2023 Shared Policy Goals
February 2025 Section E Subcommittee Update

1) *Financial Literacy and College Affordability: Ensure all campuses of the MUS provide financial literacy programs for students, including mandatory tutorials upon entry and ongoing communication with students through the financial aid process.*

- *Expand the Montana 10 student success intervention and evaluate its impact on affordability topics, including student retention, credit accumulation, and time-to-degree. If proven effective, evaluate options to expand Montana 10 program services to more Montana students.*

Key Accomplishments

Financial Literacy

- OCHE launched updates to its college access portal, https://applymontana.edu, to provide resources on the costs of college, saving and paying for college and applying for financial aid. OCHE also substantially expanded financial aid reporting available to campuses and lawmakers through its online dashboards at https://mus.edu/data/dashboards/financial-aid-dashboard.html.
- In Summer 2024, OCHE partnered with Governor Gianforte's office to distribute a financial aid postcard to all Montana high school seniors. The postcard shared financial aid information with students and families and encouraged them to reach out with questions on costs, scholarships, and financial assistance for post-secondary education.

Montana 10

- Montana 10 is the MUS's evidence-based student success initiative focused on increasing affordability and degree completion. Montana 10 provides students with supports that increase the likelihood of graduating, doing so on-time, and with less debt.
- OCHE has expanded the program to eight MUS institutions, including four two-year colleges, and has enrolled nearly 1,000 Montana students over the past two years. Across the board, Montana 10 students are on track to graduate at substantially higher rates with reduced time and cost-to-degree.
- Montana 10 received the 2023 Innovation Award from the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education.

2) *Free Speech: Reaffirm the Montana University System's commitment to fostering environments that ensure the free expression and open exchange of ideas and viewpoints in accordance with the First Amendment. Examples include,*

- *Ensuring all campuses have policies and procedures that comply with the First Amendment and affirm the rights of individuals to freely express their views.*
- *Providing a system-wide training module for campus faculty and staff on free speech and expressive activities.*

- *Establishing the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education as a resource hub for training materials, guidance, and best practices for upholding rights guaranteed by the First Amendment.*

Key Accomplishments

- MUS legal counsel conducted a systematic review of campus policies and procedures to ensure compliance with the First Amendment.
- In collaboration with legal experts from campuses, OCHE offered MUS student affairs, academic affairs, and communications officers training on free speech rights. The training included information on relevant legal obligations and policies and procedures, as well as workshopping free speech case studies. The training was recorded and is available to all campus faculty and staff.
- MUS institutions regularly provide training and education to students and student organizations on campus free speech procedures and policies, free speech issues related to college campuses, and the obligations of student employees to protect free speech.
- The MUS website is a resource hub for free speech guidance and training materials: https://mus.edu/free-speech/index.html

3) *Proficiency-based Education: Implement teaching methodologies and programs that facilitate the development of proficiency-based education opportunities.*

- *Teacher Prep: provide proficiency-based education modules/courses as part of Educator Prep Programs.*
- *Credit for Prior Learning: Improve and expand assessment-based approaches that recognize prior learning for college credit.*
- *Digital Academy: Refine the partnership between the MUS, the OPI, and the Montana Digital Academy so that the MTDA can serve as a portal to a broader range of course opportunities, including more online dual enrollment opportunities through the MUS.*

Key Accomplishments

Teacher Prep

- Montana State University received a one-time legislative appropriation in 2021 to prepare teachers to use personalized learning and proficiency-based education approaches in classrooms. These funds supported:
  - Coursework for pre-service and current teachers, principals and superintendents. From Summer 2022 through Fall 2023, 278 people completed the 3-credit course. Another 40 completed the professional development course in Summer 2024. Learn more at: https://www.montana.edu/education/events/edu491591.html.
  - A Proficiency Based Education Summer Symposium in Summer 2023. The symposium included keynote talks available at the College of Education, Health and Human Development – Montana State University YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/@collegeofeducationhealthan4558.
  - Grants to five Teacher Education Programs across Montana: MSU-Billings, MSU-Bozeman, MSU-Northern, Rocky Mountain College and UM-Western. Grant activities strengthened each program's use of proficiency-based approaches and

preparation of teacher and school leader candidates. Learn more at: https://www.montana.edu/ehhd/pbe/mtpbe.html.
- Resource dissemination: https://www.montana.edu/ehhd/pbe/.

Credit for Prior Learning

- OCHE worked with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) to conduct statewide professional development for MUS staff on tools to award credit for prior learning. Aiming to pilot system-wide equivalencies for common prior learning experiences, OCHE has crosswalked 15 industry credentials and 15 military credentials to MUS common course numbering credit.

Digital Academy

- The Montana Digital Academy (MTDA) joined the MUS contract for its single learning management system (LMS), completing a full transition in Spring 2024.
- MTDA dual credit partnerships expanded to include six MUS institutions: Missoula College, Helena College, Gallatin College, UM Western, and Highlands College. While MTDA enrollments account for only 3.3% of total dual credit, the MTDA partnership helps to expand access, particularly to rural Montana high schools.
- The MTDA dual credit partnership has added a Teacher-early start pathway, which includes statewide access to 9 credits of educator prep program core curriculum.

