MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY BILLINGS

ACADEMIC SENATE MINUTES

DATE: October 29, 2026

PRESENT:

Suzette Nynas	Matt Queen
Joseph Bryan	Paul Pope
Debra Schoenfeld	Heather Thompson-Bahm
Mel Walker	Kari Dahle-Huff
Christine Whitlatch	Melissa Boehm
Sue Balter-Reitz	Alexandra Slade (student)
Kurt Toenjes (ex-officio)	Tami Haaland (ex-officio)
Susan Gilbertz (ex-officio)	Ted Purinton (ex-officio)
Vern Gagnon (ex-officio)	Lee Vartanian (ex-officio)
Tia Brown (ex-officio)	Kim Hayworth (ex-officio)
Sam Boerboom (ex-officio)	Eileen Wright (ex-officio)

ABSENT: Cody Dayley* Allison Pelatt (student)

** excused*

GUESTS:

Kathleen Thatcher	Cheri Johannes
Christina Wulf	Joann Stryker
Bre Griffin	Bruce Brumely
Jennifer Perry	Precious McKenzie
Amanda Stonerock	

PRESIDING: Suzette Nynas, Chair

Suzette Nynas called the meeting to order at 3:40 p.m. in the Chancellor's Conference Room.

I. ANNOUNCEMENTS

ResearchFest is today at 5:30 at Craft Local.

The At-Large Senator election concluded this week with a tie. John Pannell conceded, so our new Senator is Melissa Regnier (formerly Bergerson).

The Faculty Polls for the Provost and Chancellor will be going to those administrators for review tomorrow. The survey will be distributed to faculty in November.

II. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

The minutes of October 8 were accepted as presented.

III. PROVOST & VICE CHANCELLOR REPORTS

Lee Vartanian, Provost & Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
Dr. Vartanian noted:

- The Diesel Technology program received a $100,000 grant to invest in updated lab and hydraulics equipment along with new diesel engines from the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation in partnership with Modern Machinery.
- The College of Business Dean search process will begin in November, with the goal of inviting finalists to campus during the Spring semester. Dr. Ted Purinton, Dean, College of Education, will chair this search.
- Boosting graduate program enrollment is a goal of Academic Affairs this year. Enrollment has decreased 31% over the last 5 years. The Provost has created a Graduate Enrollment Task Force to explore strategies to improve graduate enrollment and chart a sustainable future for the administration of our graduate programs. Below are the task force members:
    - Kurt Toenjes, Dean, CHPS (Chair)
    - Sam Boerboom, Director of Graduate Studies
    - Lacey Bangert, Chair, Graduate Committee
    - Julie Pettit, Director of Admissions
    - Christina Wulf, Admissions
    - Joanne Stryker, Institutional Research
    - Cheri Johannes, Registrar
    - Sue Balter-Reitz, Academic Senate Chair-Elect
    - Dan Carter, Director of University Communications & Marketing
    - Ted Purinton, Dean, COE
    - Tami Haaland, Dean, CLASS
- One persistent frustration has been the issue of adjuncts losing their email/Canvas access in between terms. Our new CIO, Jason Davis, and Dawn Morris, Interim Director of HR, have worked together to extend email and Canvas access to 120 days past the end of employment. This should fix this issue for the fall-to-spring and spring-to-fall periods.
- Keeara Rhoades' Margins & Arm Ends Multimedia Exhibition is currently open through November 19, with an artist talk and reception on November 5.

Dr. Vartanian noted University of Providence (UP) in Great Falls announced this week they will be closing at the end of the 2026-2027 academic year. There has been lots of conversation with OCHE to support those students. Little Big Horn College (LBHC) also having accreditation issues. He asked Kathleen Thatcher, Accreditation & Assessment and OCHE Liaison, to further explain. Ms. Thatcher noted that UP has a high number of

out-of-state student athletes, who may return to their home states. With NWCCU, we are creating detailed teach-out plans by program. The teach-outs will include the possibility that students may not earn 30 credits to be able to graduate from MSUB; i.e., this policy may be waived for some students. If any faculty member is contacted by UP students, please be sure to let Ms. Thatcher and Registrar Cheri Johannes know, as we need to track these students and document their plans of study with NWCCU. LBHC is at the last step before losing accreditation, so they are required to create teach-out plans should they lose accreditation and close. LBHC is under a strict and swift timeline (due December 5), so please respond as soon as you can to any requests on the teach-outs. Ms. Thatcher also thanked Cindy Bell, Director of Grants & Sponsored programs, who has many contacts at LBHC and helped get this effort off the ground.

