

Profile: Commissioner of Higher Education, Montana University System

Position

The Board of Regents of the Montana University System (MUS) invites nominations and applications for the position of Commissioner of Higher Education for the Montana University System. The Board seeks an outstanding leader who can enable its work, that of the campuses and relate higher education's efforts meaningfully to the State of Montana.

The Board of Regents of Higher Education control and direct the Montana University System and supervise and coordinate other public institutions assigned by law. The Montana Board of Regents of Higher Education's powers and duties are set forth in the Montana Constitution (Article X, Section 9) as follows:

- (2)(a) *The government and control of the Montana university system is vested in a board of regents of higher education which shall have full power, responsibility, and authority to supervise, coordinate, manage and control the Montana university system and shall supervise and coordinate other public education institutions assigned by law.*
- (b) *The board consists of seven members appointed by the governor, and confirmed by the senate, to overlapping terms as provided by law. The governor and superintendent of public instruction are ex officio non-voting members of the board.*
- (c) *The board shall appoint a commissioner of higher education and prescribe his term and duties.*
- (d) *The funds and appropriations under the control of the board of regents are subject to the same audit provisions as are all other state funds.*

The Commissioner of Higher Education serves as the chief executive officer of the Montana University System and has broad leadership responsibilities to guide the Board in its mission of serving students through the delivery of high quality, accessible postsecondary educational opportunities, while actively participating in the preservation and advancement of Montana's economy and society.

Higher Education in Montana

The people of Montana are served by wide-ranging higher education opportunities which include universities and regional colleges, technical colleges, two year community colleges, tribal colleges and private universities. Over 47,000 students are enrolled across the state, with the majority served by the Montana University System under the direction of the Montana Board of Regents.

The Montana University System operates on a \$850m. budget and enrolls 33,000 FTE students annually in programs ranging from associate to first professional and doctoral degrees. The delivery of education is provided through both the University of Montana, Missoula and its colleges: UM-Western (Dillon), Montana Tech (Butte) and Colleges of Technology in Missoula, Butte, and Helena, and by Montana State University, Bozeman and its campuses: MSU-Billings, MSU-Northern (Havre) and Colleges of Technology at Great Falls and Billings.

The Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education

Working under the direction of the Montana Board of Regents, the Commissioner of Higher Education acts to lead and unite the efforts of the Montana University System in its service to the people of the State. The specifics of leadership include duties to:

- Execute, administer, and assure the implementation of Regents' policies, decisions and rules
- Supervise and direct campus presidents in implementing Board policy
- Advise the Board concerning the selection and removal of presidents
- Prepare, with campus assistance, and present to the Board a recommended MUS budget and allocation of state appropriations
- Sign, for the Board, contracts and documents authorized by the Board unless otherwise indicated
- Act as the conduit for presenting matters to the Board and to committees of the Board
- Act as the Board's official representative to the legislature except when otherwise authorized
- Select, remove and, with concurrence of the Board, set compensation of personnel for the Office of the Commissioner
- Act as the oversight and coordinating officer for all inter-unit councils and committees
- Act as the Board's official designee to perform duties or hold offices required by state or federal law not otherwise assigned
- Perform any other duties requested by the Board or implicitly necessary to carry out the above tasks

The Board of Regents has authorized the Commissioner of Higher Education to assemble a staff of professionals and support personnel funded from a variety of state, federal and other sources to carry out its statutory duties and service to the executive and legislative branches, campuses of MUS and community colleges, as well as the public, the media and students.

The Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) employs 91 FTE staff in areas as diverse as fiscal affairs, budget and accounting, student assistance, system data administration and research, labor relations and personnel, benefits, legal services, academic and students affairs, American Indian and minority achievement, workforce development, Talent Search, Gear Up and Guaranteed Student Loan Program. Of the 91 FTE, 21 percent are funded by state general funds with the remainder supported by proprietary or federal funds.

The Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education has a professional staff of 15 and operates on a budget of approximately \$1.2m. annually for administration. It has an exceptional professional staff who have earned the solid respect of all groups with whom they work and who are a significant asset to the MUS and State of Montana.

The Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program is housed within OCHE and works with over 600 schools and 55 lenders. Its employees account for the remaining 76 F.T.E. of the Office of the Commissioner. The agency has guaranteed over \$1 billion in loans since 1980 and has an outstanding loan guarantee portfolio of \$780 million. The agency delivers over \$100 million in

new student loans guarantees, \$3.7 million in need-based aid and \$1.5 million in Regents' scholarships annually.

Life in Montana

Montana is known for its friendly, open, hard working people who value their relationships with family and with one another. The people of Montana hold integrity, ethical behavior and being as good as one's word as expectations. The State's rural nature features ranching, farming, extraction and wood products industries, and tourism as the basis of its economy. The State is one of the nation's largest in area and one of its smallest in population. Distances are great and the terrain, ruggedly beautiful. The Native American people and lands add to the state's diverse culture.

The Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education is located in historic and scenic Helena, Montana, the State's Capital. Born of the Gold Rush in the 1800's, Helena is home to 29,000 residents who are surrounded by both outstanding historic architecture and natural outdoors beauty year-round. There are abundant recreational activities nearby, including fishing, hiking, hunting, and skiing. In addition to the cultural activities of Helena itself, there is the noted C.M. Russell Museum in Great Falls, a two-hour drive through the heart of the land explored by Lewis and Clark.

Opportunities and Challenges

Higher education in Montana and the next Commissioner will face a complex environment in which to do their work. Issues within the economy, political support, and the generally held perceptions of the value of higher education all suggest that significant efforts in each of these areas will be required and, if taken up with imagination and perseverance, can present opportunities in this next period of leadership.

The Montana University System

The Montana University System is well recognized for its quality and breadth of offerings. With the advantage of a strong K-12 system, the MUS enrolls well-prepared students who have a strong work ethic, a sense of civility, and eagerness to learn. There are many positive examples of efforts of the MUS engagement with schools and teachers throughout Montana. These ongoing activities, along with federal "Gear Up" funds for academic preparedness, contribute to students being ready to succeed in college when they enroll.

MUS faculty build on this positive base, exposing students to undergraduate research opportunities and academic excellence in all ranges of programmatic offerings. Examples of this may be seen in the above national average pass rates for such national tests as the CPA, the BS nursing exam and engineering exams. Colleges of Technology and two year colleges are exhibiting strong enrollment growth and are active in meeting the needs of businesses and have Tech-Prep and Work Force Training programs.

One of the most remarkable signs of quality and growth in the MUS may be found in the activity of its faculty in research contract and grant activity. In FY 2001, the campuses of the Montana

University System and the State of Montana and its developing high tech businesses benefited from the over \$104 million that was attracted to the state by MUS faculty. These funds, largely from the federal government, reflect a 421% increase over research funding in 1990.

The MUS is an efficient system of higher education. Montana's expenditure per student in 2000 was \$6,670 per student compared with a range of \$6,786 in North Dakota to \$10,575 in New Mexico. However, it is also a system with high tuition in a state where the average income is approximately \$23,000 annually. Consequently, there is a high loan/debt burden incurred by students who borrow to finance their educations, an average of \$21,000.

In 2001-2002, the Montana University System and the State of Montana benefited economically from the presence of 6,523 full-time equivalent students from outside the State. The direct expenditures of these students paying for the cost of their education brought \$113 million into the economy of the state. The conservative three-fold multiplier used by economists would indicate that these students had an almost \$350 million economic impact on the State's economy.

The MUS employs approximately 2,142 faculty, 864 administrators, 2,767 classified staff, 343 graduate assistants, 918 part-time employees for a total of 7,035.

The Economy

The economy of the State is under pressure and needs to diversify for strength into the 21st Century. While natural beauty and resources are abundant, industries need to grow in order to offer greater levels of employment to the citizens of Montana. In addition, the resource base for services the state must provide needs to grow as well. There are a number of efforts to address this issue. Higher education is part of these conversations, most notably those within the "The Alliance for Montana's Future." The new Commissioner will need to be deeply engaged in questions of how higher education resources can be brought to bear to improve the future for the State. The body politic recognizes that higher education has important contributions to offer in this planning dialogue and urgently seeks its meaningful participation. In addition, higher education as a permanent institution, is seen as having long-range capacity to serve as an economic catalyst.

