AUGUST 9, 2023

Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
NORTHERN

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Institutional Overview

Montana State University – Northern (MSUN) is located in Havre, Montana in the north central part of the State and approximately 40 miles south of the Canadian border. The community of Havre is the eighth largest city in Montana and has a population of approximately 9,310 people. The community of Havre is very supportive of MSUN and its programs.

Montana State University-Northern had its beginnings in 1913 when the Thirteenth Legislative Assembly of Montana established Northern Montana Agricultural and Manual Training School to be located at Fort Assiniboine. The bill passed on March 8, 1913; however, no money was appropriated. Every legislative session between 1913 and 1927 saw bills introduced by local legislators to establish the college, and each year brought new objections and obstacles to prevent it.

The 1927 Legislature amended the original act of 1913 to allow certain academic subjects to be taught in the city of Havre during the summer, as a normal school. The passage of both acts was a monument to the work of State Representative Florian Carnal, Senators William Cowan of Box Elder and D.S. MacKenzie Sr., and E.C. Carruth of Havre, a longtime member of the State Board of Education. The school functioned again in the summer of 1928. Local business people funded the operation of the normal school for two summers which gave tangible proof of community support for the school.

Actual funds for the operation of the school were made available by the Legislative Assembly in 1929, and the college, known as Northern Montana College, opened its doors to 80 students on September 24th of that year (formal ceremonies opening the school were held on September 30th). The faculty consisted of five members including Dr. G.H. Vande Bogart, who had been appointed president of the school.

The entire college was originally located in temporary quarters at Havre High School. Then, in 1932, four departments were moved to East Hall (demolished in 1980), the first building on campus. In 1954, Northern Montana College was authorized to offer its first four-year Bachelor of Science degree and in 1991 it began offering its Masters of Education degree. Finally, in 1994, Northern Montana College became Montana State University-Northern.

Since its beginnings, MSUN has focused on service to the Hi-Line region with an emphasis on technical and professional disciplines that serve nearby communities and the State. Many of the current program offerings are a result of the continual emphasis on meeting the needs of Havre and its surrounding communities, as well as the State of Montana. Montana State University-Northern offers two master's degree programs, twenty-four bachelor's degree programs, three associate's degree programs, ten associate's of applied science degree programs, and six certificate programs. Also offered at Montana State University-Northern are eighteen subject-area minors. In addition to degree programs offered on the Havre campus, MSUN streams courses from the education program on the Havre campus to offsite locations in Great Falls, Ft. Peck Tribal College, and Aaniiih Nakota Tribal College. These education courses are offered in a synchronous, virtual format (using Zoom or WebEx) with asynchronous activities, assignments, and materials provided in Brightspace. MSUN also offers education classes in Great Falls taught by adjunct faculty in online, hybrid, or face-to-face formats as MSUN does not have any full-time faculty at the off-site location at this time. However, a new faculty hire in Education will allow the institution to have a full-time faculty member regularly

on site starting in Fall 2023. MSUN no longer has a site in Lewistown. The university delivers four online bachelor's degree programs (Community Leadership, Criminal Justice, Nursing (RN to BSN), Trades Management, and Business), one fully online master's degree program (MSEd Instruction and Learning), two associate degree programs (AA in General Studies and AS in Business Technology), and many individual online courses to meet the needs of students at a distance. Finally, biodiesel research takes place at the Advanced Fuels Center on the Havre campus which allows students additional experiential learning opportunities.

The student headcount for the fall of 2022 at MSUN was 1,166 with a full-time equivalency of 840 students. During this time, the majority of students at MSUN, 89.2 percent, came from Montana. The majority of out-of-state students came from the western states of California, Washington, Oregon and Idaho as part of the [Western Undergraduate Exchange](#) (WUE) program which made up 7.1 percent of the Fall 2022 student headcount. The remaining 3.7 percent of the student body were from unknown areas or were foreign students, with the majority of MSU-Northern's foreign student population from Canada. Male students made up 57.5 percent of the campus population while female students made up 41.2 percent. Further, the MSUN student population was approximately 70.2 percent white and 18.8 percent American Indian. The retention rate from fall 2021 to fall 2022 was 71 percent.

