Dear Colleague –

2011 has been another very successful year for technology transfer and economic development at The University of Montana! Among the year’s highlights, the recent Cultivian Ventures investment in UM start-up company Rivertop Renewables serves as the 2011 landmark accomplishment of the year (In 2010 Sinapis Pharma conducted the University’s first clinical trial on a research derived technology).

In addition to the general fact that venture capital investment provides Rivertop with staying power, recognition, and credibility, the Cultivian investment will also allow Rivertop to:

- begin doubling their current employment base of fifteen and hire more UM grads, and
- enter into a production phase of commercialization and bring to market their first product, a (UM discovered) renewable replacement for harmful phosphates commonly found in products such as detergents.

Highlighted below are some additional efforts and accomplishments of 2011, all of which provide a solid foundation for continued progress and growth in 2012!

Happy Holidays!

Joe.

STRATEGIC PLANNING EFFORT
Several focus groups, numerous discussions and a great deal of hard work by many folks resulted in the 2011 Technology Transfer Strategic Plan for The University of Montana. The plan focuses on the following five areas of strategic direction, for which implementation in several areas has already been initiated: (1) STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE TO THE CAMPUS COMMUNITY, (2) INCREASE THE INVENTOR BASE AND NUMBER OF NEW INVENTION DISCLOSURES, (3) ESTABLISH NEW POLICIES AND PROCEDURES TO ENCOURAGE ENGAGEMENT IN TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER, (4) ENHANCE COLLABORATION WITH (INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL) STRATEGIC PARTNERS and (5) STRENGTHEN MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION EFFORTS.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH INITIATIVE
In an effort to better position The University of Montana for national recognition in life science research, technology development, and entrepreneurship, the Life Science Translational Research Program was launched in 2011. This effort is established upon the success of UM’s School of Pharmacy, which has been ranked on average among the top 10 Pharmacy Schools in the US for NIH research funding over the last 10 years. UM Professor Dave Poulsen will be leading this new translational effort with a goal of establishing representation and strategy for the University as we come under greater pressure from federal funding agencies to bridge the gap from basic to clinical research.

NEW PATENTS
Patent highlights of the year include:
• Oxine Modified Silica Polyamine Composites for the Separation of Gallium from Aluminum, Ferric from Nickel and Copper from Nickel (Rosenberg, P. Miranda and Y. Wong)
• Novel Inhibitors of the amino acid transporters ASCT1 (SCL1A4) and ASCT2 (SCL1A5) (B. Lyda, C. Esslinger, M. Kavanaugh and N. Natale)
• Use of Cyanobacterium to Degrade Chitin for Biomass Production (C. Blank and N. Hinman)
• Nanoporous Silica Polyamine Composites with Surface-bound Zirconium(IV) and Methods of Use (E. Rosenberg, D. Neilson and V. Kailasam)

NEW INVENTIONS
Invention highlights of the year include:

• Novel Natural Product Analogs with Antiprotzoal and Antibacterial Activity (D. Bolstad, N. Priestley, N. Natale and J. Hoody)
• Preparation and Properties of Novel compounds for the treatment of neurological disorders such as Alzheimer’s. (C. Thompson and S. Bharate)
• Health Plans for Employment (T. Seekins)
• Novel Compounds as Acetylcholinesterase Inhibitor Agents, Biochemical Tools, and Tissue Biomarkers (J. Gerdes, C. Thompson, S. Ahmed and Y. Belabassi)

MISSOULA ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP LAUNCH
In 2010 Missoula Mayor John Engen launched the Best Place Project, an initiative aimed at rethinking the way our community approaches economic development. Earlier this year, the Missoula Economic Partnership (MEP) emerged as the successor to the Best Place Project and Jim Bowman (native of Moline, Illinois) was recruited to Missoula to execute a plan of investing approximately $3.2 million into the community for the recruitment, retention and stimulation of new companies and jobs. In partnership with MEP, the coming years will involve more synergistically leveraging the University of Montana’s research and technology transfer efforts with those of the community for the sake of job creation and economic development.

SBIR AWARDED TO GOOD NUTRITION IDEAS
Kathy Humphries of UM’s Rural Institute of Disabilities and owner of Good Nutrition Ideas was awarded $75,000 from the U.S Department of Education’s Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program in 2011 to access the feasibility of national distribution of MenuChoice. The copyrighted menu program was created and developed through years of research efforts at UM, and provides a platform (for the approximately 84,000 U.S. group homes of adults with developmental disabilities) to improve nutritional health and reduce the probability of individual advancement into a nursing home.

RIVERTOP RAISE OF $1.5 MILLION
As one of only ten venture capital deals in Montana during the past ten years, in November of this year Rivertop Renewables announced a $1.5 million investment from Cultivian Ventures. The funds will stimulate company expansion and the final push to commercialize bio-based detergent builders and corrosion inhibitors patented by UM. Rivertop’s glucaric acid products will initially enter the marketplace as an effective and cost-competitive replacement for phosphates in the $10 billion global detergent market and the $8 billion corrosion and scale inhibition markets. Rivertop currently maintains its headquarters in Missoula, where it employs fifteen people ranging from UM chemistry graduates to world renowned experts in the renewable chemical industry.
WARREN BUFFETT VISIT
A number of students from The University of Montana’s Masters of Business Administration and Accountancy programs were given the experience of a lifetime earlier this year, as they traveled to Omaha, Nebraska to visit with legendary investor Warren Buffett. As part of student team, technology transfer intern John Beltrone was able to make the trip. John was quoted as saying, “The experience of meeting Warren and the advice he gave is certainly something I will not forget anytime soon,” when summarizing his experience of asking Warren a question about entrepreneurship and participating in the trip. After graduating from UM’s School of Business Administration this past Spring, John went on to work for accounting firm KPMG in Anchorage, Alaska.

DELEGATION INTERACTION
Senator Tester’s 2011 Economic Policy Subcommittee Roundtable on “The Role of Universities and Federally Funded Research in Capital Formation and Job Creation” aimed to establish policy recommendations to better support the successful development of innovative small businesses. As a participant on behalf of The University of Montana, alongside colleagues from Montana State University, venture capital firms and technology based Montana business leaders, we discussed new ideas for improving Montana’s efforts to leverage federally funded research as a means of spurring capital formation and job creation. One of the primary takeaways centered around the idea of gaining a competitive edge through more assertive regional thinking in terms of research, technology transfer and economic development.

VISITING SCHOLARS PROGRAM
As a joint effort with the University of Washington, UM’s Philippe Diaz participated in a visiting scholars program this year, which allowed for the design and synthesis of compounds with potential use as a novel therapeutic cancer strategy. In addition to the fruitful research relationships built between the faculty, the collaboration also allowed for the pre clinical evaluation of UM patent pending lead compound NMP192. Promising results laid the groundwork for a budding new partnership between UM and a start-up company in pursuit of additional funds to commercialize this technology.