



MID-CYCLE REVIEW

SUBMITTED TO THE NORTHWEST COMMISSION ON
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES **MARCH 1, 2021**

THE UNIVERSITY *of* MONTANA WESTERN

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Introduction

The University of Montana Western (Montana Western) has prepared and is submitting this mid-cycle review (MCR) in response to the Northwest Commission on College and University's 2020 Standards ([NWCCU 2020](#)). This formative report follows NWCCU guidance ([Handbook](#)) and the components of Standard One—mission fulfillment, student achievement, and program assessment.

Montana Western is a small, comprehensive, four-year, regional university offering certificates, associate, and baccalaureate degrees in education, business, and the liberal arts and science. The fall 2020 end-of-term enrollment and FTE were 1,290 and 1,226, respectively. The campus is located in Dillon, Montana and largely serves a rural population of in-state students (75%).

Montana Western is unique among small, public four-year universities. It formally operates on the semester system, but it is the only public university in the United States that utilizes block scheduling to facilitate greater collaborative and experiential learning. Montana Western's signature block-scheduling model and experiential teaching philosophy are collectively referred to as *Experience One* (X1). Throughout this report and other campus documents, readers will note the institution's focus on Experience One.

Experience One offers students a remarkable educational experience, which has proven to enhance student learning, retention, and completion. There is power in Experience One ([UMW Institutional Data](#)). It results in smaller class sizes (15:1 student to faculty ratio), greater credit completions (92% of students complete >15 credits per semester), and higher rates of course completions (90% for first-year students). Since its adoption in 2005, headcount, fulltime equivalency (FTE), retention, degree completions, and graduation rates have all increased. The university has also experienced higher rankings in national surveys for educational value, affordability, student success, and growth, and several of the university's faculty have been nationally recognized for their teaching excellence. Experience One exemplifies the university's commitment to student success and it is at the core of Montana Western's academic mission.

Mission Statement

Montana Western operates under a clear and succinct mission statement that is aspirational and articulates a commitment to experiential education, institutional assessment, and student success and achievement. The mission statement, which was revised and approved by the Montana University System (MUS) Board of Regents (BoR) in May 2020, reads as follows:

As a leader and innovator in experiential education, the University of Montana Western educates undergraduate students through immersive practices in their field of study, strives for continuous improvement, and achieves evidence-supported student learning and achievement outcomes.

The mission statement resulted from a year-long strategic planning effort that sought to align institutional planning efforts with campus and community stakeholder input, MUS strategic priorities ([MUS 2021](#)), and the NWCCU's revised standards for accreditation ([NWCCU 2020](#)). The resulting mission statement, institutional objectives, and indicators of success are

presented in the university's new strategic plan, entitled *Building on the Promise of Experience One, 2020-2026* ([2020-2026 Strategic Plan](#)). The new strategic plan objectives are similar to Montana Western's three previous core themes; however, the new NWCCU standards no longer require core themes. The four-objective framework replaces the core themes framework presented in Montana Western's 2019 Year One Mission and Core Themes Self-Evaluation Report ([UMW 2019](#)). Table 1 provides a crosswalk from the former core themes to the new strategic planning objectives. The objectives and indicators presented in the 2020-2026 strategic plan more appropriately provide the framework for assessing mission fulfillment now and into the future.

Table 1. Crosswalk from 2017 Core Themes to 2020-2026 Strategic Plan Objectives

2017 Core Themes		2020 Strategic Plan Objectives	
1.1	Improve Undergraduate Education	1	Strengthen the Experience One Program
1.2	Improve Experiential Learning		
2.1	Maximize Support for Student Success	2	Enhance Degree-Seeking Student Recruitment, Retention and Graduation
2.2	Maximize Support for Completion		
3.1	Foster Responsible Campus Efficiency	3	Enhance and Diversify Fiscal Resources
3.2	Foster Responsible Stewardship of Resources		
		4	Modernize and Update the University's Infrastructure

Mission Fulfillment

The new strategic plan explicitly acknowledges that student success relies on the quality and sustainability of the university's academic programs and assets. Thus, in order to fulfill its mission and achieve evidence-supported student learning and achievement outcomes, Montana Western's strategic priorities focus on continuous improvement of Experience One, finances, and infrastructure. Continuous review of the associated strategies and indicators for each objective, guide the university's planning, budgeting, assessment, and improvement efforts.

During fall 2020, Chancellor Weatherby charged the Executive Strategic Planning Team with creating a process to evaluate progress on achieving the four objectives. A workgroup was established for each strategic planning objective—each workgroup is led by a vice chancellor and includes representative campus stakeholders (faculty, staff and administrators). Workgroups meet each semester to review indicators of progress and report their findings to senior leadership. Senior leadership consists of the members of the Academic and Administrative Council (AAC), Division Chairs, and Cabinet. The AAC membership includes leadership from the Associated Students of the University of Montana (ASUMW). Montana Western views progress toward and achievement of its strategic plan objectives and indicators as evidence of mission fulfillment.

The strategies, indicators of progress, baseline metrics, and target goals for each objective presented in the 2020-2026 strategic plan are summarized in the following sections. Each

section includes an introduction, summary table, and update of actions taken during the 2021 academic year. It is of note that, although presented differently, many of the indicators and targets shown in the tables are the same as those in the 2019 Year One Report.

Objective One – Strengthen the Experience One Program

Montana Western implemented Experience One in 2005 to better engage students in hands-on, authentic practice within their chosen discipline. Experience One utilizes a block schedule to promote immersive teaching and learning practices in the classroom. Many of the practices Experience One was designed to promote are identified by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) as high impact practices (HIPs)—e.g., service learning, research with faculty, and culminating senior experiences. Measuring engagement in HIPs is a means for assessing fulfillment of the institutions' experiential mission.

Table 2. Indicators and Strategies for Strategic Planning Objective One

Indicator	AY20 Baseline*	Current Status	2026 Target
Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Conduct an assessment of X1 that evaluates strengths, weaknesses, and needs, and develop a plan to support continued improvement of X1- Increase experiential activities and outcomes across campus programs and courses			
Feasibility study for Experience One Institute	NA	Identify leaders and participants by late 2021	Experience One Institute
Percent of students who complete at least two documented high impact practices prior to graduation (NSSE)	74%	NSSE scheduled spring 2021 HIPs/badging group to develop direct measures	85%
Percent of students who engage in undergraduate research with faculty mentors (NSSE)	22%		30%
Percent of seniors who participate in internships, student teaching, or a culminating senior experience (NSSE)	42%		80%
Percent of students who engage in service learning projects (NSSE)	27%		30%
Equitable inclusion of students in experiential learning activities	Under review		Under development
Note. 2018 National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) metrics. * Baseline metrics and targets established in the 2020-2026 Strategic Plan.			

Objective One Strategic Actions Update

- Foundation raised \$30,000 in fiscal year 2021 for the Experience One endowment—current balance is \$53,000.
- Award \$55,000 from the Experience One fund to promote interdisciplinary collaborations and program improvements.
- Implemented first First-Year Experience (FYE) program in fall 2020--\$4,000 of Experience One fund is targeted for mentors in the FYE program.
- Organized badging/micro-credentialing workgroup to establish the process and measures to recognize and assess student engagement in HIPs, fall 2020.
- Assessment Committee revised reporting templates to assess experiential learning activities and HIPs. It is also devising plans to address equity in HIPs during AY22.
- Identified comparator institutions for National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and NWCCU data comparisons.
- Prepared to administer NSSE during Spring 2021 (March)--UMW conducts the survey every three years.
- E-Learning staff are piloting an e-portfolio software, Mahara, to integrate with the campus learning management system, Moodle. E-portfolios are recognized as a HIP. Mahara will help Montana Western track experiential learning activities and assess learning outcomes.