With local populations declining, the current challenge for MSUN is to continue finding ways to effectively recruit students from Montana and across the region in order to maintain, and hopefully grow, robust enrollments. An expansion of the university's dual enrollment program, which includes increased outreach to local high schools, as well as the establishment of state-wide apprenticeship programs have proven to be beneficial in drawing in more students. Another important strategy in facing this challenge and supporting the university's mission and strategic plan, however, is to have a system for continuously evaluating the university's academic programs offered and updating the curriculum to ensure it always meets the needs of students and employers throughout the region. This requires a strategic investment from the university in filling faculty lines that have remained vacant for substantial periods of time and supporting faculty development in areas of curriculum design, assessment, and pedagogy. The implementation of such an investment, which is fully aligned with, and representative of, the heart of MSUN's current strategic plan, is readily evidenced by the fact that this past academic year, the institution hired eight full-time faculty members to fill empty positions and replace some faculty that have retired. With 50 full-time faculty members and 30 part-time faculty members as of November 1, 2022, there are still a few open faculty positions at the university that are being advertised and it is hoped that those positions can be filled in a timely manner.

Preface

Montana State University – Northern (MSUN) has experienced a number of transitions within administrative leadership over the course of the past several years. Changes include the retirement of Provost R. Neil Moisey; the hiring of a new Provost; the resignation of the Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management; the hiring and then resignation within the last year of the Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance; the retirement of the Interim Dean of the College of Arts, Science and Education; the hiring of a new Dean of the College of Arts, Science and Education; and the resignation of the Dean of the College of Technical Sciences.

Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor R. Neil Moisey retired at the end of 2022 after 5 years. A national search was conducted, and Dr. Jennifer Brown was hired, joining MSUN on June 1, 2023. Dr. Brown was the Associate Provost and a professor at Eastern Connecticut State University. Her background is in environmental economics and econometrics, and she incorporates data-informed decision making into her administrative approach.

Ms. Maura Gatch, appointed Vice Chancellor of Enrollment Management in 2020, resigned her position effective June 16, 2023. Her duties have been distributed amongst the administration until a replacement has been appointed.

Ms. Darci Hertz was hired as Vice Chancellor of Administration and Finance and started in that position November 1, 2022. She resigned her position in May 2023. In addition, the director of business services moved into a new position as the director of financial aid. Montana State University in Bozeman has provided guidance and assistance as the end of the fiscal year was wrapping up and budgets were being submitted. An active search for a controller is currently underway.

Interim Dean of the College of Arts, Science and Education, Dr. Darlene Sellers, retired at the start of the Fall 2021 semester. A national search was conducted, and Dr. Beth Durodoye was hired as a permanent Dean of the College of Arts, Sciences, and Education almost two years ago. More recently, the Dean of the College of Technical Sciences, Dr. David Krueger, submitted his resignation in June 2023. A national search for his replacement has been launched and Mr. Steven Don, currently the College Chair, is filling this position as an Interim.

Finally, the MSU-Northern Alumni Foundation has appointed a new Executive Director, Mr. Al Garver, who began work for the Foundation in July 2022.

Despite this recent turnover in the university's administrative positions, MSU-Northern has worked diligently to fully address the recommendations made by NWCCU as a result of MSUN's previous Year 7 Report and Mid-Cycle Self Evaluation. A description of the progress the institution has made with respect to those recommendations follows below.

Recommendations

Recommendation Two:
The evaluation committee recommends that MSU-N continue to refine its processes for general education assessment, as stated in Recommendation 2 of the Fall 2013 Peer-Evaluation Report. While MSU-N has made progress in standardization of general education courses and how they are assessed, further work is needed to clearly document the identified course outcomes, the thresholds for achieving these outcomes, and the assessment of achievement of each of the stated outcomes (2020 Standards: 1.C.6).

The MSUN General Education Committee, a sub-committee of the Academic Senate, worked hard over the past several years to further develop and document the institution's ability to assess its General Education Program following the recommendations outlined in the Mid-Cycle Peer-Evaluation Report, Recommendation 2. As was presented in MSUN's Responses to Recommendations from Past Reviews document (RRPR), the General Education Committee developed an Action Plan for General Education based on the findings brought forth in the Mid-

Cycle Report. Further, a timeline for the Action Plan for General Education was developed and provided on page 8, in Table 4, of the RRPR. To date, the General Education Committee has successfully completed the majority of the tasks the university presented in Table 4 of the RRPR with only tasks 14-16 still in progress.

Specifically, the General Education Committee was modified to include additional members from the College of Arts, Science and Education as well as the College of Technical Sciences. The members who volunteered to focus most intensely on general education assessment were newer faculty with backgrounds in general education assessment at other institutions. The committee then set out to identify general education goals (directly linked to the [Mission Statement of the General Education Core](#)) to be assessed on a rotating basis and to develop rubrics for selected general education classes. As a result of their work, the three student learning outcomes of the General Education Program have been identified. They are [critical thinking](#), [integrative learning](#), and [social and cultural perspectives](#). This is a more focused list of student learning outcomes than was previously used in the institution's general education assessment. Following the identification of these student learning outcomes, the committee developed an assessment plan that incorporates the evaluation of student artifacts from the institution's capstone courses utilizing modified versions of three well-established AAC&U VALUE rubrics, allowing for a standardized process consistent with national norms.

The choice to use a capstone assessment model was borne out of feedback from the [Mid-Cycle Peer Evaluation Report](#), page 8, identifying "the very large number of courses and outcomes needing assessment" as well as decisions being made at the course/instructor level as potential obstacles to general education assessments. The Gen Ed committee discussed this issue at length and determined that individual courses would not be assessed because the objective is to assess whether the institution's general education as a program was meeting the outlined goals. Further, there is no way to determine which specific course or set of courses within the General Education Program that students will choose to take during a set timeframe.

General Education Assessment at MSUN was implemented fully during the 2023 academic year with that year's focus on the assessment of critical thinking. Committee members attended college meetings to encourage faculty participation. The Committee members also provided a series of additional information sessions for faculty in January 2023 to help guide them through this continued transition. Faculty were informed that capstone courses were going to be assessed for evidence of critical thinking by students. During these discussions, faculty explored the potential artifacts or tools that would be useful in demonstrating critical thinking. Networking among peers on matters of assessment began to naturally develop, indicating a positive response to the whole assessment process and high levels of faculty engagement. These discussions also provided an opportunity for faculty in all programs to contemplate the best use for capstone courses currently being offered, discuss what a capstone class is, consider the development of capstone courses in programs where there are none, and explore how courses in the program can be developed for use to assess both general education and program-specific outcomes.

Throughout the 2023 academic year, faculty developed assignments designed to capture proficiency in critical thinking among students in their capstone courses and submitted the resulting artifacts to the General Education Committee. The General Education Committee evaluated these artifacts utilizing the VALUE Rubric for [critical thinking](#) during the Summer of 2023, data from which are currently being analyzed. The expectation is that the General Education Committee will be able to

present the results of the AY23 General Education Assessment cycle to the campus community along with any recommendations the Committee has on improving critical thinking outcomes among students. The General Education Committee will also develop and implement a plan for closing the loop during AY24 and begin assessing the General Education Assessment process itself.

As the assessment of MSUN's General Education Program has proceeded, some issues have been identified. For example, as was previously stated, for the 2022-2023 assessment cycle, capstone courses and/or senior projects from the institution's baccalaureate programs have been targeted for assessment. However, some programs on campus do not have these types of courses/projects. To adjust for this, the General Education Committee has suggested that these programs utilize assignments that approximate the objectives of a senior project. Faculty have also had an opportunity to receive feedback from peers related to class projects that could be viewed as fulfilling the general education assessment objectives.

An additional complication developed as the committee grappled with how to best include associate's degree programs in general education assessment using a capstone/senior thesis assessment model. Because these programs do not typically utilize capstone courses, suggestions were put forth for assessing comprehensive projects in select, required general education courses that address the General Education Program student learning outcomes. This would not only allow associate's programs to gauge the preparedness of their students, but it would also allow classes at the associate's and baccalaureate levels to be used to provide a snapshot of learning growth between sophomore and senior years.

Recommendation Five:
The evaluation committee found evidence of an impressive amount of focused and purposeful activity concerning comprehensive planning. However, the committee recommends that the emerging comprehensive plan be informed by the collection of appropriately defined data and documented so that it can be more systematic, better integrated, and more widely available to appropriate constituencies for input (2020 Standards: 1.B.3).

Following feedback received in the Mid-Cycle Peer-Evaluation Report and the submission of the RRPR, MSU-Northern created a Strategic Planning Committee that is made up of the Provost, Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management, the Dean of Students, and the College Deans. The Strategic Planning Committee has worked to develop strategic plans for the Colleges, University Relations, and Enrollment Management. They also continue to work with other areas of the university as they develop their own strategic plans.

To expand the process of implementation and assessment of the All N Strategic Plan 2023 - 2033, Goal Workbooks for each of the Strategic Goals that delineate the plan's objectives, tactics, and responsible parties are in development and will be shared with functional units across the institution. It is the expectation that these units will utilize the developed goals and sub-goals within the Goal Workbooks to identify additional strategies, tactics, and indicators they can employ to ensure that those carrying out day-to-day program objectives are included in the creation of, and are taking ownership for, the definition of those efforts.

Once the Goal Workbooks have been completed, they will be shared with the CORE Leadership Committee, the Institutional Assessment Committee, the Association of Students at Montana State University – Northern (ASMSUN), and the University Advisory Council (UAC). By presenting these workbooks to the aforementioned groups, the Strategic Planning Committee hopes to gain

essential and broad input, buy-in, and support from these stakeholders and participation in the implementation of newly identified strategies. Consistent with the expectations outlined within the plan itself, this is one of the ways in which the institution hopes to ensure collaboration and the development of a shared vision for the implementation of strategies identified within the strategic plan.

Finally, the Office of Institutional Research has developed an interactive database that allows the responsible parties identified in the Goal Workbooks to regularly enter and verify the strategic planning data that fall within their purview. This interactive database also provides a platform through which trends in indicator data can be made available to decision-makers across campus. This data collection and dissemination process is a key component of the assessment of the All N Strategic Plan 2023-2033 that has been missing in previous assessment efforts.

Recommendation Six:
As program assessment capacity is systematized and developed, the evaluation committee recommends that the institution incorporate more evidence of student learning outcome assessment, and assessment-informed improvement efforts throughout the educational experience, including services as well as academic degrees, programs and certifications (2020 Standards: 1.C.7).

MSU-Northern has made significant strides in program assessment since presenting the Year 7 Report of 2016. The institution previously set up an assessment system through Taskstream (Watermark) to facilitate program-level assessment. Unfortunately, this platform ultimately created a technological barrier that discouraged faculty participation. As a result, a new approach was pursued. The Director of MSUN's Office of Teaching and Learning Excellence (OTLE) researched academic program assessment systems at other institutions and, based on the information accumulated, developed template documents for assessment plans and reports and set up a Sharepoint site in which to collect submissions each year from each academic program. OTLE then worked with a group of faculty representatives to test the templates, solicit feedback from a faculty user perspective, and incorporate changes before presenting them to each academic college for a final round of feedback. When the system was ready for use, OTLE staff assisted faculty in transferring any existing program assessment plans from Taskstream into the new template and modifying/developing assessment plans for each program. The final, operationalized program assessment system is clearly laid out on the MSUN website to help ensure consistent communication about the process. Today, 67.8 percent of MSUN programs at the institution have developed assessment plans and 77.97 percent participate in the annual program assessment reporting process.

During Fall 2021, OTLE worked with the Institutional Assessment Committee (IAC) and volunteers from Academic Senate to develop a pool of program assessment reviewers and a rubric for program assessment evaluation. All submitted assessment plans and reports were evaluated by these reviewers by the end of AY22 and the results were made available to program faculty, providing an opportunity for reflection on any necessary changes in a program's assessment plan or reporting approach.

In Fall 2022, faculty were again asked to provide data, this time from the AY22 assessment cycle, and develop an assessment report to be reviewed by the IAC. This process has been repeated for AY23. The report template prompts faculty to identify whether the targets of each program's assessment plan have been met. It also requires program faculty to identify changes to be made in program curriculum and/or assessment plans based on the assessment results. For example, as the

Accounting minor faculty have gone through the program assessment process, they have identified an area in need of improvement related to the Accounting minor's first student learning outcome: **Identify, illustrate, and describe enterprise and transaction cycles and business processes.** Initially, a change was made in the Accounting minor curriculum to address this issue and, hopefully, improve student performance with respect to the program's first student learning outcome. However, data from later assessment cycles revealed decreased performance in this area. As a result, Accounting minor faculty modified curriculum for AY24 by adopting a mastery-based learning approach in a specific course covering fundamental accounting concepts. With the mastery-based teaching model, the delivery of comprehensive problems will be adjusted such that they are separated into smaller parts to facilitate better learning. Further, students will not progress from one concept to the next until competency has been demonstrated. The effectiveness of this approach will be assessed through the program's AY24 assessment cycle.

