Committee Members: David Beck (chair), Ray Cross, Emily Ferguson-Steger, Vernon Grant, Salena Hill, Fredricka Hunter, Charles Janson, Penny Kukuk, Sandy Ross, Darlene Samson

Introduction: At the request of Provost Perry Brown and Vice President for Student Affairs Teresa Branch, this committee convened to review the status of programs that support Native American students at the University of Montana in Missoula. We gathered data and met to analyze it throughout Fall semester 2011. We collected data from academic and non-academic units on campus, and from units and programs that specifically serve Native American students as well as those that serve Native American students as part of their service to all or a broader group of students. Our focus is on both strengths and opportunities for improvement. We developed a survey to gather basic data from each unit, including whether they provide services in the long-term or short-term, and where they fit into the pathway from recruitment through graduation. We also queried the units on subjective issues such as their perceptions of the university’s efforts to support Native American students and what types of support would help make their work more successful. Despite the breadth of our study, it should be viewed as a snapshot.

Overview: To focus as broadly as possible we queried student service programs, some administrative departments and academic programs and units. In some cases there was significant overlap, in some cases minimal overlap, and in some cases no overlap in the category of student service/academic service. Some of the support is very short term — primarily that based on grant money. Other support is incorporated into the fabric of departments, colleges, and the university administration. Overall respondents believe that the university has made a positive and successful effort to support Native American students, but also that the university needs to strengthen its support.

Strengths:
*The Payne Family Native American Center was named numerous times as both a symbolic and a real strength. The building itself, housing the Native American Studies Department, American Indian Student Services, and the office of the Assistant to the Provost for Native American and Indigenous Education, as well as formal and informal space for students and campus community members, is placed in a central spot on campus. The unique architecture both fits in and stands out. Symbolically the building is a statement of the strong commitment of UM to
Indian country in Montana, and to the integration of Native students, knowledges, and community into the fabric of the institution.

*The Native American Studies Department is also identified as a key strength. It has a long history at UM and is a stand-alone department with high academic standards for both its students and faculty. The NAS advisor serves not only NAS majors and minors but other Native American and non-Native students from across campus.

*The university incorporates Native American cultural features into UM functions. For example, such features have been built into commencement ceremonies, the presidential inauguration, and other campus-wide activities.

*The university supports of a campus-wide network of diversity programs helps bring faculty and staff members from across campus together.

*The “Soup Friday” event organized by American Indian Student Services and sponsored by programs and departments across campus helps build community among Native American students and among Native and non-Native campus community members.

*Institutional support for Native students in the sciences is regarded as a strength. Much of this is provided through grant money.

*The room set aside for Native student use in Forestry is a recent, positive change.

**Challenges:**

*The university does not do a good enough job providing academic support for undergraduate and graduate students outside of the sciences and STEMs, when grant money does not exist.
*Services for Native American students are often provided in isolation
*The university lacks sufficient “role models” for Native American students in staff, faculty and administration. This has been identified as problematic both symbolically and as a retention tool.
*Maintaining programs that are grant-driven is an ongoing challenge. Several grant-based programs have been lost, and many are short-term in nature.
*Native American graduate students outside of the sciences and grant-based programs often lack the financial and academic support they need to succeed
*Advising staff for Native American students in the areas of retention and financial aid is viewed as woefully inadequate.
*Communication and information regarding various programs that serve Native American students is not well-coordinated.
*Isolation of programs supporting Native American students diminishes the strength of support they can receive.
**Recommendations:**

1. **Communication:** Unify outreach materials used for Native American students for easy distribution across campus.
   - A. Develop and maintain a web portal and keep it up to date. For a model, see the University of British Columbia Vancouver Aboriginal Portal: [http://aboriginal.ubc.ca/](http://aboriginal.ubc.ca/)
   - B. Coordinate service programs so that they do not work in isolation.
   - C. Within OSRP, keep track of grants that focus on Native American students and develop lines of communication so that those overseeing the grants are aware of other similar programs on campus. OSRP can also help those developing grant proposals by connecting them with others who are doing such work already.
   - D. Revive the old poster identifying Native American programs across campus. This has been especially useful in tribal communities in the recruitment part of the pipeline.

2. **Comprehensive Plan:** Develop a comprehensive plan for success of Native American students that units across campus can use in their planning and development of programs. This plan should build on successes (such as the kind of support available to STEM students) and implement them across the system, at the undergraduate and graduate level, at the mountain campus and COT, in the sciences, professions, social sciences, arts and humanities.

   The UM Native American and Indigenous Education Strategic Plan should be consulted when developing this. The committee made suggestions of individuals who might be called on to serve on a committee to operationalize this plan. This should be tied closely to the communication recommendation #1 above.