Objective Two – Enhance Degree Seeking Recruitment, Retention and Graduation

Montana Western tracks standard institutional and student success metrics established by the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Complete College America (CCM), and the Montana University System. Many of these metrics have direct and indirect bearing on state funding allocations and tuition revenue. In response to the new NWCCU standards, Montana Western is developing strategies for assessing equity and inclusion using standard student success metrics. The institution is also exploring strategies for assessing equitable student engagement using the NSSE. Measuring, assessing and improving student success metrics is a means for fulfilling the institution's mission of student achievement and continuous improvement.

Table 3. Indicators and Strategies for Strategic Planning Objective Two

Indicator	AY20 Baseline*	Current Status	2026 Target*
Strategies: - Practice strategic enrollment management - Promote student engagement - Annually earn 100% of available performance funds			
Increase degree-seeking enrollment 1-3% annually, for a total growth of 14% (Fall term)	1,279	Fall 1,292 Spr. 1,078	1,454
Increase underserved student enrollment by 1-3% annually, for a total growth of 14% (Fall term)	663	667	765
Outperform comparator institutions based on student engagement indicators (*NSSE QI and SE)	UMW: QI 42.5% SE 38%	NSSE scheduled spring 2021	Comparators: QI 43.7% SE 34.6%
Outperform comparator institutions based on student success indicators (bachelor-seeking retention, transfer, and graduation)	UMW: Retention 76% Transfer 27% Graduation 49%	See Tables 7 and 8 in this report	Exceed Average of Identified Comparators (Tables 7 & 8)
Student engagement and success indicators will reflect equitable inclusion of all student groups (NSSE QI and SE)	NSSE baseline established in 2018	NSSE scheduled spring 2021	Under development
<i>Note.</i> 2018 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) Quality of Interaction (QI) and Supportive Environment (SE) indicators. * Baseline metrics and targets established in the 2020-2026 Strategic Plan.			

Objective Two Strategic Actions Update

- The Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) committee surveyed students on educational impacts resulting from COVID-19 during fall 2020. A summary of the results was shared with campus leadership, January 2021.
- A smaller executive SEM committee, which meets every other week, was charged with swiftly responding to identified needs. The executive committee is currently enacting three strategic enrollment initiatives— (1) establishing immediate complaint and feedback protocols, (2) soliciting student feedback and involvement, and (3) expanding virtual recruitment and retention efforts.
- Admissions started using the MUS's Central Application ([Apply MT](#)) during AY21.
- Admissions included faculty in student recruitments efforts, enabling students to meet faculty.
- The university purchased and plans to implement DegreeWorks, Tableau, and Slate Customer Relations Management software during 2021.

- Academic affairs modified the 2021 summer schedule and offerings to increase on-campus programming and provide more flexibility for students.
- Administered the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) during Spring 2021 (March)--UMW conducts the survey every three years.
- Renovated Student Union Building (SUB) services to expand food offerings and create more public space for students to congregate.
- Established Bulldog Life (formerly Residence Life) Office in the renovated SUB.
- Interim provost, AOL, registrar, and Assessment Committee identified two aspirational block-school peers and four public-school peers to serve as NWCCU comparators. Data related to these schools will be presented later in this report (*Institutional Measures of Student Achievement*).
- Expand dual-credit offerings in Early Childhood Education (performance funding metric)
- Increase number of Perkins' grants and awarded funds to address dual-credit, work force training, and non-traditional student programming (performance funding metric).
- Partner with Tribal Colleges (Blackfeet Community College, Stone Child College, and Little Big Horn College) to obtain grant funds and extend distance programming to non-traditional, Indigenous students.
- Continue to meet BoR performance funding expectations (see Table 4).

Table 4. MUS Performance Funding Metrics for Montana Western

Performance Funding Metric	AY20 Baseline*	Current Status	Prior 3-Yr Ave.	2022 Target*
First-to-second year, first-time student retention rate	70%	69%	70%	75%
Associate	62%	63%	60%	64%
Bachelor	76%	72%	75%	77%
Fall-to fall retention of all incoming undergraduates and transfers (MUS dashboard)	69%	65%	70%	≥ Prior 3-year average
Pell-eligible students	71%	65%	69%	
American Indians	46%	60%	56%	
Non-traditional	54%	55%	57%	
Veterans	92%	60%	71%	
Annual undergraduate degrees awarded	463	417	443	450
Certificate degrees	15	23	19	20
Associate degrees	200	139	190	200
Bachelor degrees	247	258	235	235
Dual enrollment participation				
Headcount	123	155	133	150
FTE	47.13	46.59	48.37	60
Note. MUS performance metrics. Montana Western continues to meet performance metric expectations established by the BoR. Performance funds account for 8% of state revenue. *Baseline metrics and targets established in the 2019 Year One Report.				

Objective Three – Enhance and Diversify Fiscal Resources

Public and private postsecondary institutions throughout the country are struggling to withstand economic downturns resulting from COVID-19 impacts, state-revenue reductions, and enrollment declines, just to name a few. One strategy to ensure sustainability is to diversify revenue and assets. Montana Western is strategically diversifying unrestricted funds to ward off economic hardships and to fulfill its mission of academic innovation, continuous improvement, and student support.

Table 5. Indicators and Strategies for Strategic Planning Objective Three

Indicator	AY20 Baseline*	Current Status	2026 Target*
Strategies:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Undertake the Experience One Campaign - Increase campus-wide efforts to obtain extramural funds in support of research, scholarship, student success, and infrastructure - Increase engagement with alumni, donors, and the university community 			
Increase annual scholarships	\$300,000	On track \$269k	\$400,000
Raise funds for the Experience One endowment	\$22,847	>\$30,000	\$2,000,000
Increase annual indirect cost revenue	\$75,265	On track	\$130,000
Standardize administrative assessment on designated and auxiliary functions	Not consistent	Under review	Standard policy for all
Increase Foundation grants in support of academics	\$30,000	\$214,752	\$250,000
Increase the number of annual individual gifts	1,259	On track	1,500
<i>Note.</i> * Baseline metrics and targets established in the 2020-2026 Strategic Plan.			

Objective Three Strategic Actions Update

- The UMW Foundation launched a capital campaign during FY20. The campaign is currently in the silent phase. Two committees are working with consultants to establish and meet goals.
- A single \$250,000 donation made in fall 2020 was allocated to raise the endowment (\$90,000 over three years) and increase support for academic initiatives (\$55,000 to be awarded in FY21, \$4,000 is allocated for the FYE program).
- The foundation received 559 gifts through December 2020.
- The foundation received \$214,752 in grant awards during FY21.
- Montana Western was awarded a higher volume of multi-year research grants during AY20. Research grants generate more indirect cost (IDC) revenues and are projected to increase IDCs over the next two years.
- IDC revenue through December 2020 (\$25,846) was higher than the prior three-year average for the same date (\$25,341).
- The Objective Three Workgroup discussed development of an administrative assessment policy. The goal is to raise discretionary funds for the university by assessing an administrative fee on designated and auxiliary operations. Initial

discussions indicate there could be unintended financial consequences and the Budget Committee needs to be included in the conversation.

Objective Four – Modernize and Update the University’s Infrastructure

Montana Western’s oldest infrastructure dates back to 1897, Main Hall. The most recent building, the Swysgood Technology Center, was constructed in 2002. Maintaining and modernizing heavily used public infrastructure is an ongoing challenge. Continuous improvement of the campus infrastructure is essential to support daily operations, academic programming, and student life experiences. The function, character, and safety of campus infrastructure is essential to ensure quality teaching, learning, living, and working environments, all of which support undergraduate education and student success.

Table 6. Indicators and Strategies for Strategic Planning Objective Four

Indicator	AY20 Baseline*	AY21 Status	2026 Target*
Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Modernize key facilities to improve comfort, safety, and access - Design and improve access to UMW (parking, alternative transportation, network enhancements, etc.) 			
Reduce deferred maintenance inventory by 1 percent (baseline number increases annually)	\$10,326,645	On track	\$10,223,378
Modernize HVAC systems	Not all controls connected to centralized Heat Plant control	On track	Centralize control
Expand and improve student recreational facilities and wellness opportunities as identified in the Campus Master Plan	Auxiliary gym and Keltz arena flooring worn out. No space for wellness programming. Plans for new stadium with artificial turf.	On track	New flooring in BARC complex (gym and arena), new stadium with artificial turf, new wellness/rec center
Invest in infrastructure priorities as identified in the Campus Master Plan	SUB and dining facilities are outdated, Atlantic Street unattractive and not accessible	On track	See Master Plan
UMW bandwidth, redundancy and network speed	1 gig capacity with normal traffic bandwidth	On track	2 gig capacity
Parking demand (lot occupancy) during peak utilization	Parking is limited and often at capacity (95% occupancy or above)	On track	Implement programs/incentives to enhance campus accessibility and reduce parking occupancy rate
<i>Note.</i> * Baseline metrics and targets established in the 2020-2026 Strategic Plan.			

Objective Four Strategic Actions Update

- Installed HVAC controls, updated lighting and replaced carpet in Mathews Hall, summer 2020.
- HVAC control upgrade proposal submitted to the state Long Range Building and Planning committee to address deferred maintenance and need for central controls.
- Planning stage for new stadium and wellness center is underway.
- Student Senate is reviewing proposals for new fee to support new stadium and wellness center.
- Board of Regents granted permission to sell Vigilante Stadium and grounds. Proceeds from the sale would contribute funds for the new stadium center and wellness center.
- A consultant was hired in Spring 2020 to evaluate services in the Student Union Building (SUB) and Dining. Upgrades were made in the SUB to move and expand The Cup, relocate the Bookstore, and improve pedestrian access from the parking lot.
- Facility Services is collaborating with the State Montana Department of Transportation on a project to upgrade Atlantic Street, a state highway. The project will improve pedestrian accessibility and safety and enhance the visual appeal from the street.
- The University of Montana is working with Spectrum to enhance bandwidth on the Missoula campus. When those enhancements are complete, Spectrum will initiate bandwidth efforts on the Montana Western campus.
- Upgrading and migrating campus-based enterprise system, Banner 9, to a cloud-based service. This move will reduce campus maintenance costs and increase system reliability.
- COVID-19 related campus restrictions have reduced the demand for on-campus parking. Parking capacity is well below the 95% target.

Institutional Measures of Student Achievement

Student achievement is measured in a variety of ways depending on the evaluator's perspective (institution, program, faculty, student). Montana Western evaluates institutional data using standardized metrics established by Complete College America, IPEDS, and the MUS. Many of these data are formally reported and available on the National Center for Education Statistics College Navigator ([NCES College Navigator](#)) and the MUS Dashboards ([MUS Data & Reports](#)) websites. Additionally, Montana Western's Institutional Research Office is developing a website ([UMW Institutional Data](#)) to more widely publish disaggregated indicators of student achievement. The purchase and implementation of several software programs were listed as strategic actions under Objective Two (DegreeWorks, Slate, and Tableau). A necessary upgrade and migration of Banner 9 to a cloud-based service was required before the new software could be utilized. The Banner 9 upgrade should be completed by May 2021. Once Banner 9 and the new software packages are functional (fall 2021), Montana Western will be able to conduct more sophisticated analysis of disaggregated student data.

This section summarizes institutional-level data for Montana Western and comparator institutions.

Peer Comparators

In response to NWCCU's 2020 Standards, Montana Western has identified six comparator institutions. Two of the comparators are aspirational and represent small private institutions that utilize block scheduling. Four of the comparators represent small, regional, public higher education institutions and are accredited by NWCCU.

- Colorado College (private block school, <3000 students)
- Cornell College (private block school, <2,000 students)
- Dickinson State University (regional public, <2,000 students)
- Lewis-Clark State College (regional public, <5,000 students)
- Montana State University Northern (regional public, <2,000 students)
- Western Oregon University (regional public, <5,000 students)

Tables 7 and 8 summarize fall-to-fall-retention and graduation rates for Montana Western and the six comparators.

Table 7. Retention Comparisons

Comparator Schools	Retention – Fall 2018 to Fall 2019	
	Fulltime Bachelor Seeking	Parttime Bachelor Seeking
Colorado College (Block School)	96%	
Cornell College (Block School)	76%	
Dickinson State University	68%	38%
Lewis-Clark State College	60%	40%
Montana State University Northern	55%	40%
University of Montana Western	76%	14%
Western Oregon University	74%	22%
Average of Comparators (excluding Montana Western)	72%	35%
Montana Western 2022 Target	≥75%	
<i>Source.</i> Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Aspirational, block-school peers are represented in shaded text. Montana Western is represented in bold text. Blank cells indicate no data were reported. Montana Western's 2022 target was established in the Year One Report.		

Table 8. Disaggregated Graduation Rates for Montana Western and Comparator Schools

Comparator Schools	Six-Year Graduation (Fall 2013 Cohort)								
	Overall and by Demographic Groups								
	Overall	Transfer-out	American Indian	Asian	Black	Hispanic Latino	White	Two or more races	No Response
Colorado College	83%		50%	97%	62%	89%	82%	88%	67%
Cornell College	69%	24%	100%	60%	50%	72%	71%	42%	78%
Dickinson State University	41%	32%		0%	50%	46%	41%	13%	50%
Lewis-Clark State College	38%	22%	11%	100%	100%	17%	33%	40%	20%
Montana State University Northern	31%	11%				25%	29%	40%	38%
Montana Western	49%	27%		0%	50%	100%	46%	0%	20%
Western Oregon University	41%		41%	53%	32%	40%	41%	100%	47%
Average of all comparators (excluding UMW)	51%	22%	51%	62%	59%	48%	50%	54%	58%
Montana Western 2022 Target	≥47%	28%	Targets have not been established for demographic groups						
Source. Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Aspirational, block-school peers are represented in shaded text. Montana Western is represented in bold text. Blank cells indicate no students in that category. Montana Western’s targets were established in the Year One Report.									

The data in both tables indicate Montana Western's fulltime retention and overall graduation rates are below the two private aspirational peers, but they are above the four public comparators. Montana Western's fall-to-fall retention and six-year graduation rates are also higher than the six comparators' average and 2022 targets established in the Year One Report. Analysis of the demographic data presented in Table 8 is inconclusive due to small demographic group sizes. Setting targets for Montana Western's minority student groups is also difficult due to small group sizes.

Disaggregated Campus Demographics and Indicators of Student Achievement

Montana Western's demographic profile is dominated by White students (80-83%). Native American and Hispanic students each represent 5% of the population (<15 per first-year class). No other ethnic group (Asian, Black, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or two-or-more races) constitutes more than 2% of the population. Females out-number males 2 to 1 (63% to 36%). Roughly 80% of Montana Western students who file a FAFSA qualify for financial need. Of those with need, nearly 80% are awarded a Pell grant (more than 50% of the student body). Montana Western's demographic profile is similar to Montana University System (MUS) demographics—Native Americans constitute the largest ethnic group at roughly 6% and females outnumber males. The MUS Board of Regents (BoR) has identified four underrepresented student groups to track for performance funding—Pell-eligible, American

Indian, non-traditional, and military veteran students. All MUS campuses are required to track and report underrepresented student data to the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE). OCHE maintains web-based dashboards ([MUS Performance Funding Dashboards](#)) of performance funding indicators—completions and retention rates—for these groups. OCHE also maintains a web-based dashboard for American Indian student success ([MUS American Indian Dashboard](#)). Table 9 summarizes Montana Western’s underrepresented student retention data. These data indicate Montana Western’s American Indian and non-traditional students are not retained at the same level as other groups (as much as a 14-percentage-point difference) and Pell-eligible students and veterans are retained at similar levels to the general student population (~70%).

