years](#). It provides an opportunity to take an in-depth examination of what the program has accomplished and consider future goals. An expert faculty member from another institution is selected to serve as an external reviewer. A [feedback form](#) is provided to the reviewer to guide the feedback received. In addition to the feedback from the external reviewer, the dean and Provost also provide feedback. The result is an action plan, created in consultation with the program faculty, chair, dean and Provost. The Provost approves the plan, with the Dean following up to assist with implementation and resources. The action plan created from APR serves as a mini strategic planning document for the program. This comprehensive process provides an opportunity for programs to reflect and gain insight from internal and external colleagues. It guides the development of MSUB's academic programs.

In addition to the APR seven-year process, student learning data of each program are collected and analyzed annually. A set of expectations and a process have been established. MSUB maintains [University standards for program assessment of student learning](#). These standards guide faculty to implement a meaningful, manageable, and sustainable processes for analyzing and using student learning data. They provide a foundation and encourage meaningful data collection and analysis. Setting the University's expectations are also complementary to the established process. The standards inform the assessment [plan](#) and [report](#) templates that are provided to each program to guide their work. Each [College has an identified annual reporting month](#), where programs are expected to submit assessment

of student learning reports to the Office of Assessment and Accreditation. The plan and reports are then submitted to the [faculty University Assessment and Accreditation committee \(UAAC\)](#). Documents are reviewed, using a [rubric](#), and peer feedback is provided. The rubric used to provide feedback includes the university standards language, bringing the process full circle. The feedback from other faculty provides an avenue for continuous improvement for both student learning in the program and the assessment process. The program assessment process at MSUB is integrated into the APR seven-year process, helping faculty make the connection to annual student learning evaluation at the program level and more in-depth program evaluation every seven years.

As evidenced in the previous pages and demonstrated above, MSU Billings has made tremendous progress from October 2018, when this recommendation was delivered. As demonstrated through a variety of successful initiatives and efforts, MSU Billings has a focused direction and leadership. We have condensed and reconsidered the academic offerings, better aligned with enrollment trends and student needs. We have structures and processes in place for continuous evaluation of our academic programs so that we can have a better understanding of how best to serve our students and community. We are making great strides at being a better partner with the Billings community and surrounding region. Our strategic plan and other evaluation strategies will yield the data we need to continue guiding our direction. We, therefore, believe we have fulfilled the expectations of Standard 5.B.3 and substantially addressed the previously identified concerns.