4) *Tribal College Relations:*

- *American Indian Language and Culture: Expand American Indian language, linguistic, and culture programming.*
- *Tribal College/MUS Transfer: Continue efforts to engage Tribal Colleges to improve the experience of students transferring between Tribal Colleges and MUS institutions.*

Key Accomplishments

American Indian Student Success

- In 2024, American Indian student enrollment grew 5%, graduation rates increased, and the number of American Indian student completions grew by close to 14%. MUS American Indian student enrollment has increased 25% in the past decade, while enrollment nationally has declined.

American Indian Language and Culture

- Montana State University hosted the 2024 Tribal College Librarians Institute, providing professional development on archival practices, digitization, and language preservation (https://www.lib.montana.edu/tcli/).
- Montana State University launched a Tribal Nations Language Program, which invited American Indian speakers to campus for an accelerated one-week course on greetings and basic conversational skills.
- The Mellon Foundation awarded $1 million to the University of Montana to support an indigenous scholar-in-residence program focused on expanding humanities curricula on native culture and incorporating elders and indigenous instructors in curriculum development.
- The Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education is updating the system-wide Indian Education for All for One MUS course, a resource for faculty seeking and staff seeking an

improved understanding of American Indian history and culture. This update is a part of the system's transition to the Canvas learning management system.

TCU Transfer and Curriculum Collaborations

- Salish Kootenai College joined the Montana University System Year to Career Initiative, an effort with national partner, Education Design Labs, to establish micro pathways, short credentials designed to lead directly to a career, but that also stack towards a college degree. SKC became the first tribal college in the country to participate in this effort.
- Fort Peck Community College and Stone Child College are joining the Montana University System course sharing effort https://courseshare.mus.edu. This effort will make online courses across the state easily accessible to tribal college students, expanding their options and reducing time-to-degree.

5) *Career & Technical Education: Continue to develop and improve CTE opportunities, particularly those that leverage public/private partnerships and expand high school CTE pathways.*

- *Sprint Degrees: Establish and evaluate new accelerated degree pathways in in-demand fields ("Sprint Degrees") in partnership with industry.*
- *High School Student Access: Expand CTE dual enrollment opportunities and pathways, particularly those that incorporate industry credentials that articulate with degree programs.*

Key Accomplishments

Sprint Degrees

- Initial cohort launch in Fall 2023 with four programs (Surgical Technology, AAS – Great Falls College MSU and Missoula College, Paramedic, AAS – City College MSUB, Human Services, BSHS – MSU Billings)
- 111 students enrolled in the initial cohort, with 33 graduating by the end of 2024 and 57 students to graduate by the end of 2025.
- Students who select accelerated degree programs rank time to completion as the number one factor influencing their enrollment. Despite the accelerated model, students have been retained at above-average rates and performed well academically and on licensure exams.
- The second cohort launch in Fall 2024 introduced three additional Sprint Degrees (Elementary Education, BS- UM Western, Automotive Technology, AAS – Highlands College, Construction Management, BS- Montana Tech), with three additional degrees (Occupational Therapy Assistant AS – Helena College, Nursing, ASN- Missoula College, Diesel Technology, AAS- MSU-Northern) launching in the 2025-26 Academic Year. All are designed to be completed in 50-75% of usual time.

HS Student Access

- In its second year, Montana's Future at Work, the MUS initiative to help high school students complete dual enrollment workforce credentials before graduation, served 144 students at 32 partnering high schools, awarding credentials in the construction trades, cybersecurity, health care, and machining.
- CTE dual enrollment continues to grow in Montana, outpacing overall dual enrollment in the state. In 2023-2024, CTE dual enrollment courses accounted for 47% of overall dual

enrollment taken in Montana. We have seen 15.3% CTE dual enrollment growth per year since 2016-2017.

- High-impact, student-centered events for high school students are offered at every MUS college, highlighting postsecondary and career exploration in CTE programs. Students participate in events like TekNoXpo, Trades & Technology Day, World of Work (WOW), Career Bonanza, Photonic-CON, Women in Cybersecurity, and Future NOW all around the state.
- In 2023-2024, $50,000 of Federal Perkins Grant dollars were used to support career exploration in middle school grades. Twenty schools were funded and resulted in activities related to Family Consumer Sciences, Hydroponics, Welding, STEM, Manufacturing, Agriculture Mechanics, and CTE career fairs.

6) *Data Sharing: Collaborate with the OPI and the DLI to deepen P20W data sharing partnerships in a manner that provides actionable insights to policymakers and educators and helps to streamline agency processes.*

Key Accomplishments

- OCHE has been an eager participant in the work of the Education and Workforce Data Governing Board.
- OCHE is in progress shifting core data warehousing services to the Snowflake platform, which will facilitate more secure and monitored data sharing partnerships between state agencies.