Table 9. Fall-to-Fall Retention of MUS Underrepresented Student Groups

MUS Underrepresented Student Groups	AY20 Baseline*	Current Status	Prior 3-Yr Ave.	Difference from Prior 3-Yr Average for All Undergraduates
Fall-to fall retention of all incoming undergraduates and transfers (MUS dashboard)	69%	65%	70%	0
<i>Pell-eligible students</i>	71%	65%	69%	-1
<i>American Indians</i>	46%	60%	56%	-14
<i>Non-traditional</i>	54%	55%	57%	-13
<i>Veterans</i>	92%	60%	71%	+1
<i>Note.</i> The MUS definition of underrepresented student groups includes Pell eligible, American Indian, non-traditional, and military veterans. (UMW Institutional Research 2021)				

Montana Western has taken the following actions to address the needs of underrepresented students.

- Applied for and was awarded a TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) grant in 2020 to continue targeted services to low-income, first-generation, and disabled students. The five-year grant (Sept. 2020 to August 2025), annually serves 160 disadvantaged students (~10% of the student body) to increase persistence, academic standing, and baccalaureate completion (6-year).
- Relocated the Multicultural Center from the basement of the SUB to Main Hall. The move brings Native American students closer to academic support services offices (advising, TRIO SSS, director of student success, and the provost).
- All faculty and staff participated in the MUS American Indian and Minority Achievement (AIMA) cultural sensitivity training course, *Indian Education for All in Montana for One MUS* ([IEFA Course](#)), during AY20.
- Montana Western’s AIMA committee conducted a survey of minority students during February 2021. Campus climate focus group discussions will follow-up on the survey during spring 2021. The results of the survey and focus group discussions are not yet available.

- Registrar is developing processes for disaggregating and reporting student success data (using Tableau) that enable assessment of equity, inclusion, and diversity. As appropriate, these data will be widely shared on the website and with campus planning groups (departments, division chairs, strategic planning committee, chancellor's cabinet, etc.).
- Objectives One and Two of the strategic plan include indicators of equity and inclusion. Baseline and target metrics for equity and inclusion are being developed at the institutional level and within departments. Given the institutional mission, these efforts are focused on assessing equity and inclusion in experiential learning activities, quality of campus interactions, and supportive environments.
- An ad hoc workgroup, which includes the Objective One workgroup, registrar and e-Learning staff, is establishing coding and badging protocols for high impact practices at enterprise scale. Systematic coding in Banner of courses that incorporate HIPs will facilitate direct assessment of underrepresented student engagement in undergraduate research, service learning, and capstone experiences.

Barriers to Academic Excellence and Success

Numerous student groups at Montana Western are at-risk of not succeeding. They include academically underprepared students, first-generation and low-income students, disabled students, American Indians, military veterans, and non-traditional students (≥ 24 years old). These students have a variety of recognized needs ameliorated with financial aid, remedial coursework, tutoring, counseling, ADA accommodations, etc. It is more difficult to identify and overcome less-well-recognized barriers such as feelings of belonging and campus and community culture. This report documents a variety of strategic actions the university has taken to solicit and respond to student concerns (SEM committee survey and focus groups, AIMA survey, relocation of some services, etc.). Additionally, the university is working to address student preparedness, equity, inclusion and diversity concerns, and impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. The following subsections, *Remediation* and *Equity, Inclusion and Diversity*, present examples of the university's efforts to track success of at-risk groups. The last section, *Higher Education Landscape Relative to COVID-19*, identifies additional barriers the university recognizes and is addressing.

Remediation

The MUS identifies completion of remediation-to-gateway mathematics and writing courses within the first two years of college as a proven student success strategy. The MUS's Complete College Montana (CCM) math and writing remedial success metrics are not MUS mandated performance-funding metrics for Montana Western, but the university tracks them as a measure of student success (Table 10). As much as 77% of Montana Western's first-year students require remedial coursework in mathematics and writing (SSS Proposal 2020). The quicker underprepared students demonstrate college-level proficiency and begin making progress toward a degree, the higher their chances are for persisting and reducing time-to-degree.

Table 10. Remedial Success Rates for Mathematics and Writing

Indicator	Current	3-Year Average	2022 Target*
Enrolled in remediation and completed gateway within two years of initial enrollment (CCM)			
Mathematics Remediation	67%	57%	54%
Writing Remediation	98%	97%	90%
Note. Complete College Montana (CCM) metrics (UMW Institutional Research 2021). *2022 targets established in the 2019 Year One Report.			

Montana Western achieves the highest remedial success rates in the MUS ([MUS Performance Funding Dashboards](#)). The most recent average math and writing remediation rates for MUS two-year campuses are 44% and 49%, respectively. At 67% and 98%, Montana Western's current remedial math and writing success rates exceed other MUS two-year programs and its own 2022 targets. Montana Western's success is in part attributable to Experience One. Experience One allows the English and Mathematics departments to employ a proven Complete College America success strategy and sequentially link remedial and gateway courses. Recent assessment of both programs resulted in lower course caps. Remedial course enrollment is limited to 15 students in English and 20 students in mathematics, and the linked courses are taught by the same instructor. The immersion, continuity, and low student-to-faculty ratio all contributed to higher completion rates.

Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity

Detailed metrics demonstrating the needs of first-generation, low-income, and disabled students were presented in the 2020 TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) grant proposal. Seventy-five percent (938) of students were eligible for SSS services in fall 2018; however, only 17-percent of eligible students (160) could be served by the grant-funded program. Figure 1 shows how Montana Western's SSS-served students outperformed students who were not served by the program.

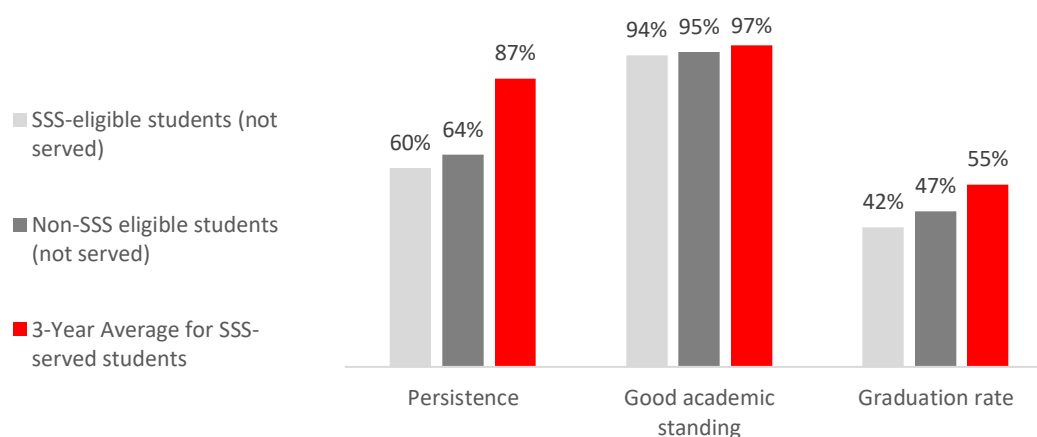


Figure 1. Comparison of Persistence, Academic Standing, and Graduation Rates for Students Served and Not-Served by the TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) Program

The Student Support Services data illustrate how important targeted program services are for ensuring academic success for disadvantaged students. Objectives One and Two of the Strategic Plan inherently recognize the need for targeted services to engage all students, promote student success and completion for all students, and track indicators that reflect equitable inclusion of all students. The university is developing metrics to track and assess equity, inclusion, and diversity at the program and university level; however, these efforts have been delayed due to issues related to a Banner 9 upgrade, migration of the enterprise system to cloud computing, and staffing shortages resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Once the Banner 9 upgrade is completed later this spring (May 2021), Montana Western will be able to conduct more sophisticated analysis of disaggregated student data to identify and redress issues related to equity, inclusion, and diversity.

