

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

A Regular Interim Report

On

Montana State University  
Bozeman, Montana

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A Confidential Report – that represents the views of the evaluators, prepared for  
the Commission on Colleges and Universities

## Introduction

A regular fifth year evaluation visit was conducted at Montana State University (Bozeman) on Oct. 18-19, 2004. The purpose of the visit was to enable the Commission to monitor institutional changes, assess continuing compliance with accreditation standards, assess progress toward addressing the general recommendations made at the time of the last full-scale evaluation in 1999, and to evaluate results achieved since the university's progress report in October, 2001.

The university was most recently fully accredited in 1999. Since that time, a "progress report" was provided in 2001 addressing the university's progress toward addressing General Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 in the 1999 Evaluation Committee Report. Additionally, since that time, the Commission accepted a progress report on Recommendations 1 and 4 in 2001 and approved the offering of a jointly sponsored MSU-Bozeman/MSU-Billings Master of Public Administration degree as a "minor change." A complete history of the accreditation actions taken regarding MSU-Bozeman is provided as Appendix 1 to this report.

Prior to this visit MSU-Bozeman prepared a thorough and comprehensive interim report on its progress since the 1999 visit. This report along with the October 2001 report, was provided to the evaluation team members in a timely manner and greatly enhanced the preparations for our visit. The reports describe substantial progress in addressing the recommendations from the 1999 visit and important new developments in the university.

Montana State University occupies an attractive and spacious campus. It benefits from views of the Bridger range and other mountains. Members of the team were received openly and hospitably and benefited from the frank comments of administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Their open and welcoming attitudes contributed significantly to a productive visit. Members of the team visited with the President, Provost, other administrators, faculty leaders, student leaders, and members of the Board of Regents (including a student Regent) – all of whom confirmed individually and collectively the institutional commitment to addressing the earlier recommendations and meeting the Standards of the Commission. A schedule of our visits is attached. (Appendix 2).

This report provides the team's comments on the institutional progress toward meeting the 1999 General Recommendations. It also provides comments on the institution's status regarding the Standards, and some Recommendations and Commendations to help guide MSU's continuing development.

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## Part A. Actions Regarding Recommendations (1999 Full-Scale Visit)

### Recommendation 1

**...that the University administration work with the Montana Board of Regents and the Commissioner of Montana Higher Education to take actions to clarify relationships among the MSU affiliates. Also...that MSU-Bozeman work with Regents and the Commissioner to ensure that MSU-Bozeman does not bear financial and administrative burden of both MSU-Bozeman and the...affiliates. In addition...that the Board, Commissioner and MSU administration develop criteria to determine what management functions are centralized and what are decentralized. Finally...that the MSU Administration along with Regents and Commissioner explore the problems associated with the development of new programs and courses within MSU (Standards 6.A and 6.B).**

This evaluation team notes that progress in addressing this multi-faceted recommendation is somewhat mixed. The university administration is certainly making a good-faith effort to address it, but the results are mixed.

On the positive side, the Board of Regents engaged a consultant (Dr. James Mingle) to work on restructuring plans. His finding was that the Board of Regents and the Commissioner's office should "...establish more explicit guidelines to govern the administrative, financial and academic relationships between the universities and the affiliates." He also laid out a matrix detailing the current roles of each level of the organization in resolving important issues, and this document is under continuing review on the Board of Regents agenda. For a more complete discussion, please see Oct. 2001 progress report.

Also on the positive side, the President of MSU has recently appointed a "Vice President for Intercampus Affairs" specifically to assist in the management of and communication with the "affiliated campuses." This should result in better understanding of their role and scope in the university system.

There is also positive news to report on the concern about the "...problems associated with the development of new programs and courses within MSU." There is now a rigorous approval process mandated by the office of the Commissioner which requires new programs to pass through three stages of approval which require a minimum of six months and requires consultation with other institutions before consideration. Members of our team believe that this part of the recommendation has been addressed. Some other parts of the 1999 recommendation are still in flux and require further work and action on the part of all parties. (Please see our General Recommendation 1). We do recognize that this is a difficult area and that there are numerous political, social, and economic issues involved. At the same time, it is clear to us that MSU-Bozeman may bear a disproportionate responsibility for financial problems at its affiliates, and we are strong believers that authority to take action and responsibility for actions taken should be linked together.