   - A. The plan should include methods of providing support for students who are not supported through STEM grants. This was also identified as an issue by tribal college representatives who visited UM in Fall 2011. The scholarship program overseen by the NAS department provides some financial support, but with the growth of the Native American student population, this has become underfunded. The committee recommends that the President include such support in his short list of projects to the foundation.
   - B. Special attention should be paid to COT services since MUS is increasingly focusing on 2 year colleges as student entry points into the university system.
   - C. Other elements of this report (#3-6) are all factors that should be built into the plan.

3. **Role models**
   - A. Recruit Native American staff, faculty and administrators across programs and units. Thus far the most progress has been made in the area of staff. Nearly 800 Native American students are studying in 88 majors at UM, and priority for this recruitment
should be made in colleges and departments/programs with significant numbers of Native American students, such as COT, the Business School, and the School of Education. These individuals should encourage incoming students to attend summer orientation.

B. Bring back the Peer Mentoring program. Students need to be educated in ways they can access services and mentoring across campus, and the Peer Mentoring program was successful at this. This program should work together with #4A.

C. Develop a speaker series of successful Native American alumni who come to campus and give a talk where they “tell their story.”

D. The web portal in 1A above can also provide examples of role models.

4. Work to develop personal relationships between Native American students and individual faculty/staff members. This is especially important for retention.

A. Identify individuals in each department/program/unit across the university that Native American students can go to – those who will have some basic knowledge of working with Native American students. Department Chairs and Deans will need to identify the go-to people in each department. (See also #3B)

B. Provide multi-cultural training for working with Native American students to those individuals identified in departments/colleges as the go-to person.

C. These departmental reps can be identified as “allies” in some way, similar to the current allies program.

D. This should not exclude Native students from working with other faculty or staff. It should simply be a person who a student can approach for advice.

5. Hire more staff to advise Native American students for retention and financial aid. This might be based broadly in fields, or it may be based on grade level (Freshman-Sophomore, Junior-Senior, Transfers, Graduate students, for example). This should be done in conjunction with AISS and the Office of Student Success.

6. To diminish isolation and the alienation that can arise from it, outreach to Native Students should occur in places across campus. Events modeled after the popular Soup Friday, if held in other venues, could bring Native and non-Native students, staff and faculty together to build community. The public schools do this through monthly round dances held in various schools.

A. Set aside gathering spaces in departments or schools with high Native student population, such as the new room set aside in the Forestry building

7. The EEO office should provide a training/retraining on discrimination issues at two levels

A. To NAS/AISS/TRIO
B. To Mentors in departments (#4A)

8. Identify and ameliorate gaps in the recruitment-retention-graduation pipeline.
   A. The chart developed by Aislinn HeavyRunner-Riou (below) shows that there is overlap – that programs fill more than one slot in the pipeline. This data needs further development in order to create a working plan for filling the gaps. An individual with previous experience in quantitative research and a background in working with Native American programs/students/communities should be tasked to increase the quality and analysis of data. This project can be the start to building a database to house all information pertaining to Native American education at The University of Montana. (see also recommendation 15). Such data would be invaluable for retention efforts and also for grant proposal work.

![American Indian Student Service Programs at The University of Montana Pipeline Focus](chart.png)

The AISS Committee questionnaire included a question asking “Where is your unit on the continuum – i.e. is your impact primarily in pipeline Recruitment-Retention-Transition-Graduation?” A simple count was taken of the programs that responded to this question, followed by a simple percentage calculation; the results are shown above in the bar chart. Fifty-three percent of the programs that responded reported their focus including recruitment of students. Sixty-nine percent reported their focus included retention of students. Sixty-three percent of the respondents reported transition as a focus of their program efforts. Last, fifty-three percent of the respondents reported graduation as part of their program focus.

9. Community input.
   B. Develop a system to provide for input from the Native American campus community when decisions are made that impact Native American students, such as job hires for programs providing oversight to Native American students.
C. Develop a system for tribal community leaders from across the state to provide input to the university regarding educational needs within their communities.

10. Support development of 2+2 programs with TCU’s

11. University system cooperation. Conduct research and planning for Native American student success system-wide (UM and MUS flagships and smaller campuses)

12. Assessment. Develop an annual process to systematically assess the success of support systems for Native American students. Some programs do this well, others do it moderately, and others do not do so at all. This should be a university-wide assessment. This should be incorporated into an administrator’s annual reporting and job description.

13. Conduct studies like this one for the Dillon, Butte and Helena campuses.

14. In nearly all of these actions, include Native American student participation.

15. Conduct a study of grants and programs that work with Native American peoples and communities off-campus, but that do not work directly with Native American students on-campus. UM does a lot of work in Indian country, but who keeps track of it all? That work was not the subject of this report unless Native American students on campus are directly involved. The research office seems to be the logical place to keep track of this work since so much of it is grant-driven. These projects could be integrated into the website proposed in recommendation 1A. This would help with transparency and it would help connect projects that may have overlapping or contradictory purposes.

Attachments:
* UM Native American Majors, Fall 2011
* Sample Questionnaire
* Summarized responses to report