MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY BILLINGS

ACADEMIC SENATE MINUTES

DATE: October 8, 2026

PRESENT:

Suzette Nynas	Matt Queen
Joseph Bryan	Debra Schoenfeld
Rachael Waller	Christine Whitlatch
Paul Pope	Melissa Boehm
Sue Balter-Reitz	Alexandra Slade (student)
Allison Pelatt (student)	Ted Purinton (ex-officio)
Vern Gagnon (ex-officio)	Lee Vartanian (ex-officio)
Kim Hayworth (ex-officio)	Eileen Wright (ex-officio)

ABSENT:

Heather Thompson-Bahm*	Mel Walker*
Kari Dahle-Huff*	Cody Dayley*
Kurt Toenjes (ex-officio)*	Tami Haaland (ex-officio)
Susan Gilbertz (ex-officio)*	Tia Brown (ex-officio)
Sam Boerboom (ex-officio)	

** excused*

GUESTS:

Kathleen Thatcher	Cheri Johannes
Christina Wulf	Julie Pettitt
Joann Stryker	Bre Griffin
Erica Shea	Precious McKenzie
Amanda Stonerock	

PRESIDING: Suzette Nynas, Chair

Suzette Nynas called the meeting to order at 3:40 p.m. in the South Conference Room of the City College Health Science Building.

I. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Textbook selections for Spring 2027 are due by October 16.

MUS Teaching Scholars application is due tomorrow, October 9.

ResearchFest will be October 29.

II. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

The minutes of September 17 were accepted as presented.

III. PROVOST & VICE CHANCELLOR REPORTS

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

- The College of Education received a $1.4 million grant to support the Special Education Program, led by Melissa Walker.
- The College of Health Professions and Science finalized a lease agreement with Rocky Vista University to utilize lab space in the Yellowstone Science and Health Building. The funding from this agreement created 19 student fellowships, providing them with faculty-mentored research opportunities.
- MCIE is partnering with Billings West High School to offer vocational rehabilitation opportunities for students in the Special Education program.
- The Library Lecture Series started this week and includes Joseph Bryan as a speaker.
- The Academic Support Center is collaborating with Student Health Services to provide food and personal supplies to students. The ASC is also hosting a student writing competition.
- OCHE Program Reviews petitions were submitted for all six of our red-flagged programs, so we wait to hear if those will be accepted. Again, this is a test year. Academic programs outside OCHE's maximum BA/BS credits policy are exploring curricular changes.
- The Environmental Studies Program hosted an Alumni Homecoming, with over 50 alumni, students, and community members attending a full day. Multiple presentations provided opportunities for students to meet with current professionals in the field. Susan Gilbertz, long-time faculty member in Environment Studies, was honored as the keynote speaker.
- The Prison Education Program is hosting a site visit for NWCCU this month. Thank you to Nicole Bogunovich and Kathleen Thatcher for the hard work in preparing our report and for the site visit.

Kim Hayworth, Vice Chancellor for Student Access & Success
Dr. Hayworth noted that in conjunction with Rocky Mountain College, the MSUB All Nations Club will host events for Indigenous People's Day on Monday, October 12, including a walk, round dance, and short film "Home Away from Home." The next Elder in Residence program is October 19-23.

Preview day is October 23.

The enrollment press release went out this week: our retention is the highest in recorded history at 62.2%. This is up 5.7% over last fall. Everyone did great work on this.

A year ago in the Spring, staff members spoke to the Senate about the importance of finding out the students who are actually here. We have a number of students who register and confirm attendance, and then never show up for classes. With faculty working to report those incidences, we are contacting students and getting them the help they need.

The question was raised as to whether there have been any impacts from the changes in financial aid. Dr. Hayworth responded that we had many students wait until the latest possible point to confirm attendance and arrange payment.

Tia Brown, Vice Chancellor for Administration & Finance
Ms. Brown was unable to attend but sent a short report:

- The Budget Office began analysis today of all fee requests. We will be reviewing all current fund balances to requests to ensure budget alignment in the upcoming biennium. Once this is complete, the Budget Office will bring the fee requests to campus for discussion.
- The infrastructure is complete for the water main, and all buildings are tied in.
- Reminder, Jacket Success training is just around the corner, October 21 and 22.