## Recommendation 2

**...that MSU-Bozeman engage in a full and inclusive process involving all elements of the campus community, focusing on the nature of its mission and the changes that increased research is creating. This process should result in an academic and financial plan detailing how the university will obtain and provide resources adequate to meet its mission. Analysis should focus in part on the roles of undergraduate and graduate education in MSU-Bozeman's changing environment. (Standards 1.A, 1.B, 4.B, 5.A.2, 7.A, and 7.B.)**

Members of our evaluation team believe that the university has made an excellent response to this recommendation. Since the arrival of the new President, a broadly representative University Planning, Budget and Analysis Committee (UPBAC) was established to provide direct and permanent links between planning and budgeting, and to open up these processes to the public. This group, established in Feb. 2001, is functioning well – and is widely applauded on campus. In September of 2001, members of UPBAC and other members of the Bozeman campus community were joined by members of the executive staff from the Billings, Northern, and Great Falls campuses to begin the first full cycle of planning and budgeting for the Bozeman campus. Vision and Mission statements were adopted (See Report) and a variety of committees (e.g. Strategic Planning, Enrollment Management, etc.) were constituted. The result is that, under the leadership of the President the campus is doing everything within its power to respond affirmatively to this recommendation.

A positive example is the new link between undergraduate education and graduate education/research in which all undergraduates, as part of the new “Core” requirements will have a research or creative experience. Another positive result is the campaign initiated by the administration to raise additional funds for scholarships. This campaign has already exceeded its original goal, and is now estimated to raise \$25 million for this laudable purpose.

Members of our team recognize that, due to the vagaries of state funding, it may not be possible to develop a firm “...academic and financial plan detailing how the university will obtain and provide resources adequate to meet its mission,” however, we do believe that the university is doing everything within its power to meet this recommendation.

## Recommendation 3

**...that the MSU-Bozeman administration, work with the Regents and Commissioner to address the competitive salary problem for MSU-Bozeman's senior leadership positions (Standard 6.C.9)**

Although this situation continues, our team would note that some progress has been made. (See p. 32 of the report) and that the campus has recently filled a number of administrative positions with high quality individuals. We would further note that the competitive salary problem cited in the 1999 report also applies now to faculty positions, and to the state civil service positions. This is a problem that will certainly require the combined efforts of the university administration, the Board of Regents, and the Commissioner of Higher

Education; and the system Regents (to their credit) requested a study of compensation issues, which has now been completed by the Commissioner's Office. The results of the study were made available to our team. MSU-Bozeman and The University of Montana were classified for comparative purposes as "Public Doctoral/Research Universities – Intensive" and the case can be made that they belong in the "Public Doctoral/Research Universities – Extensive." Even at this lower classification, however, administrative and faculty salaries lag behind; and civil service salaries are also low. This is true even though it is acknowledged that costs of living (e.g. housing) are significantly higher in Bozeman and Missoula than they are in most of the state. If the citizens of Montana truly value the high quality educational programs provided at MSU, they will want to address this problematic area. (Standard \_\_\_\_\_)

#### **Recommendation 4**

**...that MSU-Bozeman develop a formal and open linkage between its planning and budgeting efforts in a way that provides clear opportunity for all interested members of the university community to understand and participate in shaping the institutions priorities and future. It is recommended that the institution provide a progress report to the Commissioner in written format by Dec. 1, 2001. (Standard 1.B and 7.A)**

Members of our team believe that the university has responded fully and admirably to this recommendation. (See Comments under Rec. 2 and Oct. 2001 Progress Report). Under the leadership of the President, the university has a very comprehensive and broadly participative planning process in place.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**...that MSU-Bozeman needs to more effectively organize, coordinate and deliver special student and academic services for students enrolled in off-campus degree programs and credit courses, especially those offered through distance learning. These services should address student needs such as general advising, registration, admissions, technology assistance and other types of support in modes and times that are convenient and accessible for working adults with time and other constraints. Specific responsibility for developing, organizing, and providing these services needs to be designated. (Standard 2.6.0)**

Members of our team believe that the university response to this recommendation is also mixed, with results varying somewhat by program. The Burns Telecommunications Center (BTC) provides technical support for students in programs coordinated through that unit, and technical and course development support for faculty who choose to utilize their services. Grant-funded distance education programs through the College of Education, Health and Human Development provide a range of support services through a person hired for this purpose. However, this model is not scalable for programs with significant enrollments or for a university-wide response to distance learning. A set of guidelines (Guidelines for Distance Delivered Courses, Programs, and Degrees, Attachment C of the Fifth-Year Interim Report) has been developed, but the degree to which these guidelines are followed for all courses and programs, and the consequences for failure to do so, are not clear. There does not appear to be central administration oversight for consistency in distance programs and services. Neither the MSU

website nor the university catalog provides a clear and complete picture of distance education and the services available at the institution.