Higher Education Landscape Relative to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has been highly disruptive for postsecondary students and institutions. Montana Western, like many other campuses, rapidly transitioned to remote learning during spring 2020, adjusted fall 2020 and spring 2021 schedules, cut back extracurricular activities, and had to accommodate staff, faculty and student quarantines/isolation. The following bullets list some of the campus impacts:

- Remote learning
- New student enrollment decline
- Increased retention of existing students
- Increased faculty, staff, and student flexibility and creativity
- Schedule disruptions – compressed fall term, no block breaks, no spring break
- Mask and distancing mandates
- Decline in extracurricular activities – sports, clubs, etc.
- Staff and student quarantines/isolation
- Morale and motivation declines
- Increased demand for counseling services
- First-Year Experience – started to better engage students during the pandemic

These impacts are not dissimilar to what other MUS campuses have experienced. The university has done what it can to adjust, but expects there may be many unpredicted consequences to meeting these challenges, such as lower engagement rates and higher course drop and failure rates. An example of lower student engagement is noted in the Paw Prints program data (Table 11). Current participation in the Paw Prints program is 26 percentage points lower than the AY19 baseline. As extracurricular programming resumes, student engagement in the Paw Prints program is expected to return to preCOVID-19 levels.

Table 11. Student Engagement in the Paw Prints Program

Engagement Indicator	AY19 Baseline*	Current Status	3-Year Average	2022 Target*
Participation in the Paw Prints program—percent of campus student population accumulating more than 5,000 points	47%	21%	28%	65%
<i>Note.</i> * Baseline metric and 2022 target established in the 2019 Year One Report. (UMW Institutional Research 2021)				

Many students who responded to the SEM Committee’s survey on educational impacts resulting from COVID-19, acknowledged their educational experience was not the same as before the COVID-19 pandemic, but expressed thanks for the university’s creative efforts to keep them safe while continuing to meet their educational needs (e.g., rapid migration to remote and HyFlex instructional modalities, increased availability of laptop computers for student checkout, and increased Wi-Fi hotspots across campus). Students also expressed an eagerness to return to their normal lives and get fully back to mask-less, face-to-face, experiential learning.

Examples of Programmatic Assessment

Several examples of Montana Western’s programmatic assessment efforts follow for Experience One, General Education, and Mathematics. These are not exhaustive representations of these efforts, but they demonstrate different levels of institutional and programmatic assessment.

Experience One – Student Engagement

Experience One is the signature academic difference at Montana Western. Experience One does not represent an academic program as much as it represents an educational philosophy. Everything the university does is influenced by its commitment to educating undergraduate students through immersive practices in their field of study. To facilitate immersive teaching practices, the university modified its campus-based classes to a block-schedule in 2005. Campus-based students are encouraged to take one-block-class-at-a-time. Block classes meet 3 hours per day for 18 days; there are four consecutive blocks each semester. Immersive practices lead to higher levels of student engagement, which the university measures indirectly with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Figures 2 and 3 show comparative data for Montana Western and three peer groups obtained in 2015 and 2018.

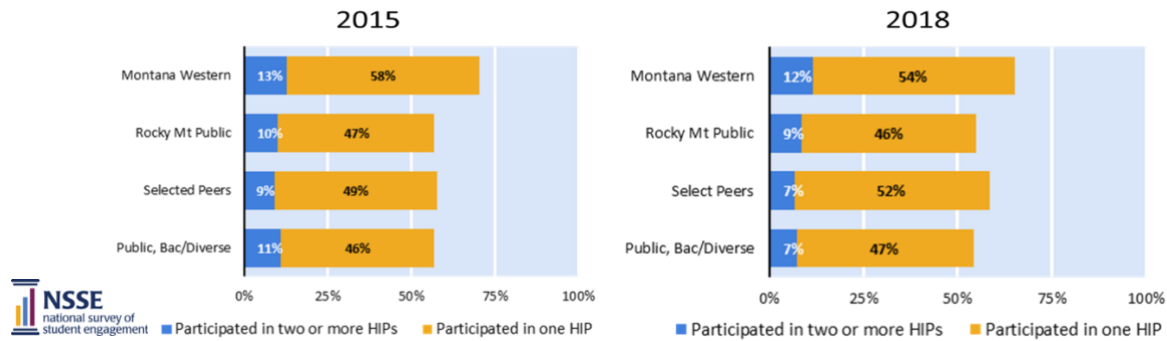


Figure 2. First-Year Student HIP Participation, 2015 and 2018

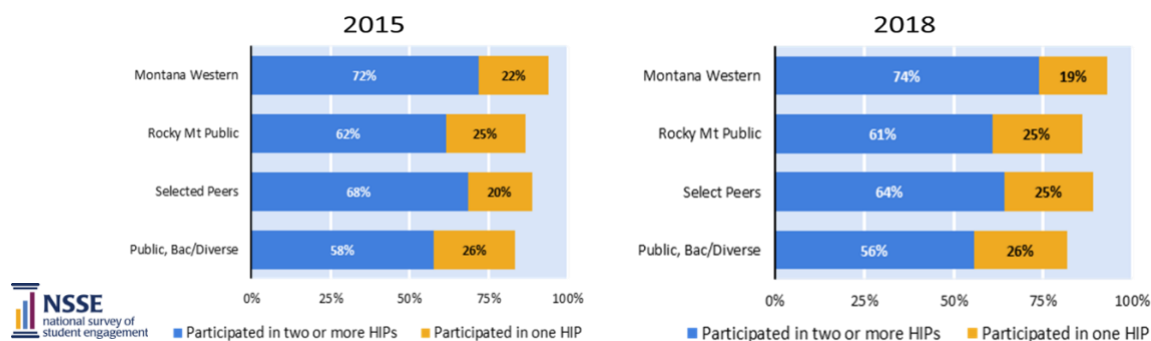


Figure 3. Senior Student HIP Participation, 2015 and 2018

The three NSSE comparator peer groups included Rocky Mountain public institutions, Public, Bac/Diversity Carnegie-classified institutions, and a self-selected group of IPEDS and aspirational peers. Montana Western's NSSE Selected Peers included Colorado College, Cornell College, Dickenson State University, Lewis-Clark State College, and Montana State University-Northern. Montana Western's 2015 and 2018 NSSE data indicated that first-year and senior students participated in HIPs at higher rates than first-year and senior students in the other comparator groups. Montana Western's NSSE data also indicated female participation in HIPs was slightly higher than male participation and first-generation student participation in HIPs was slightly lower than non-first-generation students. Minority student participation in NSSE was reflective of campus demographics, but small sample sizes limited the NSSE analysis.

