Montana University System

College!NOW

Increasing Awareness and Use of Montana's Two-Year Colleges

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The primary function of Montana's two-year colleges in higher education includes:

- Prepare students for jobs
- Give students transfer opportunities for four-year degrees
- Offer adults retraining and retooling for careers or courses for curiosity
- Provide remedial help for students who want to continue
- Partner with business, industry, government and non-profits to strengthen our communities
- Provide high quality and diverse educational opportunities at lower tuition costs than four-year programs

Montana ranks near the bottom nationally in numbers of students taking advantage of two-year educational opportunities. While our four-year and graduate enrollment is strong, this is only part of the preparation needed to grow an economy and serve ALL students.

Montana's new two-year education initiative, College!NOW will help more students learn about two-year opportunities, access those opportunities, save money on their educations and earn more after graduation.

To do this, we will:

- Expand the programs available – more programs serving more students
- Partner with our communities
- Coordinate among institutions to save money and streamline services
- Brand and market our two-year institutions better so students know what two-year education is and where they can access it
- Keep tuition low to serve students with limited financial resources
- Base state funding on student success: more students achieving what they expected to attain (knowledge, degrees, certificates, jobs, and strengthened skills and abilities)

To learn more, click here . . . .

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Exhibit 14

Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education

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Why Now?

Montana's two-year colleges are not being used to their full potential. Only 27% of undergraduates in the Montana University System attend two-year colleges, compared with nearly 53% throughout the nation.

Montana's economy needs more skilled workers, and two-year colleges can meet much of the demand. According to the most recent projections, 75% of the 25 fastest-growing jobs in Montana will require at least an associate's degree.

Montana must increase the education and training levels of its working adults to meet workforce retraining demands. Enrollment of working adults ages 25-64 in two-year education compared to the number of 25-64 year olds in the general population is low, ranking Montana near the bottom nationally.

Montana must provide a low cost entry point to higher education. Currently in the Montana University System, the average two-year tuition for residents is 62% of the average four-year tuition… in the western states two-year rates average 46% of four-year.

Montana will also need educated workers to fill jobs being left by retiring Baby Boomers. One out of every five Montana workers is over 55 years old, which means that education leaders, business and community leaders, and policymakers need to take action today to prepare the workforce they will need tomorrow.

What Is It?

Montana's colleges and universities are teaming up with business and community leaders, K-12 educators, and elected officials on a policy initiative to make two-year education more affordable and accessible statewide. As a result, Montana's education leaders are working to create or expand new models of delivery to serve more students in lower-cost programs. To this end, Montana is focusing on making two-year higher education more accessible, better coordinated, better understood and, as a result, better utilized statewide through an initiative called College!NOW.

What Are the College!NOW Initiatives?

Extend the Comprehensive Two-Year Education Mission to all of Montana's Two-Year Colleges.

Leveraging support and mentoring from the State's existing three comprehensive community colleges, the Montana University System will extend the comprehensive two-year mission to the State's five Colleges of Technology by 2013, including rebranding and renaming them. In addition, support will be provided to MSU Gallatin College Programs and UM Bitterroot College Programs as they continue their respective evolution toward comprehensive two-year colleges. A key goal is to bring transfer degrees to all two-year colleges.

Every Montana Region will be served by a Two-Year College or Two-Year Program.

Montana's eight public two-year colleges and four university based two-year programs will become, even more clearly, "hubs" for their local regions, providing gateway services that will help students get started or get up to speed and help businesses with "just in time" assistance and programs for their employees. Efforts will include expanded dual enrollment programs, new adult friendly innovative programming, efficiencies through collaboration, partnerships with tribal colleges, K-12, business and industry, and joint grant applications.

Montana Two-Year Education is Enhanced through Coordinated Curricula and Integrated Technology.

Two-year colleges and programs will expand collaboration with K-12 and the Big Sky Pathways Initiative to increase awareness of secondary to post-secondary pathways for Montana's students. In addition, College!NOW will focus on new efforts to implement the general education core curriculum and increase transfer to four-year campuses. The two-year colleges are also moving toward common information technology systems that will make information sharing easier and more efficient and even pave the way for sharing some administrative services.

Montana's Higher Education Funding Model Will Include Performance Based Funding

Methods to reward institutions for increased student success and productivity by including performance-based approaches in the state funding model will be developed.

Effective Communications and Branding

The impact and contributions of Montana's two-year colleges will be better known and understood. A major marketing effort will increase public awareness of the comprehensive mission and nature of each of Montana's two-year colleges.