

ACADEMIC SENATE MINUTES**DATE:** October 2, 2025

PRESENT: Suzette Nynas
Emily Arendt
Heather Thompson-Bahm
Rachael Waller
Christine Whitlatch
Melissa Boehm
Kurt Toenjes (ex-officio)
Vern Gagnon (ex-officio)
Leslie Weldon (ex-officio)
Sam Boerboom (ex-officio)

Matt Queen
Jen Lynn
Mel Walker
John Pannell
Paul Pope
Sue Balter-Reitz
Tami Haaland (ex-officio)
Lee Vartanian (ex-officio)
Kim Hayworth (ex-officio)

ABSENT: Debra Schoenfeld*
Susan Gilbertz (ex-officio)
Eileen Wright (ex-officio)
* *excused*

Vikash Kumar (student)
Melanie Reaves (ex-officio)*

GUESTS: Cheri Johannes
Bre Griffin

Kathleen Thatcher

PRESIDING: Suzette Nynas, Chair

Suzette Nynas called the meeting to order at 3:42 p.m. in the South Conference Room of the City College Health Science building.

I. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Senate welcomed Emily Arendt and Jen Lynn from CLASS and Christine Whitlatch from City College as newly elected Senators.

MyMSUB is live. There are videos and tutorials for many of the functions. Cheri Johannes, Registrar, noted that there have been many changes to registration and advising, so please check them out and let her know if something is missing.

ResearchFest is October 23, directly after the Senate meeting, at Craft Local. The deadline to submit a presentation is October 13, and October 20 for posters.

The NWCCU Peer Evaluation Team will be here next week. The All Faculty Forum is Wednesday, October 8 at 2:00 p.m. The closing meeting will be Friday, October 10 at 10:30 a.m.

II. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

The minutes of September 11 were accepted as presented.

III. PROVOST & VICE CHANCELLOR REPORTS

Provost Lee Vartanian

Dr. Vartanian gave some shout-outs to faculty making impressive commitments to the Community. Bruce Brumley taught a cybersecurity camp this summer, while Elaine Westbrook and Heather Slezak did three weeks of drone camps. Daren Small presented a recital that was phenomenal.

The Prison Education Program (PEP) is still in the process of searching for a new director. The Provost hopes to have someone in that position by the next Senate meeting.

The College of Education will begin a national dean search very soon. Dr. Vartanian spoke with the faculty and staff of COE for their input on the search.

Vice Chancellor for Student Access & Success Kim Hayworth

Dr. Hayworth noted that the Great American Shake Out for earthquake disaster preparedness will be October 16 at 10:16 a.m. Campus alerts on phones and through the Emergency Notification System will be issued.

Dr. Hayworth noted several high points for the Fall 2025 enrollment:

- Overall headcount, not including Dual Enrollment, is up 1.8% or 53 students
- FTE is up 1.5% or 35 students
- Undergraduate is up 1.9% or 52 students
- City College is up 7.4% headcount
- Graduate is up 1 student over last year
- For Dual Enrollment –
 - High School Connections is down 37 students
 - University Connections is up 2 students
- New first-time freshmen up 1.9% or 50 students – our largest freshman class since 2019
- Military affiliated, Hispanic, and Native American enrollment are all up
- International Studies is down 22%
- Retention is up 1%
- Fall 24 to Fall 25 retention is 61.3%, which is up 1.3%

Institutional Research has posted some excellent reports, including the highest retention ever for freshmen and transfer students for both the COB and COE. Retention of American Indian students is also the highest we've ever had.

Vice Chancellor for Administration & Finance Leslie Weldon

Ms. Weldon noted that Brett Weisz, Chief Information Officer, will be leaving us in November for a position in North Dakota. He leaves big shoes to fill.

The Long Range Building Planning (LRBP) process began in Bozeman yesterday. There will be lots of back-and-forth as we prepare for the next legislative session.

Jacket Success Employee Training will be October 22-23.

The CBA for the main campus faculty union has been ratified, so the pay increases will show up in the October 29 paycheck.

The Well Check will be October 22-23.

IV. OTHER REPORTS

None.

V. CONSENT AGENDA

Title	Status	Received
ELCT 250: Programmable Logic Controllers	Edited	9/17/2025
EETEC 284: Digital Electronics	Edited	9/17/2025

⇒ Motion by Paul Pope, seconded by Jen Lynn to **approve the consent agenda.**

⇒ Motion carried.

VI. ITEMS FOR APPROVAL

Names for Sabbatical Committee	Added	9/25/2025	policy
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⇒ Motion by Sue Balter-Reitz, seconded by Paul Pope to **approve the Sabbatical list.**

⇒ Motion carried.

Names for Provost's Faculty Professional Development Committee	Added	9/25/2025	policy
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⇒ Motion by Jen Lynn, seconded by Paul Pope to **approve the professional development list.**

⇒ Motion carried.

VII. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

A. Vice Chancellor Poll Update

In Fall 2024, faculty were surveyed for perceptions of the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor for Administration & Finance, and Vice Chancellor for Student Access & Success. The Senate Executive Committee analyzed the data and Dr. Nynas met with all three administrators. The Vice Chancellors requested in writing the summative report not be posted to the intranet, which has been the norm for all previous surveys. The Executive Committee met to discuss this request, and decided, in light of the tone of the emails, to post the attached narrative to the intranet in lieu of the summary. The Chancellor's summary will be published to the intranet.

The Vice Chancellors' communications state two objections to posting the summary of the faculty survey. The first reason was because the Senate did not strictly adhere to AAUP guidelines, which would have given the Vice Chancellors opportunity to review the poll questions before the poll was conducted. The second reason was that the privacy rights of the Vice Chancellors would be violated. The Senate did not have time to get in contact with AAUP for guidance and legal advice. It was noted there is legal precedent that this process is absolutely acceptable, and surveys have been conducted on the Chancellor, Provost, and Deans previously with the summative reports posted on the intranet without objection. It was further noted that the decision not to post the summative report is not in alignment with what we reported to NWCCU. Vice Chancellor Weldon's and Vice Chancellor Hayworth's refusal to allow Senate to post the summative reports on the intranet is in direct violation of policies and procedures as stated in the 2024 PRFR report.

The faculty will be polled on all the Deans this year. The Chancellor and Provost will be in Fall 2026, and the Vice Chancellors in Fall 2027.

In the discussion over the poll itself, it was noted that "Not sure" and "Prefer not to answer" are two different things. Maybe they should be different responses on the poll. The Executive Committee will discuss.

B. Canvas/Navigate Integration

The Executive Committee discussed the options and decided that we should leave the integration at what we have now: last login to Canvas and last activity in a course in Canvas.

The Senate thanked Dr. Johannes for asking about this.

C. Discussion of Possible No Orphan Courses Policy

Last year the Senate received proposals for courses that did not belong to a program/plan of study. The Senate may consider creating a policy, as we do not have one, regarding how new courses must be linked to a program. It was noted that most of the ACT courses are not linked to a program, and in fact, most of the ACT courses are electives for any student.

It was noted that stand alone courses used to live in what was called Extended Campus. Perhaps we need something like Extended Campus, or at least some guidelines for new, stand alone courses. Special topics (course number 291/491) is also a great place to grow courses like this. The Financial Aid issue surfaces as well: if a course is not in a student's plan of study, they can't get financial aid for it—unless it's above 12 credits.

The Executive Committee will begin developing a policy. It was noted that we must be careful not to kill creativity with policy.

D. Interdisciplinary Studies M.S. and new Co-Convening Policy

The Interdisciplinary Studies MS will be discussed at the next meeting.

The co-convening policy was sent out, but no proposals have been started. The 400/500 courses need to be submitted by this catalog deadline (December 11, 2025) in order to offer co-convened courses for 2026-27. A reminder will be sent.

It was noted that 200/300 courses are not recommended.

The meeting adjourned at 4:43 p.m.

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Faculty Perceptions of Vice Chancellor Leadership and Execution of Duties

Each year, the Academic Senate administers a survey regarding faculty perspectives on selected administrators at Montana State University Billings. The questions cover broad topics including shared governance, university leadership, and communication.

This process allows faculty to share their perspectives on their experiences with Academic Administrators so that 1) faculty perception may be expressed and 2) administrators will have information on how their leadership is perceived.

This survey was distributed to 141 faculty in December 2024. The survey consisted of twenty-one questions grouped into three themes. The themes include: Theme 1: Shared Governance (6 questions) Theme 2: University Leadership (9 questions) Theme 3: Communication (6 questions). Each question consisted of a statement for which faculty could select one of the five response options: Strongly Agree / Agree / Not Sure--Prefer Not to Answer / Disagree / Strongly Disagree. The final question asked faculty "How would you rate the Vice Chancellor's overall performance? Please include any comments you wish to share."

The Chair of Academic Senate has met in person with each administrator to share their individual reports. Although this is the first time faculty have been polled about Vice Chancellors, Academic Senate believes it is important for faculty to share their perspectives given the Vice Chancellors' important intersection with the academic mission of the institution. Although the Senate closely adheres to AAUP's recommended processes, including making summary data available to faculty, unfortunately this year the Vice Chancellors were not given the questions in advance of the start of the survey, which is recommended by AAUP. In future iterations of this process, we will more closely adhere to AAUP processes.

In an email addressed to the Senate Chair, Vice Chancellors Hayworth and Weldon objected to the proposed dissemination of survey results to faculty stating it was an infringement on their constitutional rights. They wrote that "under the Montana Constitution, citizens are guaranteed the fundamental right to privacy. The release of the evaluation summary (whether in whole or in summary form) constitutes a direct violation of that constitutional protection." Furthermore, they believed the process used was "one-sided and did not reflect trust, fairness, or confidentiality that AAUP deems critical."

Therefore, it was the decision of the Executive Committee of Academic Senate to not release the summative reports of the faculty feedback. In future iterations the Executive Committee of Academic Senate will ensure the Vice Chancellors review the questions prior to being sent to faculty. Given the Vice Chancellor's stated goals are to "work collaboratively with the Academic Senate and all faculty to improve communication and relationships" the Academic Senate will conduct the survey again in 2027-2028 according to timeline outline on the Academic Senate Intranet and as stated in the 2024 Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review (PRFR) Report to the NWCCU.