The evaluation team recognizes distance learning programs are not a major part of the institution's program mix at this time. However, there seems to be widespread agreement among the administrators, faculty and regents we talked with that these programs are likely to play a larger institutional role in the future. The successful programs already in place at MSU, the guidelines that have been developed, and the services available through the BTC provide a good foundation for growth. Building on these programs and the best practices of distance learning programs elsewhere can put MSU in a strong position for future development.

### **Part B.1 Responding to Commission Questions on Institutional Changes (and Standards)**

General Comment: There have been very significant changes in the leadership at MSU-Bozeman since the 1999 visit. The new President has made changes in style and substance that are widely and enthusiastically endorsed on the campus by all constituencies with whom our team visited. The only substantive (Minor Change) in academic offerings is the addition of a joint MPA offered cooperatively by MSU-Bozeman and MSU-Billings. Other significant changes (e.g. Core Curriculum, Assessment, etc.) will be discussed under the individual standards.

#### **Standard 1: Institutional Mission and Goals, Planning and Effectiveness**

MSU-Bozeman has developed a new mission and vision statement. (See comments also under Rec. 2). The new President is committed to the importance of shared governance; and faculty, staff and students were all involved in significant ways in these developments, and are involved in planning and budgeting on an ongoing basis. (Please see p. 3-6 of Self-Study Report). An important development is the formation of the new University Planning, Budgeting and Analysis Committee (UPBAC) which is broadly representative and makes decisions based on rich data and established university priorities. Other key groups involved in these processes include the President's Executive Council (senior administrative staff), the Dean's Council, the Strategic Planning Committee, the Enrollment Management Committee, the Budget Office and the Office of Planning and Analysis.

In September of 2001 the University held a retreat to develop new mission and vision statements. A broadly representative group (including UPBAC) prepared drafts which were widely circulated and reviewed; and the President's office sponsored a public forum. As a result of these efforts, a new and appropriate Mission/Vision statement for MSU-Bozeman was adopted. It can be viewed on page 5-6 of the self-study for this visit. Members of our team believe that MSU-Bozeman is now in complete compliance with the goals of Standard 1, and that faculty, staff and students are enthusiastically and appropriately involved in all aspects of planning and budgeting.

#### **Standard 2: Educational Program and Its Effectiveness**

We recognize that each catalog cycle results in changes to departmental requirements within majors. The most important change since the 1999 report has been the introduction of a new "Core Curriculum" called "CORE 2.0." The 1999 report commended the university for its "persistent pursuit" of a new core curriculum and the "broad vision it embodies." The university has now benefited from 4 years of grant support from the Hewlett Foundation, and after several years of experimentation has, this Fall, fully implemented CORE 2.0 for the entire campus. The highlights of this new core curriculum can be found on p. 11 of the self-study report and include: university seminars, diversity courses, inquiry courses, courses on contemporary issues in science and a research or creative experience for all undergraduates. Our team has reviewed this core thoroughly and concurs with the faculty steering committees that have the courses under continuing review that the new core is an excellent one to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century students.



## **Standard 2.2: Educational Program Outcomes Assessment of Student Achievement**

The university's Assessment Outcomes Committee (AOC), which was established prior to the 1999 accreditation, has been revitalized under the present administration. The addition of Jim Rimpau, Executive Director of Planning and Analysis, has provided valuable expertise to that group.

The AOC has used the Student Outcomes Assessment Policy (Attachment E of the Interim Report) as the basis for their work. Each department is asked to develop assessment plans. The committee goals for these plans are that all departments will be using assessment based on student outcome objectives, that faculty are actively involved in the process, and that assessment results are being used for program improvement. The committee asks for assessment results each year, and for updates of the assessment plans every other year.

Recognizing that the process is in its beginning stages, the Assistant Vice Provost for Under-graduate Education noted that the process seems to be working and is stimulating direct faculty involvement.

Other new programs include a "Liberal Studies" degree which was approved by the Regents (after careful consideration on campus) in November of 2003. Other degree programs approved or discontinued are shown in charts on p. 12-14 of the self-study. There are several new multi-campus, inter-institutional graduate programs – two within the state and three national. These are shown on p. 15 of the self-study, and our team believes they are appropriate, needed and generally well managed. We believe that MSU-Bozeman meets the spirit and intent of Standard 2 (except as noted elsewhere in our report).

## **Standard 3: Students**

The University has made a priority of increasing the academic quality of its undergraduate student body, reflecting its five-year vision. Current freshmen have higher SAT scores and include the largest number of top Montana high school graduates of any public university in the state. Overall, enrollment has increased from 11,753 in Fall 1999 to 12,135 in Fall 2003, an increase of 3.3%. The institution has also focused on improving student retention by elevating the status of the Office of Retention and instituting a process for promoting first-year student success.

In terms of support for students, MSU has greatly enhanced access to web-based services and is implementing a new Web portal. Various technologies are also being utilized to better support students with disabilities, re-entry students and veterans. Positions have been added to promote better living environments for campus housing residents and to broaden career counseling.

Facilities to support intramural sports and recreation have been enhanced, and planning to expand Strand Union is underway. The Division of Student Affairs assumed responsibility for emergency preparedness planning and coordination in 2001. Expansion of this effort has continued since that time.

#### Standard 4 Faculty

It is clear that MSU-Bozeman has a dedicated, talented and loyal faculty. It is also clear to members of our team that they lag behind their peers in compensation.

In recent years the University has adopted four new policies that significantly affect tenured/tenure track faculty. These are:

1. Establishment of a post-tenure review process -- developed by faculty and approved by the administration (Standard 4.1);
2. Definition of work-load -- providing opportunities for professional growth and development and ensuring that teaching, research/creativity and service are appropriately recognized for each faculty member individually;
3. University sponsored research appointments -- allowing faculty with externally-funded research grants and contracts to receive special salary considerations; and
4. Expansion of opportunities for additional compensation for teaching -- providing for such compensation for teaching in "overload" courses such as the First Year Seminar courses in the new CORE program.

The University is also working on policies regarding adjunct and part-time appointments, especially in regard to benefits, etc. All of these policies and proposed policies have included full faculty participation in their development; and faculty leaders with whom we visited expressed no concerns regarding them.

Our team notes that comments made by previous teams regarding faculty salaries are still viable. In fiscal years 2000-2001 through 2004-2005, average faculty salary increases were respectively 0%, 4.0%, 4.0%, 0% and an annual increase of \$500 not effective until Jan. 1, 2005 (i.e., \$250 in that year). These salary increases fail to match even inflation, and our team members are concerned that, given the higher cost of living in Bozeman, salary levels may test the loyalty of even the most dedicated faculty members. (Standard 4)

We should note, however, that the university has initiated a program of "promotion raises" and a total of 80 faculty members have benefited substantially from these. A program (BEST - Buyout for Enhancing Scholarships and Teaching) and a faculty short-term professional development leave program have also been helpful and have contributed to morale on campus.

In summary, our team believes that, with the exception of a concern about salaries, MSU-Bozeman fully meets the expectations of Standard 4. (For a more complete description, please see pages 20-23 of the Self-study.)

### **Standard 5: Library and Information Resources**

Over the past five years, increased funding for information resources and a major renovation to Renne Library have combined to significantly improve both the physical facility and the library holdings on the Bozeman campus.

### **Standard 6: Governance and Administration**

In the judgment of our team, MSU-Bozeman has in place a very strong and effective leadership team. Leadership changes since the 1999 visit include the appointment of a new and highly regarded President (December 2000), the selection of a new Vice President for Administration and Finance (interim Sept. 2001 to May 2004, then permanent), and a newly created Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education who began his work on July 1, 2003, following a national search. Additionally, a new Commissioner of Higher Education arrived in September 2003, and a new Board Chair assumed his responsibilities in February 2004. Members of the team reviewed the administrative structure at MSU and find it to be appropriate and effective. While there may be some lack of clarity (in our minds at least) in the borderline between the responsibilities of the Commissioner's Office and the Board of Regents, we believe that MSU-Bozeman is in full compliance with this standard.

### **Standard 7: Finances**

While the state funding base provided to MSU-Bozeman remains meager, at best, the University itself has taken a number of steps to enhance its viability. Significant changes since the 1999 visit include the following:

1. The legislature no longer requires the university to revert money to the state for projected (funded) resident FTE that is not realized during the biennium;
2. Actions by the Board of Regents have given the university more flexibility in using year-end funds for long-term initiatives;
3. The university's funding from grants and contracts has increased from ca. \$52,000,000 (FY'98) to ca. \$88,000,000 (FY 2004).

