What is your vision for the role of the chief academic officer of the University of Montana over the next five years?

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The Chief Academic Officer (CAO) plays multiple roles and several of them are illustrated below. At UM, central among these roles is working with faculty, staff, students, other administrators, and friends of the University to fulfill the vision expressed in the UM Strategic Plan, *UM 2020: Building a University for the Global Century*. This is hugely important as we position the University for the future so that it can provide the highest levels of learning, discovery and creativity, and outreach that are relevant to a rapidly changing world. An effective CAO is sensitive to change occurring outside the University while sensing and monitoring internal changes as well. Observing, listening, and managing change are critical activities.

In the context of the UM Strategic Plan, overseeing efforts to ensure student success is paramount. Strengthening relationships with K-12 and integrating those relationships into a more seamless K-20 or beyond is an essential goal. Expanding on campus advising and student support services to enable students to succeed is another vital goal as UM strives to help increase the educational attainment and success of the US population. Another major challenge is overseeing the development of curricula that are clearly relevant to the world in which we live, with its instant communications, extraordinary analytical power, intimate connections linking people at home and around the world, numerous international businesses, unprecedented levels of worldwide trade, and mutual interdependencies among nations and peoples. UM must provide curricula and support ways of learning that truly function to prepare graduates for the Global Century, capitalizing on a broad liberal education that is critical to developing life’s habits and individual character. We also must foster an environment of discovery and performance that facilitates knowledge acquisition, innovation, and experimentation, enlightening the mind and challenging us every day. To enhance student success, to develop relevant curricula, and to discover and perform, the CAO will help build the most dynamic learning environment that is possible given the human, technological, and financial resources we can assemble.

Hiring the right people for the right jobs is foremost among the challenges the CAO faces. There is no substitute for a great faculty and staff. In addition, the CAO must provide a quality working environment with the facilities and technologies that will allow a great faculty and staff to succeed. Beyond that, the CAO must actively cultivate a campus culture and ambiance that model excellence. Given the recent decrease in enrollment and consequent financial stress at UM, over the next five years the CAO’s financial role will evolve from that of a resource allocator to that of a resource generator. The CAO’s financial role will change as we seek a new budgetary model for UM; most likely built on incentives leading to desirable outcomes for individuals, the University, and society.

When considering how best to prepare UM graduates for the Global Century, the CAO must be mindful of the diversity present in today’s world and strive to bring the perspectives and talents of a diversity of people and behaviors into the University’s sphere. The variety of perspectives and knowledge present within our state and country, and beyond, is a potential source of dialogue and creative thinking that
can lead to new approaches to problem solving. A university must capitalize on such diversity in all of its forms if it is to fully prepare graduates who will find success after leaving the academy, engaging diversity in thought, culture and language both domestically and worldwide. Another one of the CAO’s roles is to foster a climate that celebrates diversity and the exchange of ideas and perspectives.

The next five years at UM will be challenging. The CAO must be intimately involved in all facets of the University as it focuses on its core mission of preparing exceptional graduates for the world that is unfolding, as it develops research, technologies, and knowledge for the future, as it engages performance and exhibition that enlightens the mind, and as it serves its state and nation in myriad ways, with the principal objective of adding value to peoples’ lives. In closing, my vision for the role of UM’s CAO over the next five years is a multi-faceted role of leadership and engagement to increase the relevance and enhance the outcomes of a great university.