DATE: March 31, 2016

TO: Sara Rinfret, Department of Political Science
    Liz Ametsbichler, Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures
    Michael Mayer, Department of History
    Beverly Chin, Department of English
    Rob Smith, Department of Computer Science
    Chase Greenfield, Associated Students of the University of Montana

FROM: Royce C. Engstrom, President

RE: Liberal Arts Conversation

Thank you for volunteering to be a part of our conversation about the Liberal Arts. You were among many people who stepped forward to be a part of the conversation. In the end, I want to involve all who volunteered and then some. As a beginning step, though, I am asking you to be the advisory group to design the conversation with me.

I see this playing out in two steps: first, a discussion with you as a small group to outline the questions we must ask ourselves, and second, a broader discussion of all who volunteered structured around the questions you design. To be clear, my purpose in assembling this group is two-fold: (1) to ensure that the principles behind a liberal arts education are solidly in place for all of our students, and (2) to enhance our collectively ability to articulate the importance of the liberal arts to all of our constituencies – students, the public, policy-makers, donors, and ourselves.

I am inviting you to a coordinating group meeting on Friday, April 15 from 2-4 p.m. To help make this a free-flowing conversation, I would like to hold the meeting at The DoubleTree Hotel and I will spring for beverages and snacks. The goal of this meeting will be to design the second event, which will be the broader campus conversation. We will hold this forum on Friday, April 29 from noon to 3 p.m.

My preliminary thoughts on the questions we should ask and answer include the following:

1. Definitions – We use quite a few terms without clear definitions, and sometimes the conversation gets obscured because of that: liberal arts (in a disciplinary sense), a liberal arts foundation, liberal education, the humanities, etc. We should clarify what we mean by these terms and come to agreement as to which we are using.

2. Do we effectively implement what we profess to do, that is, give our students a strong foundation in the liberal arts?

3. What are the key attributes of a liberal arts education?

4. How do we communicate with excitement and a sense of urgency the importance of a liberal arts education to our constituencies?

There are undoubtedly more or different questions, so let’s work on that at our first meeting. Please let Rebecca know if you will be able to participate. I look forward to hearing your thoughts.