September 4, 2015

Faculty Senate
University of Montana

Dear Senators,

The Academic Alignment and Innovation Program (AAIP) Task Force completed its work early this summer. We are grateful for this yearlong effort, conducted with the direction of the Office of the Provost and the leadership of the Faculty Senate, to assess the status of current academic programming and to identify possible new academic programming for the University of Montana. Led by Andrew Ware, who served as Presidential Leadership Fellow last year, the task force produced a comprehensive and very readable report.

At the outset, the task force was charged with five areas to review:

1) Ensure that the liberal arts are central to today’s higher education and decide how we should communicate the importance of the liberal arts to prospective students, parents, teachers, and the general public.

2) Design a process for identifying programs across campus that are challenged by low enrollment or perception of irrelevance and determine what can be done to strengthen them and make them more attractive to today’s students.

3) Identify existing undergraduate, graduate, or professional programs that present distinctive opportunities for growth or strengthening because they already are in high student demand and have strong placement opportunities.

4) Determine which programs are not yet present on campus, but should be, given our mission and the opportunities that those programs present.

5) Identify new, enhanced, or expanded opportunities for interdisciplinary, international, and on-line offerings.

Some of these items were recommendations of the Task Group on Academic Programming in summer 2013. Forming the AAIP Task Force was a suitable follow up to these recommendations. This is the first time that we know of where virtually all academic programs were evaluated at the same time. It didn’t replace the normal seven year program review process, but it does offer a comprehensive overview view of UM’s academic portfolio.

With the report in hand, we anticipate that there will be active discussions on campus about how to ensure that we have the best array of programs we can for the 21st century. Some of that discussion as outlined below can take place on a campus level, but much more ought to occur within the schools, colleges, and departments of the University. And, we anticipate that the discussion will include the voices of students, staff, faculty, and administrators across the campus as well as key voices from off campus.
The broad campus activities we expect to organize include:

• Discussion with the Faculty, Staff, and Student senates
• Open fora where all are welcome to offer their assessment of the recommendations in the report
• One of the sessions at the October 26-27 UM conference, Defining a 21st Century Education for a Vibrant Democracy, will be devoted to AAIP

Work is already underway to develop a course of action for programs that were identified as challenged; their respective deans and faculty have begun to consider how to address this. For programs that are poised for growth and strengthening, work is commencing and for new programs, since they require either new financial resources or considerable reallocation of existing resources, the pace of implementation likely will be limited.

We now request that the Faculty Senate, with engagement of Academic Deans, undertake discussion of the specific recommendations and provide feedback to the administration on the merit of the AAIP Task Force report recommendations and the sequencing of actions to be taken. In particular, we would like to target at least one program from each category (1-4 listed above) for action each year going forward. Please provide your input to Provost Brown directly after your October meeting.

We were pleased with the work of the AAIP Task Force and thank them for their extraordinary service to UM. What they accomplished and the recommendations they made should have beneficial and long-lasting effects on the University.

Sincerely,

Royce C. Engstrom
President

Perry J. Brown
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs