



The University of
Montana

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TO: Campus Community

FROM: Royce C. Engstrom, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

SUBJECT: Academic Strategic Plan

Introduction: The purpose of this letter is to announce the initiation of a major academic strategic planning effort that will occur over the next fifteen months. An up-to-date and ambitious Academic Strategic Plan (ASP) will serve as a decision-making guide over the next five years. It will focus resources and energy on key issues, provide a solid foundation for our upcoming accreditation visit (about which you recently received a letter from President Dennison), and, most importantly, help us build an even more effective university. The ASP will be developed in parallel to, and in close connection with, the Accreditation process. The specific goal is to have the completed ASP published by the end of summer, 2009.

Principles: In order for the ASP to be effective, we will need to abide by several principles:

- The focus of the plan must be on enhancing the effectiveness of our core mission. However, the emphasis of the plan shouldn't be so much on how we spend our time (teaching, research, and service) as on how we optimize the outcomes of our efforts (for example, student learning, new knowledge and creative works, and solutions to problems.)
- The planning process needs to be stepwise and deliberate, it needs to be open and collaborative, and it needs to be informed by knowledge of external forces and expectations.
- Planning needs to be done in the context of the resource base we can realistically, but ambitiously, expect.
- Academic planning relies upon the involvement of other sectors within the University, so Student Affairs, Research, Information Technology, and Administration and Finance, in particular, must be involved.

Stages of Development: There are many resources available describing the strategic planning process in academic settings¹. Key steps in our process should include:

1. Getting organized (Spring 2008): We will begin by establishing an ASP Steering Committee. *If you are interested in serving on this committee, please let me know within the next week.* A Coordinator will be appointed and, to ensure close communication with the Accreditation process, frequent meetings will be held with the ASP Steering Committee Chair, the Accreditation Steering Committee Chair, and the Provost. During the Spring semester, the ASP Steering Committee will define the planning process, including development of a clear communications plan. The committee will design the Environmental Scan (next section), it will look at plans from other schools to inform the design of our own plan, and it will identify key subgroups to work on particular aspects of planning. During this phase, and all others, specific venues will be scheduled to receive contributions from any interested member of the campus.

2. Environmental Scan (Summer 2008): An environmental scan will provide the background and context in which our plan will be developed. The scan will include, for example: a) data and trends for parameters such as enrollment, research productivity, and student performance; b) a review of external forces that are operative, such as federal and state public policy statements related to higher education, demographic changes and trends in participation in higher education, and funding projections from state and other sources; c) strategic directions as communicated in documents from the Board of Regents and President Dennison; and d) analysis of our own strengths and concerns.
3. Identification of Strategic Issues (September, October 2008): Informed by the scan, and in keeping with our defined Mission and Vision statements, we must decide which key issues are to be addressed in the plan. These might include areas such as undergraduate student success, building the graduate program, increasing research productivity, moving toward sustainability, and others.
4. Goal-setting (November, December 2008): For each strategic issue, a set of clearly articulated goals will be formulated. Accompanying each goal should be a metric or other indicator of progress, with a target defined. An assignment of responsibility should be made for each goal.
5. Key Actions (January through March 2009): What are the actions needed to achieve the goals? The focus should be on establishing a relatively small number of clear actions. The implementation steps for each should be articulated along with a statement of resource needs.
6. Annual Review Plan (March, April 2009): Strategic plans are useful only when they are actively reviewed on a periodic basis to determine progress toward goals, to examine whether the environment has changed in important ways, and to make adjustments in the actions. Typically, an annual review begins with collecting data related to the progress indicators, then preparing a progress report, making appropriate adjustments to strategies, and using the review to inform the budget cycle. The review plan should include a timeline that indicates to the campus when input and discussion is to occur, and the review plan should be written into the ASP.
7. Publication (Summer 2009): The completed ASP will be published electronically in a prominent location on the University's web site.

Individual Unit Planning: In addition to the University-wide ASP outlined above, many individual academic units and programs are in some stage of planning. The ASP should be designed to provide for inclusion of unit and program plans as those units undertake their own strategic planning. Just as the ASP is informed by strategic plans from the President and Regents, the unit plans should be informed by the ASP.

Conclusion: The strategic planning process will be intensive work, but also a healthy process, especially when initiated in parallel with our accreditation preparation. We will need the involvement of creative thinkers who wish to work on behalf of the entire University and who believe that The University of Montana is a leader among the nation's public universities. Again, ongoing and open communication is paramount to developing a plan that the campus supports, so members of the Steering Committee will need to be active communicators. I hope that you will consider becoming involved.

Thank you.

1. For example: Dolence, M. G.; Rowley, D. J.; Lujan, H. D. Working Toward Strategic Change: A Step-by-Step Guide to the Planning Process. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1997. Sevier, R. A. Strategic Planning in Higher Education: Theory and Practice, Council for Advancement and Support of Higher Education, Washington, D. C., 2000.