IV. ITEMS FOR APPROVAL

Item 1		
Move Ownership of RD 101 from COE to City College	Added	10/1/2026

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

Erica Shea, City College Department of General Education, noted that they have been teaching this course for some time. It's more of a developmental course and does not fit into the College of Education programs. Sections are offered at City College, the University campus, and online.

⇒ Motion carried.

Item 2		
Names for Sabbatical Committee 26-27	Added	10/1/2026

⇒ Motion by Paul Pope, seconded by Matt Queen to **approve Item 2.**

⇒ Motion carried.

V. OTHER REPORTS

Dual Enrollment
Precious McKenzie, Associate Dean and Director of Dual Enrollment

Dr. McKenzie noted we have over 1100 high school students in Dual Enrollment courses, as well as over 300 University Connections students. All of the high school Dual Enrollment instructors are paired with mentors for support. Staff have been making visits to local high schools to build relationships. The mentorships have hit a snag over union issues, but they are working through those issues.

The question was raised as to what's happening with OPI's requirements for university faculty teaching high school students. Provost Vartanian noted that we attempted to comply with OPI's unusual policy last year, which caused OPI to reconsider it. School District 2 still requires that anyone having contact with a high school student unsupervised/alone must complete the fingerprinting background check—that includes online courses.

It was noted that we currently have 123 full- and part-time faculty teaching classes where there is at least one high school student. They are working with Human Resources to do batches of checks/fingerprinting. The Provost has agreed to cover this cost.

It was cited that the union issues include evaluation of instructors, which is quite different between University faculty and high school faculty. There was also pushback regarding student evaluation of teaching. Kathleen Thatcher, Assessment & Accreditation Director, stated that it's important to stay consistent with how faculty are evaluated, whether the course is Dual Enrolled or not. Dr. Nynas noted that very often, Dual Enrolled courses are also Gen Ed courses, so the assessment of learning for those courses also needs to be conducted.

VI. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

Senator Election Changes & CLASS Position
The open position for the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences has not been filled. The Executive Committee discussed and noted that all three of our at-large representatives are from CLASS. It was agreed to move a volunteer, Paul Pope, to the CLASS position and run a new at-large election. The election will open Monday, October 12.

Dual Enrollment Grant
Guest Amanda Stonerock, Director Montana Center for Inclusive Education

Dr. Nynas noted that this grant was announced at Provost Council, so the Senate has asked Ms. Stonerock to appear and discuss the process that resulted in this grant. Ms. Stonerock distributed a one-page summary of the grant, attached to these minutes, and noted that OCHE is working with the Dennis & Phyllis Washington Foundation on this

funding. The grant will allow students to complete 15, 30, or 60 credits while in high school. There are two requirements (deliverables) of the grant: (1) host a summit with partner high schools for superintendents, students, parents, and instructors to figure out the Dual Enrollment "mess" and build pathways; and (2) have at least 15 students enter the program. This is intended to help students start on a Dual Enrollment pathway.

Ms. Stonerock heard about this grant because no other institutions had applied for it. Because this is not a federal grant but rather a private entity, there is a lot of flexibility in how the funds can be used. We can pay for books, pay lab fees for students, pay faculty to design or redesign graduate courses for Dual Enrollment instructors, pay for support technology, even travel costs for faculty. A soft-launch of the program ran this summer with an English instructor course.

The question was raised as to the courses and programs referenced in the grant: which faculty did Ms. Stonerock work with on this proposal? Ms. Stonerock responded that she worked with the Deans and assumed they would pull in the appropriate faculty. She stated she is not designing coursework. However, it was noted that the grant states that curriculum will be developed, yet no faculty were involved in the writing of the grant. Ms. Stonerock stated that she used language from a previous grant. It was stated that with no faculty input on how the grant was written, faculty are forced into a pathway not of their choosing. What if no faculty want to work in this grant program? It was further noted that the grant says MSUB will develop a 60-credit associate degree plan in the future. Will a staff member be creating a degree program? Ms. Stonerock responded that they have received a great deal of information about the grant since it has been awarded. However, we only have the two deliverables of a summit and 15 students entering the program. It was also noted that this 15 credit "start" is presented like a program, and any academic program needs to be assessed. Ms. Stonerock said that the 15-credit plans are not intended to be a program, but rather lead to an outside certification or licensure, or credits toward a degree. This grant is also about a mix of non-credit and credit-bearing courses for high school teachers earning their credentials.

The question was raised as to how Dual Enrollment instructor plans of study are being organized. It was responded that those are being built in conjunction with the departments, per our policies, and are currently being done on a case by case basis.

> ⇒ Motion by Joseph Bryan, seconded by Sue Balter-Reitz to **suspend this grant for a year, because so much of the parameters and requirements are unclear.**

This grant purports to help students, and we should not abandon that. However, the grant cannot make promises the faculty cannot fulfil. Suspending the grant for a year would allow us to work out the things that should have been worked out in the application process. Ms. Stonerock responded that we can't suspend the grant for a year; we can only give the money back. The Senate requires assurances that how we deal with Dual Enrollment is not going to change. There is grave concern that this grant moved forward with absolutely no faculty consultation; it promises things the faculty never agreed to. It was noted that faculty would be willing to move forward with the grant if it could be

revised or a change of scope submitted that does not include any curricular additions or changes.

⇒ Motion by Matt Queen, seconded by Joseph Bryan to table the motion.

The meeting adjourned at 5:02 p.m.

rjrm

A pilot for rural opportunity. A framework for academic quality.

Academic Senate & Faculty Brief | 15|30|60 Rural Future Ready Pathways
The $90,000 award supports a regional pilot that connects rural high school students with existing MSUB college coursework and appropriate industry-recognized credentials (IRCs). It also helps rural teachers pursue the qualifications required to teach dual-enrollment courses. This is an opportunity to strengthen MSUB's academic systems, not to give away programs, dilute rigor, or bypass faculty review.

STUDENTS	EDUCATORS	MSUB & DISTRICTS
Individualized IRC or 15-, 30-, or 60-credit options, appropriate advising, readiness checks and clear expectations.	Transcript and qualification reviews, existing graduate-course options, and faculty approval before teaching college credit.	Shared rural access, stronger course oversight, sustainable local capacity and a pathway to recruit future MSUB students.

The academic safeguards remain in place
College credit remains college credit. MSUB faculty and established governance processes determine learning outcomes, curriculum, instructor qualifications, assessment, and course approval. High school instructors must meet institutional authorization and training requirements; students must meet applicable admission, placement, prerequisite and course expectations. New graduate coursework, microcredentials, or City College IRC offerings move through their normal academic and credential review processes, not through grant approval alone.

A pilot designed to improve the system
The 2026–27 school year is the first in which schools can access Future Ready funding under the STARS Act. Districts, students, and families are learning the rules alongside higher education. The pilot gives MSUB room to test course access, educator supports, advising and communications; gather faculty feedback; and adjust the approach as OCHE, OPI, and state guidance evolves. Grant budgets and proposed activities may be revised where permitted and with appropriate funder communication and approval.

What students and families will see
Students will be identified as MSUB students, with coordinated outreach and materials explaining academic expectations, college transcripts and grades, tuition and fees, financial-aid implications, transferability, and how each course or IRC relates to an educational or career goal. Individualized plans and proactive advising can help students succeed now and encourage them to continue at MSUB after graduation.

TWO FIXED PILOT COMMITMENTS	DECEMBER 9 | SOUTH CENTRAL MASS
Host the OCHE-framework Future Ready Summit on December 9 in COE 122; and enroll at least 15 pilot students with access to an IRC or a 15-, 30-, or 60-credit pathway by the end of the grant. Access does not mean automatic credential attainment.	MSUB serves the South Central MASS region. OCHE's summit agenda includes a student panel, employer/workforce panel, K–12 administrator panel, Apply Montana discussion and feature of grantees.

Faculty partnership is the mechanism, not an afterthought
The proposed Academic Senate Dual Enrollment Committee offers a standing venue to develop guidelines for High School Connections and University Connections, evaluate course quality and student learning, guide high school instructor onboarding, and coordinate with Graduate Studies, the Registrar and academic units. Its work can help MSUB establish consistent practices as dual enrollment and IRC opportunities expand.

Institutional match: The required dollar-for-dollar match is documented through eligible in-kind contributions of existing MSUB and district staff time and resources devoted to work within their regular roles. It is not a separate $90,000 cash commitment; valuation and documentation must meet grant requirements.