



Chancellor's Cabinet Meeting Minutes October 7, 2025 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

In Attendance: Chancellor Stefani Hicswa, Kim Hayworth, Kathleen Thatcher, Leslie Weldon, Lee Vartanian, Suzette Nynas, Kathy Kotecki, Dan Carter, and Natalie Preston. Mike Bazemore attended virtually.

Did You Know?

Student enrollment is highest since fall 2019, driven by increased retention at University Campus and a large freshmen class at City College, specifically in health-related programs.

UPDATES

Chancellor Hicswa addressed three news items related to MSU Billings that have been in media in the past week: an accident involving the cross-country team, Direct Admit partnership with School District 2, and a personnel matter.

DISCUSSION

Shout-Outs

Chancellor Hicswa thanked Kathleen Thatcher, Director of Assessment and Accreditation, and Hannah O'Donnell and Natalie Preston for preparing to welcome the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) peer evaluator team.

Paula Highlander, Director of Human Resources, announced that her son, a senior at Skyview High School, received his acceptance letter from MSUB.

Chancellor Hicswa complimented Mike Bazemore, Athletic Director, for handling the situation with the Cross Country athletes very well, and for his coordination with Kathy Kotecki, Dean of Student Engagement.

Lee Vartanian, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, announced that he traveled with a team of MSUB employees from Advising, Admissions, and Financial Aid to attend the Montana Tribal College Student Transfer Summit. Dr. Vartanian complimented the team's dedication to their work that he observed while traveling with them.

Kim Hayworth, Vice Chancellor for Student Access and Success, gave a shout out for the inaugural Chancellor's Community Breakfast on September 25, and the Outstanding Alumni Awards brunch the following Saturday.

Krista Montague, MSUB Foundation CEO, gave a shout out to Chancellor Hicswa for fundraising. Krista announced that we have received over \$2 million in commitments for the sculpture and ceramic studio.

Leslie Weldon, Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance, announced that she, Ryan Morris, Director of Environmental Health and Safety, and Justin Rife, Director of Facilities, presented at the Long-Range Building Program meeting at MSU in Bozeman on October 1. She complimented her team for their excellent presentation at the meeting, which was attended by the Architecture and Engineering Division of the State of Montana and MSU counterparts.

INFORMATION

Census Report

Vice Chancellor Hayworth reported highlights from the census data that was finalized last week. Dr. Hayworth announced that new freshmen enrollment increased by 50 students or 9.1%. Enrollment is the highest since 2019. Retention at the university campus is at the highest rate on record despite starting at a deficit because of the discontinuation of men's soccer. Retention has increased almost 1% in the cohort. Additional highlights include the College of Business, College of Education, and American Indian students reaching record high retention. Military-affiliated students increased their enrollment.

NWCCU Visit

Kathleen Thatcher announced that the peer evaluation team representing the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities has arrived in Billings and their official visit begins tomorrow, October 8. The university will receive the final decision on the Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE) in February, after the Chancellor, Provost, and Kathleen present to the NWCCU Board of Commissioners at their January meeting.

Process Reimagine and Review

Chancellor Hicswa announced that the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) charged university system campuses with developing an innovation project to improve retention and graduation rates and will provide one-time funding to support this work. We will be able to use our process review work for this project. CampusWorks will provide process review and consultation to help MSUB improve the student experience, retention, and graduation.

Generative AI Acceptable Use Standard

Vice Chancellor Weldon presented the Generative AI Acceptable Use Standard drafted by Brett Weisz, CIO/Director of Information Technology. Leslie explained concerns about confidentiality of data entered into artificial intelligence tools and how this standard addresses those concerns. Brett has requested feedback from the Chancellor's Cabinet and will then finalize and publish the standard to the IT webpage.

Single Email Project

Leslie Weldon provided an update on the Single Email project that has been underway. Montana State University has experienced some delays in implementation on their campus. MSU Billings can be leaders in the process by encouraging students to use their msubillings.edu email addresses.