Montana Western will administer NSSE again during spring 2021. In accordance with the comparator schools previously identified for NWCCU, the 2021 NSSE survey will include Western Oregon University in the selected peer group. NSSE results will inform the university's institutional and programmatic assessments of student engagement and HIPs. During fall 2021, Montana Western plans to mine the 2021 NSSE data to better understand minority engagement in experiential activities and HIPs. These data will inform development of inclusion indicators for Objectives 1 and 2 in the strategic plan.

General Education – Learning Outcomes

With few exceptions, all degree-seeking students are required to complete the university's 32-credit General Education Program ([Catalog](#)). The overall goal of the program is to develop students' intellectual and communication skills while gaining knowledge of and experiences with human cultures and the physical and natural world. The program aims to develop the following essential learning outcomes:

- Communication skills
- Quantitative reasoning
- Scientific inquiry and analysis
- Global and cultural awareness
- Critical analysis and logical thinking
- Creative expression

Faculty teaching general education coursework are asked to complete a survey of essential learning outcomes for their class at the end of each block. The General Education Committee (GEC) compiles the survey data by the seven designated general education categories (e.g., written and oral communication, mathematics, behavioral and social science, history, expressive arts, literary and artistic studies and natural sciences). Faculty reviewers, representing each general education category, annually review the survey results relative to the primary ELOs established for that category and submit an assessment report to the GEC. The GEC reviews the seven reports and prepares a comprehensive annual report that summarizes findings, identifies areas for targeted improvement, documents planned actions, and suggests recommendations for continuous improvements.

The GEC's approach to assessment has changed over recent years. Since 2018, the GEC has reduced the number of learning outcomes to be assessed for each category and developed more consistent processes, rubrics, and direction for direct assessment of the learning outcomes. In addition to standardizing common rubrics for each general education category, the GEC is weighing options for a pre- and post-test for the entire program or using e-portfolios of student work.

In AY19, the GEC piloted a common Communication Skills rubric. Twelve sections of general education courses reported listing the Communications Skills learning outcome, eight of the sections used the GEC's Communication Skills rubric to assess student learning. The rubric scores from 1 to 4 with 1 being the lowest, 2 representing proficiency and 4 being the highest score. Of the 92 students scored, 73% achieved a 3 or higher, 83% achieved a 2 or higher. The GECs target goal was 70% proficiency. The pilot indicated a majority of students met proficiency targets, but it also revealed a few areas for improvement (e.g., some assessors found it difficult to distinguish between 3 and 2 scores, some of the rubric language led to different interpretations).

During AY20, the GEC continued its efforts to simplify assessment, generate more faculty buy-in, and standardize direct assessment measures of student learning. In addition to revising the Communication Skills rubric, the committee planned to pilot two more rubrics to measure

quantitative reasoning and scientific inquiry and analysis. Faculty in the Mathematics and Natural Sciences general education categories offered to pilot the rubrics, but their efforts were thwarted by COVID-19. The necessary norming and review of student artifacts could not take place during AY20, but the committee has continued this work during AY21.

Once the GEC's outcomes revision and rubric development efforts are complete, the committee will have the data necessary to establish reliable trends, evaluate student learning, and measure improvements. In the meantime, the GEC's assessment efforts are producing measurable outcomes and resulting in program improvements. Recent GEC recommendations have resulted in lower course caps in remedial sections of mathematics and English, renewed and increased MATLAB software licenses to support undergraduate research in linked general education science and mathematics courses, and a student-directed self-placement pilot in remedial or gateway writing classes. The GEC has also tasked itself with creating a handbook covering general education at Montana Western, including instructions for assessment. The handbook should help full-time and part-time faculty better understand and participate in general education assessment. In summary, the GEC is engaged in refining its instruments and processes for assessing student learning and it is continuously working to improve the General Education Program.

Mathematics – Program Outcomes

The Mathematics Department's Program Assessment Plan identifies four graduate outcomes. Successful graduates will:

1. Demonstrate competence in a variety of mathematical subfields, including calculus, linear algebra, probability and statistics, data analysis, modeling, and mathematical proof;
2. Read and understand primary mathematical and/or scientific literature;
3. Write mathematical and/or scientific research proposals and papers; and
4. Give effective spoken presentations on mathematical and/or scientific research.

To assess the first outcome, the department uses exam scores from five classes (STAT 121 Probability, STAT 217 Intermediate Statistics, M 171 Calculus, M 210 Introduction to Mathematical Software, and M 221 Linear Algebra). To assess the last three outcomes, the department uses several rubrics to score student research proposals, articles, or oral presentations required in several courses (M 210 Introduction to Mathematical Software, M 49* Mathematical Research or Senior Thesis, STAT 433 Stochastic Modeling, STAT 394A Statistical Learning Workshop, and other advanced classes).

Figure 4 shows mean final exam scores for probability (STAT 121) and statistics (STAT 217). The department reported that scores for both courses were within acceptable limits; however, it noted that recent successes in STAT 121 (mean scores reported for AY19 and AY20) were related to linking STAT 121 to science classes in the honors program.

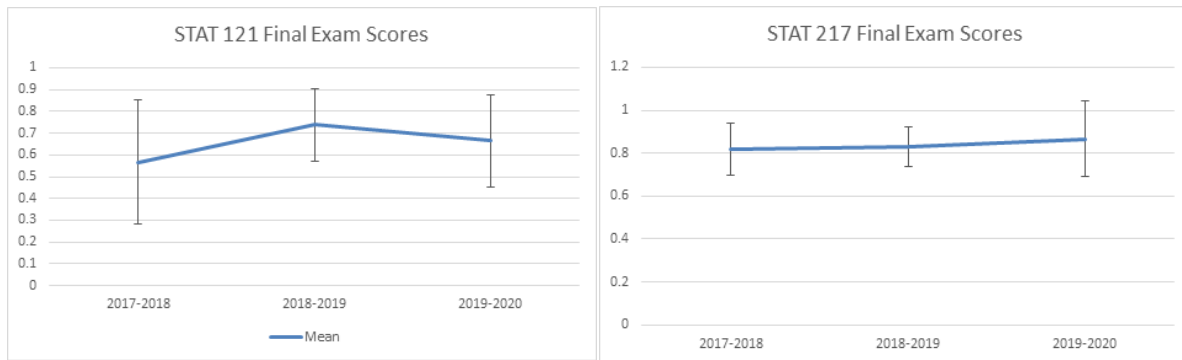


Figure 4. Mean Final Exam Scores for STAT 121 and STAT 217

Based on the success of this approach, the department expanded its efforts to accommodate all incoming mathematics and science students. There were several program benefits to creating a linked science/mathematics experience for first-year students: students became more quickly and strongly connected to their mathematics and science peers and the linked structure allowed for early engagement in applied mathematics research. Both of these benefits may improve student recruitment and retention efforts in mathematics and science. Additional campus-wide benefits included early development of research skills and cross-disciplinary collaborations.

Figure 5 shows mean rubric scores for math research proposals and research papers. The department's rubric was used to assess the third program outcome and scores writing structure, grammar and mechanics, and mathematical and scientific considerations.