Even as higher education is looked to as an important participant in the long-term economic development of the state, the scarcity of overall state budget has pressed on its capacity to serve. In the past 10 years, state funding for the educational units has slipped from \$115m. to \$113m. of the \$850m. overall higher education budget, even as enrollments have grown by 2,000 students. Inflation has taken a toll during this decade as well, leaving rising tuition to bridge the gap.

Political Support

In the highly constrained resource environment in Montana, higher education has been perceived as a cost, rather than as an investment. Levels of support suggest that it is seen as a private, personal good rather than a public good. There is a strong opportunity for the next Commissioner to work vigorously in connecting the value of Montana's colleges and universities to its best possible future. To do so will require development of grass roots support for the state's higher education system through demonstrations of its value to the people of the State.

Some progress in this regard has been made in the area of agriculture under the auspices of its land-grant university. Other creative means and ideas will need to be developed. Within local communities, campuses are often the most significant contributor to the local economy. The Commissioner and the MUS will need to be articulate ambassadors for the value higher education brings on many levels to the people of Montana.

Partnerships

Because of the tightness of funding resources in Montana, it is vital to forge partnerships for success. Such partnerships begin at the Board level with the creation of a common agenda to move the MUS forward with assuredness. The Board and the new Commissioner, vested with seeing the big picture for higher education in the state, can, in league with one another, create strategies for working constructively together and for earning greater grass roots and political support. The next Commissioner must help facilitate the positive work of the Board as well as serving as a uniting force and team builder for the MUS itself. Opportunities exist for even greater engagement from the two-year campuses in Montana, particularly in the areas of work force development. The same is true for research expansion at the graduate institutions. Beyond the internal workings of the Board and MUS, the Commissioner will need to work effectively with K-12 and its leadership, with agricultural and business interests, and, very importantly, with the Montana political leadership. Collaboration will likely be an important means of achieving success for the Montana University System and its new Commissioner.

Characteristics of the Commissioner

Given the importance of the success of the Montana University System to the future of the State, the Board of Regents seeks a highly effective, experienced leader with a record of significant accomplishments who can guide the Board, its staff and the presidents and chancellors within the MUS to realization of its goals.

More specifically, the Board of Regents seeks:

- A person of integrity and vision who can thrive and lead in a complex academic, political and economic environment.
- An experienced professional with a strong record of achievement and a sound knowledge of higher education.
- An ambassador of the MUS with superb interpersonal skills. An excellent communicator who can talk plainly to all audiences about complex issues and who can listen effectively regarding higher education matters.
- An excellent administrator with exceptional skills in planning, budgeting and management and coordination issues.
- A “can do” person who perseveres in the face of challenges and finds in them opportunities.
- A trustworthy “bridge builder” and “connector” who relates warmly to the people of Montana, its culture and values.
- A skilled professional who has the capacity to facilitate the work of the Board, the MUS system and the work of the staff of the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education.

- A strategic thinker who can help plan and develop grass roots support for the work of the Montana University System.
- A wise decision-maker who can fairly balance all perspectives and bring fresh thought and innovation to the table.
- An outwardly directed person with a sense of humor who is able to parlay the contributions of the Montana University System into broader support for its work.

Search Information

The Board of Regents of the Montana University System invites interested parties to apply for this position. Application materials should include a vita, the names and contact information of five references and a cover letter outlining qualifications of the candidates in light of the challenges and opportunities and commissioner characteristics described herein. Additional information can be found on the Board of Regents of Higher Education's website at www.montana.edu/wwwbor, and the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education's website at www.oche.montana.edu.

The Board is being assisted in this search by Dr. Elaine H. Hairston, Senior Consultant, Academic Search Consultation Service. Materials should be addressed to her at:

Dr. Elaine H. Hairston
Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education
Montana University System
2500 Broadway, P.O. Box 20301
Helena, Montana, 59620-3101

Confidential inquiries may be directed to Dr. Hairston at 740-964-0905 or at ehairst@attglobal.net

It is the goal of the Board to make the appointment of the next Commissioner of Higher Education by late May, 2003. Interested candidates are encouraged to submit their credentials as soon as possible for consideration.

The Montana University System is an equal opportunity employer.