Another program that utilized program assessment data to make curricular changes is Community Leadership. Specifically, the program assessment that was completed two years ago by faculty in Community Leadership provided findings that prompted the faculty to revise the curriculum to better align with current program outcomes. Faculty, through conversations with former graduates and a review of the self-assessments that some students chose to complete as part of the assessment mapping, found that their students did not have a realistic perception of their own professional readiness. This was interpreted as a weakness of the curriculum and program in general, so faculty have now integrated strategies into the curriculum to facilitate the development of reflective practitioners. They revisited the curriculum in two core courses to eliminate duplication and fill in any content gaps. Faculty also enhanced concentrations within the major and provided an undergraduate research option as a substitute for the required co-op. These proposed changes are currently making their way through the curricular process and will hopefully be implemented in AY24. Finally, the student learning outcomes for the program have been updated and now include much more mention of the ability of students to "analyze and explain" information.

In the area of student learning support, OTLE conducts their own yearly assessment. As part of that assessment, the office collects data from student surveys to gauge student satisfaction in using Brightspace, the Learning Management System which OTLE oversees. OTLE's evaluation of the survey results has led to the implementation of new training approaches for students and faculty. One of the specific issues that students have brought up in the survey was the trouble they were having navigating the many "pieces" of each of their courses as different instructors would locate course material in different places in the Brightspace shell. OTLE addressed this by presenting the student feedback to the faculty with "consistency in course structure" as a key theme. OTLE also reached out to specific faculty that they found were not following standard practices and made sure to provide new faculty with training on best practices in online course design. Another very important concern students expressed was that their grades were not updated consistently and in a timely fashion. In response, OTLE offered regular Tech Snack training sessions to demonstrate the usefulness of the gradebook in Brightspace. In addition to these efforts, OTLE significantly increased its presence at the on-campus orientation for incoming students held each fall.

As a final example, the Office of Financial Aid and the Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management recently utilized institutional data to assess the equitable distribution of scholarship funds across MSU-Northern's student population. As part of this assessment, they approached the Office of Institutional Research and the director of OTLE to develop an application to track students' scholarship award allocations during the selection process. Through this process, it was determined that scholarship funds could be distributed more evenly among aid-eligible students and, as a result,

in Spring 2023, awarded funds were adjusted such that 63 more students received scholarship aid than in the previous year.

Recommendation Seven:
The evaluation committee recommends that planning for core themes, and decisions and resource allocations concerning core theme programs and services, be consistent with the University's comprehensive plan and informed by the evaluation of the accomplishment of core theme objectives (2020 Standards: 1.B.1).

As presented in the RRPR, MSUN discontinued the use of Core Themes and has, instead, integrated them into the goals of the university's All N Strategic Plan 2023 – 2033. The goals of this plan include Stability, Quality and Efficiency, Engagement, and Collaboration. For each of these strategic goals, there are objectives and tactics and an identified responsible party (see Goal Workbooks). The current Strategic Goals/previous Core Themes of the university have been the framework of institutional planning for the last seven years and have been supported by initiatives implemented within that timeframe. As identified in the previous Year 7 Report, there were nine initiatives that were to support Core Themes #1, #2, and #3 which are now encompassed by Strategic Goal #2, #3, and #4, respectively. These initiatives were:

- Adding a horsemanship minor
- Course scheduling enhancements
- Industry Partnerships
- Enhancing Student Life
- Collaboration with Great Falls and the Lewistown center
- Building a football stadium and events center on campus
- Building a Native American Cultural Center
- Building a comprehensive Veterans Center
- Expanding fine arts offerings

Over the years, these initiatives have continued to be reviewed and shaped, particularly within the context of providing support for Strategic Goal #1 of the All N Strategic Plan 2023 - 2033, Stability. The Strategic Planning Committee has worked closely with the CORE Leadership Committee to identify tactics that address and support the implementation of these initiatives. Throughout the last eight years, as one example, efforts have been made to identify faculty to develop curriculum for the horsemanship minor initiative which is anticipated to increase interest among prospective students and, eventually, overall enrollment and retention. After a great deal of planning and effort, the University recently hired a new faculty member in Agricultural Technology, who also coaches the rodeo team, to develop the necessary curriculum. As a result, the curriculum for an equine minor at MSU-Northern was presented to and approved by the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education in April 2023.