DISCUSSION

Retention

In keeping with the purpose statement of the Chancellor's Cabinet to serve as an advisory body for the Chancellor, Chancellor Hicswa asked each member to report on what they are doing to significantly increase student retention, which is one of the goals of the FY'26 Operational Plan. Each member reported on current efforts that may improve retention as well as goals they set for the upcoming month.

UPDATES (Reprinted as submitted)

Kathleen Thatcher, Director of Assessment and Accreditation

- The NWCCU peer evaluation team will be here tomorrow through Friday (Oct 8-10). Calendar invites have gone out but please check with our office if there are questions. Please wear your nametag and welcome the review team if you see them around. We plan to have guides taking them from meeting to meeting, but if you find them wandering, please help them get to where they are going.
- Student Health Services (SHS) will host their accreditors on October 14-15, 2025. One reviewer (surveyor) will be on campus to evaluate the SHS programs and services. Please support our amazing SHS staff if they reach out with questions.
- The Paramedic program at City College will host their re-accreditation visit December 4-5, 2025. Please welcome the review team if you see them!

Kathy Kotecki, Dean of Students

Student Health Services:

They have been busy with both medical and counseling appointments. The team is going through their department Accreditation process and will have an onsite accreditation visit October 14 and 15, 2025.

University Police:

-The 2025 Annual Security and Fire Safety Report (Clery mandate) was published on September 29th, two days prior to the October 1st deadline.

-We have an open patrol officer position – the search has been failed multiple times so struggling to get qualified applicants.

CFE/Housing:

-Fall 25 Occupancy Report: we have 346 currently in halls and last year we had 346 at this time. This number is up significantly from last spring. The team is working to promote on campus housing to spring applicants to continue to increase those occupancy numbers.

-The teams are coordinating and facilitating many programs and events to engage students.

Leslie Weldon, Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance

Brett Weisz will be joining the University of North Dakota as their new Deputy Chief Information Officer. His last day is November 14.

LRBP – presentation in Bozeman October 1. This presentation is in preparation for the next biennium funding for our long-range building and planning.

Jacket Success will be offered again October 22nd and 23rd.

Salary calculations and retro pays for approved union Collective Bargaining Agreements. Four of the nine CBAs have been approved.

Fall Well Check October 22, 23 and 24

KnowBe4 Training is at 66% completed.

Kim Hayworth, Vice Chancellor for Student Access and Success

Please plan to join the following Enrollment Celebrations later this month:

Oct. 13 at 3 pm University Campus Enrollment Celebration in the SUB Atrium

Oct. 15 at 3 pm City College Enrollment Celebration in Tech Commons

Please plan to join the Oct. 21, 9-10:30 am Ruffalo Noel Levitz presentation on "The 2025 Higher Education Landscape" to be held in Glacier Room. All MSUB team members are invited to attend.

On Oct. 16 at 10:16, MSUB will participate in a nationwide earthquake preparedness drill, Great American Shakeout as a test of our emergency notification system.

Fall Enrollment Highlights

- Overall headcount is the highest since 2019 at 4145

- Dual enrollment is down 37 or 3.2%

- International student enrollment is down 22 or 32.8%

- FTE is up 1.2% over F'24

- City College headcount is up 7.4% over F'24

- New Freshman enrollment is up 50 students or 9.1%

- One Year Fall to Fall Retention for University Campus at 61.6% is the highest Performance Based Funding on record (going back to 2002) This is especially significant given the impact sunsetting the men's soccer program and loss of several players in the F'24 cohort.

- College of Business F'24 cohort retention rate is 64.5% which is highest on record

- College of Education F'24 cohort retention rate is 74.1% which is the highest on record

- University Campus American Indian retention rate is highest on record at 50.9%

- Military affiliated students is up 50 or 21.6% even while their retention is lower than in '24