Kim Hayworth, Vice Chancellor for Student Access & Success
Dr. Hayworth noted that if faculty know any student clubs or organizations that are not registered with the Center for Engagement, please ask them to do so. Registering allows the groups multiple benefits, including being able to ask ASMSUB for funds.

She thanked the faculty for participating in Preview Day last week, and making so many great presentations.

The next Elder in Residence is Philip Beaumont Jr., November 2-6.

Over the next two weeks, Disability Support Services will be doing a survey of any student registered with them. Also, on Monday (November 2), the DSS survey of faculty will go out.

Katie Moffat, Retention Director, will be offering Navigate workshops on November 13 and December 1. It was noted that Ms. Moffat also created a great video for students about Navigate.

Tia Brown, Vice Chancellor for Administration & Finance
Ms. Brown noted the FY26 budgets were accurate within 1.3%, so the Budget Office Analysts did a great job. We ended FY26 with a surplus, which will go toward rebuilding our reserves so we can breathe a little easier. MSUB bond debt has also shifted so that will be decreased by $500,000 less per year for the next 3 years. For this year, 48.5% of the budget is in instruction. She also noted that there will be a training from Payroll on stipends and overload pay on December 8, Facilities Services is installing pay parking signs, and the final designs for the City College food service remodel will be done soon. Ms. Brown noted that we will be sending our food services out for RFP soon (and there has been interest from other vendors), though we are under contract with Sodexo for the next 18 months.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

Title	Status	Received
CSCI 127: Joy and Beauty of Data	Deleted	10/15/2026

CSCI 241: PL/SQL	Deleted	10/15/2026
COMX 211: Advanced Public Speaking	Deleted	10/15/2026
COMX 414: Comm in Personal Relationships	Deleted	10/15/2026
Communication Bachelor of Arts Degree	Edited	10/15/2026
MUSE 440: Commercial Music Pedagogy	Deleted	10/15/2026

⇒ Motion by Paul Pope, seconded by Matt Queen to **approve the consent agenda.**

⇒ Motion carried.

V. ITEMS FOR APPROVAL

Item 1		
Cybersecurity/Network Support Associate of Applied Science Degree	Deleted	10/15/2026

⇒ Motion by Paul Pope, seconded by Sue Balter-Reitz to **approve Item 1.**

Bruce Brumely, Computer Tech, noted that they merged their two programs and this is clean up the program that is no longer offered. There are no students in the program.

⇒ Motion carried.

Item 2			
Advanced Studies Option Applied Behavior Analysis Emphasis Master of Science in Special Education	Added	Remove from Moratorium	10/23/26

⇒ Motion by Sue Balter-Reitz, seconded by Paul Pope to **approve Item 2.**

Mel Walker, Educational Theory & Practice, noted that this program, currently on moratorium, is the only master's in the state or region that results in a board certified behavior analyst. The department does not, at this time, have a faculty member to teach in this program, but the open line remains with the Department for a search. The Department is receiving lots of requests and interest. Dr. Walker noted they will seek a different accreditation for what our students need. The previous accreditor was focused on students who go on to a PhD program, whereas our students will be practitioners. The accreditation we will seek is just getting started, but we will get on their list. We must have students in the program before we can be accredited, and there should be options for graduates from an unaccredited program to get a job. The program will also have a capstone rather than a thesis, which proved to be a barrier for many students.

One of the issues with that put the program into moratorium was the experiential learning requirements. The Department will be working with the Montana Center for Inclusive

Education, as well as doing distance options, as there is a demand for this program in rural areas.

It was noted that OCHE will treat this like a new program, so there will be enrollment and graduation rate requirements that must be met.

⇒ Motion carried.