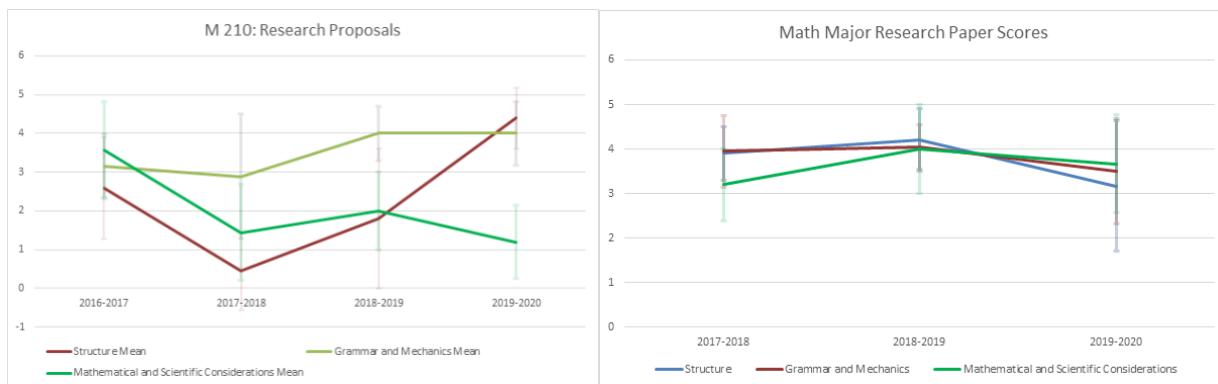


Figure 5. Mean Writing Rubric Scores for Research Proposals and Papers

Mean rubric scores for structure and grammar and mechanics have improved in M 210 Statistics. The department attributed these improvements to use of a model paper and regular feedback on drafts. Mean rubric scores for mathematical and scientific considerations were lower, raising internal questions about the rubric's efficacy or the department's approach. The department has made progress on structure and mechanics and is striving to accurately identify and measure quality in research papers. Current rubrics have been found to be too coarse-grained. The department is refining its instruments, data analysis, and understanding of student learning and taking action to continuously improve program outcomes.

Moving Forward

Montana Western is in the third year of its seven-year accreditation cycle. Since its last NWCCU site visit in 2018, Montana Western has engaged in intensive self-analysis to better understand and quantify institutional success metrics, assess student learning outcomes, set reasonable targets for improvement, engage in meaningful dialogue with stakeholders, establish strategic priorities for the next seven years, and clearly articulate an acceptable threshold of mission fulfillment. The results of these efforts have informed the contents of the institution's 2019 Year One report, revised mission statement, new strategic plan, as well as this document and its addenda. Each action, indicator and outcome has been strategically planned to support Experience One, be true to our mission, and align with stakeholder expectations.

Findings from this mid-cycle review have pointed out some areas of strength and some areas to investigate further. Montana Western is performing well relative to peers and preliminary AY22 enrollment and fiscal projections indicate the campus is stable. The institution's indicator metrics are generally tracking toward established strategic targets and strategic actions to meet targets are plentiful. A few current indicator metrics are below prior year and prior 3-year averages—this is not unexpected given the challenges the institution and its students have faced from COVID-19. COVID-19 impacts may continue for an undetermined period and rather than lower targets, the institution plans to move forward with a renewed focus on serving all students, promoting student achievement, and differentiating itself through Experience One.

Montana Western's 2020-2026 Strategic Plan aligns with the NWCCU's seven-year assessment cycle. The new mission statement also aligns with the NWCCU's 2020 Standards. The processes established for ongoing review of the strategic indicators facilitate ongoing assessment, continuous improvement, and prepare the institution for the year seven self-evaluation scheduled for spring 2025. Montana Western plans to conduct a review of policies, regulations, and finances (PRF) in advance of spring 2024. Findings and feedback that Montana Western receives from the PRF review will inform ongoing assessment efforts and discussions leading up to the next strategic plan (2027-2033). In the meantime, Montana Western will continue to track institutional and program metrics, analyze trends, and modify strategic actions in response to changing indicators with a focus on assessing equity, inclusion, and diversity.

To move the university forward, as well, we will use CARES Act funds strategically in order to prepare for future challenges and opportunities. We are learning a great deal from the experience of the pandemic and plan to build on that knowledge to increase student success. Our interconnectedness with our community has never been more clear than during this pandemic. We have worked hand in hand with our health care partners and law enforcement to respond to this challenge and keep this community safe. It will be more important than ever to, as we state as our fourth value, to "share resources and partner with the community to serve community needs and offer distinctive and relevant programs."

Addenda

Montana Western is addressing three recommendations from prior reviews in this addendum—Recommendation 1 from the 2019 Year One Report and Recommendations 3 and 4 from the Year Seven Peer Evaluation Report.

Recommendation 1 from the 2019 Year One Report

Montana Western received one recommendation resulting from its 2019 Year One Mission and Core Themes Evaluation. Citing 2020 Standard 1.B.2, the NWCCU asked the university to:

Clearly define mission fulfillment and articulate institutional accomplishments or outcomes that represent an acceptable threshold of extent of mission fulfillment as an addendum to Mid-Cycle Review Spring 2021.

Montana Western revised its mission statement and developed a new strategic plan during 2020. Both efforts included extensive stakeholder input to capture the collective essence of Montana Western, its mission, and its strategic priorities. The strategies, indicators of progress, baseline metrics, and target goals presented in Montana Western's 2020-2026 Strategic Plan and this mid-cycle review report represent the outcomes that the institution and its stakeholders deem as reasonable, verifiable, and ambitious measures of mission fulfillment. Montana Western views progress toward and achievement of its strategic plan objectives and indicators as evidence of mission fulfillment.

A logic model depicting the relationship between the mission statement, campus inputs, activities and strategies, measurable outputs, and strategic outcomes is illustrated in Figure 6. The logic model does not include every target metric from the strategic plan, but it does show how ongoing assessment of institutional programs and accomplishments leads to mission fulfillment.

