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

Dan O’Hair

Based on what I could learn from UM’s culture and profile, and the goals set forth in strategic planning documents, I have identified some key areas where the Provost could play an important role in collaborating with key players for moving the university to higher levels of achievement. In each of the areas, UM has developed solid plans for growth and excellence. I would want to capitalize on those plans, and what I propose below could morph based on collaborative conversations with colleagues at UM. Let me propose the following goals for the next five years with corresponding strategies.

**Emphasizing innovation and entrepreneurial thinking as the research and creative activity enterprise is enlarged and enriched.**

UM has stated that it wants to grow research and creative activities through a more entrepreneurial approach. This is a very natural process for me as an applied communication researcher and someone experienced in the realm of research commercialization and technology transfer. With the uncertainties of sequestration and other funding surprises as part of the status quo, I hope UM would pursue research opportunities created through less traditional sources such as industry, foundations, businesses, and non-profit originations. I also believe that UM, as with most universities, would be wise to invest in strategic research initiatives that build from current strengths.

**Elevate learning to new heights by offering transformative experiences, with tangible measures of student success always within sight.**

I have become a believer in the power of undergraduate research as a means of discovering knowledge and creating spaces for collaborative work between faculty and students. I also know how these experiences stimulate students’ intellectual curiosity causing them to persist and graduate sooner from the university. Service-learning opportunities serve similar goals as do summer bridge programs for those students who are less college-ready but who are seen as having strong potential for UM. UM may also have assets in place to enrich partnership programs with the K-12 system to offer college readiness programs such as dual credit and early college. I appreciate UM’s emphasize on student success and want to augment those efforts. Through investments in information and communication technology, informatics, and analytics we can understand our students better, communicate with them more effectively, and serve their needs and interests in a more financial sound manner.
Pursuing diversity and inclusion in all educational and scholarly activities at UM.

The strengths that UM already bring to the table should be embraced and examined for enrichment. Expanding international opportunities should be examined in step with existing programs such as the Global Leadership Initiative and other international program. We should be keeping a watchful eye on our hiring practices that emphasize opportunities for inclusion. We should collaborate with campus, community, state-wide, and international partners as we provide rich and diverse engagement experiences for our students and faculty. Students, staff, and faculty can be powerful forces in our diversity efforts and should be consulted regularly for their advice and counsel.

Diversifying the Funding Portfolio

State funding, financial aid packages, federal and state grants, and tuition and fee rates are under constant scrutiny with many experiencing challenges that will not subside anytime soon. A recovering economy will alter the context to some extent, but recent events have emphasized attention on responsibility and accountability. Even if we never see “report cards” many eyes will focus on measures assessing the success of our students (as well as research productivity). Amid this scrutinization landscape will be other distractions that make our funding portfolio less certain (e.g., entitlement programs, an aging culture, unkempt infrastructure, sustainability issues, etc.). Diversifying the funding portfolio will become a necessity.

Re-emphasizing Branding and Marketing

At my own institution we are carefully examining our university branding and marketing strategies so that we can tell a powerful story to our alumni base and prospective students. We are re-thinking how to define our unique assets and how we can differentiate ourselves from the competition. We intend to build an identity that promotes academic achievement and post-graduation success. We think we can do a better job of promoting our affordability and the tangible outcomes associated with a degree from UK. We are using many methods to accomplish these purposes, and I would look forward to exchanging ideas with UM colleagues to get their sense of UM’s brand.