Dear Students,

As we approach the end of the calendar year, I write to wish students a successful end to their semester, and I write to parents who are looking forward to spending time with their students once they return home for the holidays. I am exceedingly proud of the student body at UM. Our students’ accomplishments and growth are the reason we are here, and I know that everyone who works at the University wants our students to thrive. The University of Montana provides an education that serves our students and graduates well, and we are proud to offer a distinctive experience steeped in critical thinking, communication and problem-solving.

I want to provide an update on UM’s staffing and budget situation, which you may have heard about in the news and around campus. In short, we experienced a dramatic enrollment increase during the recession years and now we have experienced an enrollment decline back to essentially pre-recession levels. When UM’s enrollment grew, UM added faculty and staff to handle the increased numbers. Now, we must decrease the number of employees to maintain fiscal responsibility and to serve as good stewards of our students’ and state’s investments. I know how rumors can spread quickly, so I want to provide you the following factual information:

- We will continue to provide a favorable student-to-faculty ratio that is in line with the national benchmark for public universities like ours. That ratio is 18:1. Clearly, some classes are larger and some are smaller than that number, but overall this ratio is an indicator of an excellent education.
- Our teaching faculty will be approximately 8 percent smaller next year than it was at our peak enrollment, but we will have as favorable of a student-to-faculty ratio as we have had in quite some time.
- We will continue to devote 50 percent of our budget to instruction. That is as high of a percentage devoted to teaching and faculty as any institution in Montana.
- The vast majority of majors and options for our students will remain almost entirely intact. Only a handful of majors and options – one graduate program and two technical programs – are likely to be eliminated or consolidated.
- There will be downsizing in other areas where enrollment is lower than in past years, and that may translate into fewer class sections in some cases. We are currently working through the details of those changes.

As we move forward, UM will remain true to our foundation in the liberal arts and sciences, and we will continue to strengthen our offerings in most professional programs as well. We will work to make sure that any change will not jeopardize the chosen path of current students.

The University of Montana continues on a path of excellence. We aim to provide among the best overall experiences available in public higher education, and the quality of education for which we are known will continue to be our hallmark.
Thank you, and I wish you a restful holiday season.

Sincerely,
Royce C. Engstrom, President

This message was sent by the Office of the President to all University of Montana students. To contact President Engstrom, please write to prestalk@umontana.edu.