Item 3			
Academic Senate Bylaws for Dual Enrollment Committee	Added	Policy	10/23/26

⇒ Motion by Paul Pope, seconded by Matt Queen to **approve Item 3.**

It was noted that we are working with School District #2 on the evaluation of teaching required by NWCCU, making baby steps toward an MOU. Dr. Nynas noted that she has been asked to sit on an OCHE workgroup for Dual Enrollment, so the issues are being confronted from multiple viewpoints.

It was noted that, as the work of the committee progresses, the functions of the committee may need to be updated.

⇒ Motion carried.

⇒ Motion by Matt Queen, seconded by Paul Pope to **constitute the committee, which will then review and update the functions of the committee, in consultation with the ex-officio members, and submit those changes to the Senate.**

⇒ Motion carried.

VI. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

A. Dual Enrollment Grant Update

After last week's Senate meeting, MSUB reached out to OCHE about the grant language and they advised us to resubmit. Dr. Nynas and Dr. Balter-Reitz worked with Precious McKenzie, Associate Dean, to rewrite the grant. Dr. McKenzie will be the PI and the three major charges remain: the summit, a cohort of 15 students, and creating a pathway. We will work with our AA and AS in General Studies to give these students a pathway to a degree. Dr. McKenzie noted that many of the rural high schools involved in this project will not have teachers credentialed to teach the Dual Enrollment courses, so many of the students will be in our online courses. It was noted that this project will likely result in a broader discussion of teacher credentialing and what that means.

The question was raised as to progress on OPI approval and finger printing for MSUB faculty to teach high school students. Provost Vartanian noted that Dawn Morris, Interim

Director of HR, is on this project and we have to do some training before we can begin the finger printing process.

B. OCHE Program Reviews
Provost Vartanian noted that we petitioned to have all six of our flagged programs excluded. However, two are moving forward in the process: the Curriculum and Instruction Teacher Licensure Option Master of Education and the Master of Health Administration. These two programs were not flagged because their graduation rates are low, but rather because OCHE noted a significant drop in enrollment over a number of years. Dr. Vartanian noted that this is all still a test, but we must submit detailed reports by January 15. With that in mind, the Provost requested that the deadline be flexible, since it's not much time for a very detailed report. Institutional Research and the Budget Office will do much of the heavy lifting filling out the OCHE form with data. Ms. Thatcher noted that the two directions to go with the report are to moratorium the program or to create a plan of improvement.

The question was raised that since this is a pilot year and no program changes will result from this process, will we have the same programs flagged again next year? Dr. Vartanian responded that yes, we will likely receive the same flags again. However, we will already have the reports prepared. It was noted that OCHE does seem to be asking the campuses to create the forms and guidelines. It was also noted that OCHE is aware they have data challenges.

C. Statement Regarding Last Senate Meeting
Dr. Nynas read the following statement:

We would like to acknowledge the difficult discussion about the Future at Work Grant that occurred at our last Senate meeting. The question-and-answer period during that discussion at times felt tense and there was a perception that a staff member was attacked. The question period brought out concerns and strong feelings, but the intent was never to belittle the director of the MCIE. While some have suggested that these concerns would have been better addressed privately, open discussion in Senate helps build a shared understanding across campus of how curricular decisions are made and who needs to participate.

The Academic Senate is responsible for the integrity of the curriculum and academic programs offered by MSUB. As a Senate we are at our best when we ask thoughtful questions and engage in purposeful discussions. These conversations help establish the expectation that faculty are involved before commitments are made concerning the curriculum they will ultimately deliver. The discussion over this grant was meant to be grounded in these fundamental principles, and not a personal attack.

We are grateful to work with an Academic Senate that takes their responsibilities to heart. We hope that as we move forward with other grants and projects that include curricular items, that we can ensure that every step of the process is infused with a spirit of shared governance, collaboration, and professionalism. Given the ongoing changes and

uncertainties in higher education, we will need to continue to have difficult discussions. The only way to continue to strengthen MSUB for the future is to ask tough questions and have these vital conversations.

Montana State University Billings
Academic Senate Executive Committee
Suzette Nynas, EdD, Chair
Susan Balter Reitz, PhD, Vice Chair and Chair-elect
Paul Pope, PhD, Vice Chair
Matt Queen, PhD, Vice Chair
Melissa Boehm, PhD, Secretary

The meeting adjourned at 4:54 p.m.

rjrm