In addition, as described earlier, the university has revamped its budget development and strategic planning processes in productive and inclusive ways; and the university has embarked on strategies to increase out-of-state enrollments, increase its endowment, and become more self-supporting. Members of our team believe that the state should increase its funding to support the campus, but that MSU-Bozeman continues to meet the requirements of Standard 7. (For further details please see pgs. 24-26 of the Self-study)

### **Standard 8: Physical Facilities**

The MSU campus is a pleasing mix of historic and modern buildings set in a tree-lined, residential section of Bozeman. A number of new buildings and an improvement to the tunnel infrastructure have been added to the campus since 1999. Several older buildings have been

renovated during that time, and funding has been committed to deferred maintenance projects. There is some backlog of deferred maintenance, according to the Regents with whom we visited; but, as noted, the University is addressing this problem. We believe MSU-Bozeman meets the requirements of Standard 8.

### **Standard 9: Institutional Integrity**

The university and its administration appear to be held in high regard, both internally by faculty, staff and students, and externally by regents and the community. The open and inclusive nature of the administration under the President has clearly reflected well on the entire institution.

In 2002 the university instituted a two-year pilot for a University Ombuds position. Focus of the position is providing a neutral, independent, and confidential resource for professional staff and faculty in addressing work-related issues. Availability of the University Ombuds to the entire institutional community will help assure the highest ethical and professional standards and behavior among its employees. A request for permanent funding for the position will be made through the UPBAC process. In the judgment of our team, there is no doubt that MSU-Bozeman meets the requirements of Standard 9.

### **Part B.2. General Comments, Advice and Suggestions**

1. Scheduling regular meetings of the Dean's Council, perhaps once a month, would stimulate valuable discussions about issues of importance in meeting the institution's academic goals. As part of the senior leadership of the university, the academic deans can provide useful input related to such topics as enrollment management, implementation of the core curriculum, and the role of distance education.
2. We recommend that the university administration continue its efforts to convince the Commissioner and the Board of Regents that it is deserving of the designation "Research Extensive" rather than "Research Intensive" since this would more accurately reflect its competitive position. We suggest that the Commissioner and the Board consider carefully this question.
3. We recognize the important role that major research universities play in economic development in their states, but the team members hope that the citizens of Montana will continue to recognize the importance all academic programs play in the cultural and intellectual development of the future leaders of the State.
4. Our team suggests the desirability of developing and publicizing articulation agreements with the community colleges in the state.

### Part C. Institutional Commendations

1. The evaluation team commends the University Administration for the open, candid, thoughtful way in which it has implemented the response to Rec. 2 from the 1999 report. Budgetary processes, academic plans, etc., now involve all elements of the university community in an inclusive process that strengthens and enhances university morale. (Standards 1.A, 1.B, 4.B, 5.A.2, 7.A, and 7.B)
2. The evaluation team commends the faculty and staff of the university for their enthusiastic participation in planning activities, and for their continuing commitment to MSU in difficult financial times.
3. The evaluation team commends the students of MSU for their willingness to absorb additional financial burdens as a result of the state's inability to provide adequate resources to maintain institutional quality.
4. The evaluation team commends the university administration and faculty for the development and implementation of a new "Core Curriculum" designed to prepare students for the changes that lie ahead in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.
5. The evaluation team commends the university for the adoption of a thoughtful "vision statement" and for the ongoing efforts to implement this statement.
6. The evaluation team commends the university for the efforts it is making to recruit and retain an increasingly able student body while simultaneously increasing the diversity of traditionally under-served groups.
7. The evaluation team commends the university for providing support to enhance the research of faculty in the creative arts, humanities, and social sciences where federal funding is hard to obtain.

**Part D. Institutional Recommendations**

1. The team recommends (See Rec. 1, 1999) that the MSU-Bozeman administration continue to work with the Montana Board of Regents and the Commissioner's office to clarify the fiduciary/financial responsibility of the Bozeman campus for the affiliated campuses (Standards 6.A and 6.B).
2. The team recommends (See Rec. 3 from 1999) that the MSU-Bozeman administration continue to work vigorously with the Regents and Commissioner to address the competitive salary for administrators, faculty, and staff on the Bozeman campus (Standards 4 and 7)
3. The evaluation team acknowledges that progress has been made on Rec. 5 from the 1999 report, but recommends continuing attention to the effective organization, coordination, and delivery of the special student and academic services required to meet the needs of students enrolled in off-campus degree programs and credit courses, especially those offered through distance learning (Standard 2.6.0).
4. The evaluation team recommends that the MSU-Bozeman administration make special efforts to assure that students at the affiliated campuses, and other institutions throughout the state, have a clear understanding of how their courses articulate with and are accepted to meet requirements at the Bozeman campus. (Standard 2)
5. The evaluation team recommends that the MSU-Bozeman administration continue its efforts to develop and implement uniform "guidelines" to assist individual colleges and programs in developing distance learning activities and maintaining/monitoring their quality. (Standard 2)