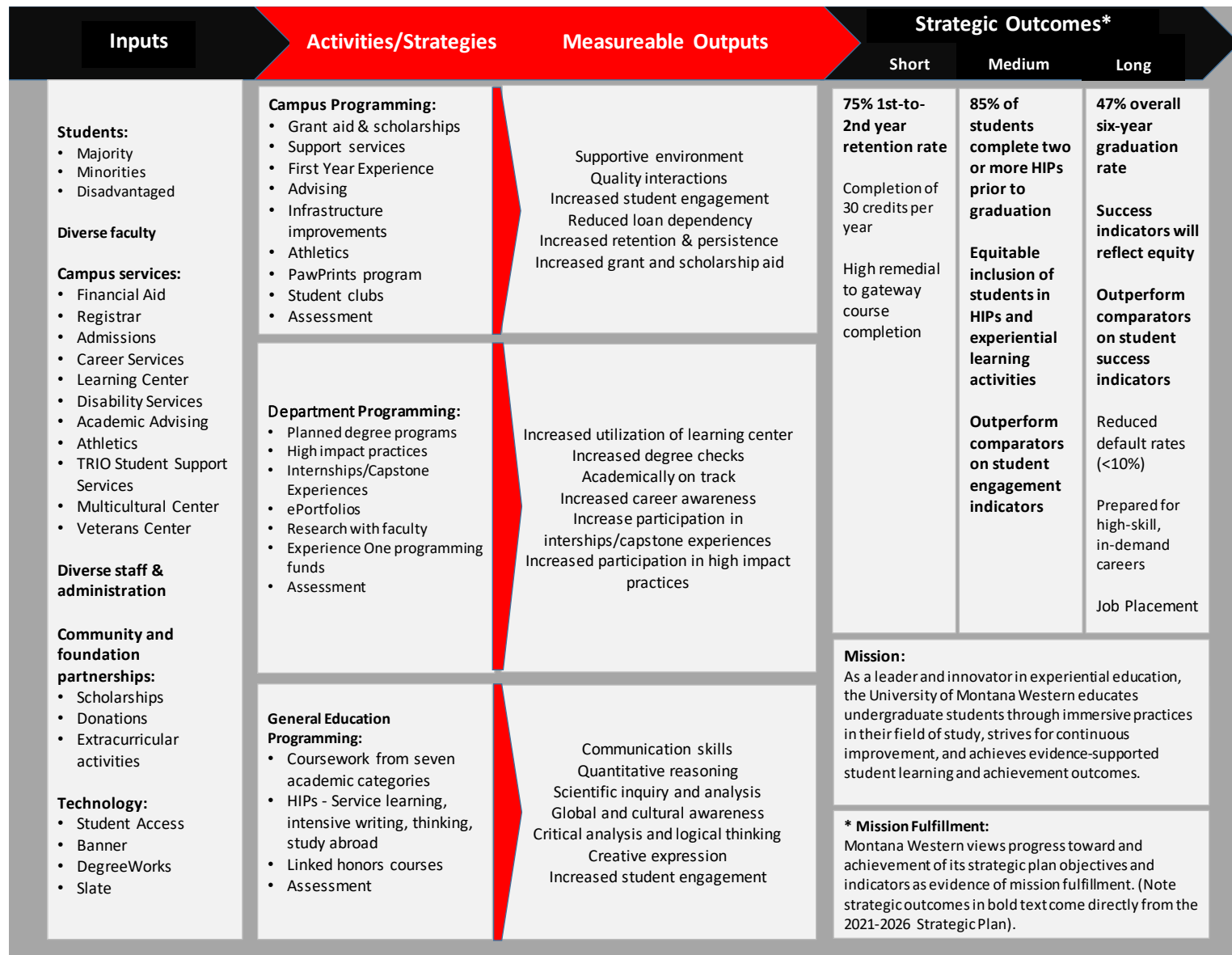


Figure 6. Montana Western's Logic Model for Mission Fulfillment

Recommendations 3 and 4 from the Spring 2018 Year Seven Peer-Evaluation Report

Montana Western received four recommendations resulting from its Spring 2018 Year Seven Self-Evaluation Report. The first two recommendations have previously been addressed; the NWCCU requested Recommendations 3 and 4 be addressed as an addendum to the Spring 2021 Mid-Cycle Review (letter dated July 24, 2018). Citing the 2010 Standards, the NWCCU asked the university to:

Engage in ongoing, systematic collection and analysis of meaningful, assessable, and verifiable data as the basis for evaluating the accomplishment of its core theme objectives (2010 Standards 4.A.1)

Align core themes to achievement of goals and outcomes. Core theme planning should be informed by the collection of appropriately defined data that are analyzed and used to evaluate accomplishment of core theme objectives (2010 Standards: 3.B.1, 3.B.2, 3.3.3)

Both of these recommendations refer to core themes which are no longer required under the 2020 Standards. The university must still address the intent of the standards and the NWCCU's Accreditation Handbook provides a crosswalk from the old to the new standards. Table 12 summarizes the applicable guidance for reference.

Table 12. NWCCU Crosswalk from 2020 Standards to 2010 Standards

2020 Standards	2010 Standards
1.B.1 The institution demonstrates a continuous process to assess institutional effectiveness, including student learning and achievement and support services. The institution uses an ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning process to inform and refine its effectiveness, assign resources, and improve student learning and achievement.	3.A.1; 3.A.3; 3.A.4; 3.B.1; 3.B.2; 3.B.3; 4.A; 4.B; 5.A.2; 5.B.1; 5.B.2
1.C.7 The institution uses the results of its assessment efforts to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices to continuously improve student learning.	4.A, 4.B
<i>Note.</i> 2010 standards in bold text refer to Recommendations 3 and 4. NWCCU Accreditation Handbook.	

The gist of Recommendations 3 and 4 and 2020 Standards 1.B.1 and 1.C.7 is about the established processes to use data, in a planned and coordinated way, to analyze progress toward meeting established outcomes, and to make continuous improvements. The process involves identification of key metrics, an understanding of the factors that influence the metrics, predictive modeling and planning, and ultimately an ability to take decisive actions to improve results. Figure 7 illustrates a generalized continuous improvement model that is followed throughout the institution for student services, course assessment, academic program assessment, general education program assessment, strategic planning, and mission fulfillment.

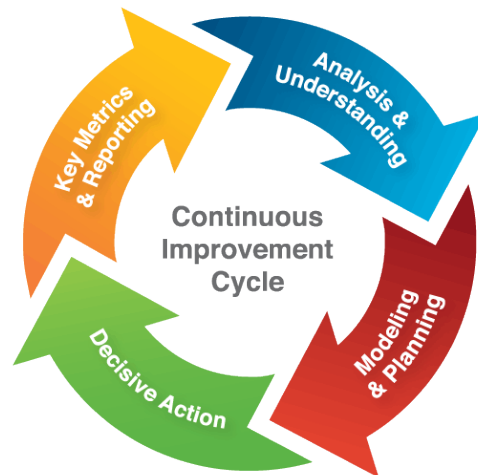


Figure 7. Model of Continuous Improvement Cycle

The institution goes through this continuous improvement cycle on an ongoing basis to assess indicators of achievement established for the four strategic planning objectives (see pages 3-8). As described in the *Mission Fulfillment* section of this report, Chancellor Weatherby charged the university's Executive Strategic Planning Team with creating a process to evaluate progress on achieving the four strategic plan objectives. Separate workgroups track and report progress on each strategic planning objective—each workgroup is led by a vice chancellor and includes representative campus stakeholders (faculty, staff, and administrators). Workgroups meet twice a semester to review indicators of progress and report their findings to senior leadership. Senior leadership consists of the members of the Academic and Administrative Council (AAC), Division Chairs, and Cabinet. The AAC membership includes leadership from the Associated Students of the University of Montana (ASUMW). Senior leadership uses the progress reports to assess institutional effectiveness, allocate resources, and improve student success outcomes.

Similarly, academic departments, the General Education Committee and the Assessment Committee engage in continuous review of academic programs. Each committee has developed annual assessment reporting forms. The forms focus on programmatic learning outcomes. Academic departments meet regularly throughout the year but they are required to devote time each spring to annual program assessment. Each fall, departments submit results of their efforts using the standardized annual assessment reporting forms. Results of these efforts are summarized annually and reported to campus leadership. Recent reports to leadership from the Assessment Committee and the General Education Committee indicate review processes are being refined to improve reporting templates, standardize assessment rubrics, establish meaningful metrics for learning outcomes, and be more directive in acquiring data on HIPs, equity, and inclusion. The annual assessment efforts are iterative and continuously refined in response to changing needs, outcomes, and environmental conditions.

The Montana Board of Regents requires academic program reviews every seven years. The BoR's program review format is largely a numerical report of majors and graduates with a brief summary narrative. Past program reviews are archived on the OCHE website ([Program Reviews](#)).

Personnel Changes since 2019

- Dr. Jenny McNulty became interim provost and vice chancellor of academic and student affairs, July 2020
- Dr. Anneliese Ripley became accreditation liaison officer, July 2020
- Dr. Laura Straus became division chair of education, July 2020
- Dr. Ashley Carlson became division chair of humanities and social science, July 2020
- Mr. Mike Piazzola promoted from Director of Residence Life to Senior Director of Auxiliary Services (new position on campus), July 2020
- Ms. Patricia Lake became personnel officer (new position), September 2020
- Mr. Michael Reid assigned 50% CFO responsibilities for Helena College, September 2020
- Chancellor Beth Weatherby announced plans to retire at the end of AY21, October 2020
- Several director-level position turnovers have occurred in information technology, business services, advising, and counseling.

Program Changes since 2019

- New Certificate in Early Childhood to Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 3
- New Certificate in Infant and Toddler Development and Education
- New Certificate for Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 3 to K-8 Bridge
- New Certificate for K-8 to Early Childhood Education Pre-Kindergarten-Grade 3
- Rename BS in Early Childhood Education to BS in Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood
- New ranch management programs in Business



Photo by Harv Lake