The Industry Partnerships initiative was taken on by the Director of the Career Center and, ultimately, overseen by the Vice Chancellor of Enrollment Management with the Dean of the College of Technical Science also working to identify and nurture relationships with industry partners. While the development of industry partnerships directly supports Strategic Goal #4, Collaboration, it also indirectly supports other strategic goals. For example, through the development of these partnerships, many program areas in the College of Technical Science have assembled advisory boards that feature representatives from industry as well as alumni and regional

business owners who employ students that graduate from MSU-Northern. The establishment of these advisory boards has benefited MSU-Northern immensely in the form of feedback on curricular design, supporting Strategic Goal #2, as well as fundraising, supporting Strategic Goal #1.

In fact, it is this initiative and the resulting collaboration that ultimately led to the realization of another initiative, building a football stadium and events center on campus. Specifically, a large number of MSUN's industry partners provided support with funding and in-kind services for the construction of Tilleman Field. These industry partners, along with regional legislators, also supported the proposal that MSU-Northern put forth this past legislative session to fund a wellness and events center on campus, the Aurora Complex. This events center will complement the football field as an integral part of the university's stadium and enhance student life. As a result of the planning that has taken place at the institution level and the support provided by industry partners and regional legislators, MSU-Northern has been awarded $25 million in legislative funds to construct the new Aurora Complex. Meetings soliciting stakeholder input on its design are scheduled to take place in the coming year. So, it is out of support for Strategic Goal #4, Collaboration, that the university has been able to make tremendous progress on building a stadium and events center which is anticipated to support Strategic Goal #3, Engagement. It is also believed that supporting Goal #4 and the resulting construction of these structures supports Strategic Goal #1, Stability, through the increased interest they will generate among first-time and transfer students and higher retention among continuing students.

Another initiative for which there has been much progress made is Enhancing Student Life. This initiative is intended to support Strategic Goal #3, Engagement, in a time when student engagement has been experiencing a period of relative dormancy due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The process of identifying strategies to support this initiative afforded the institution an opportunity to review and reimagine previous practices and long-standing traditions. One result from the reimagining of long-standing traditions was the development of signature campus events that enhance the student experience through strengthening connections with and between students, faculty and staff, and the larger campus, Havre, and Hi-Line communities. The Aurora Borealis Festival is one such event, designed to introduce students to the University's surrounding communities, while also bolstering the institution's relationship with local community service organizations and businesses. This year, the University will host the 3rd Annual Aurora Borealis Festival in August 2023, having seen this event grow in popularity and impact each of the past two years.

Overall, the progress in implementing these initiatives demonstrates the alignment of the institution's resource allocation model with its Strategic Plan and the Core Themes it now encompasses.

Standard 1.A: Institutional Mission

1.A.1 *The institution's mission statement defines its broad educational purposes and its commitment to student learning and achievement.*

Montana State University – Northern offers academic programming for a diverse population of students. These programs are developed with a keen eye on the needs of Northern's students, the surrounding community, industry leaders, and the State of Montana and range from certificates to

Master's degrees in professional and technical fields. Indeed, MSU-Northern offers certificate; Associate of Applied Science; Associate of Science; Associate of Arts; Bachelor of Arts; Bachelor of Science; Bachelor of Applied Science, and Master's degree programs. Programs offered include technical areas such as plumbing, electrical, welding, automotive, and diesel technology as well as traditional disciplines in professional areas such as business, education (elementary and secondary), liberal studies, criminal justice, community leadership, integrated health, and biology. In addition, MSU-Northern works with the Montana Department of Labor to support apprenticeship programs and has an Advanced Fuels Center which supports local, state, and regional businesses.

Through the process of shared governance, MSU-Northern's current mission statement (below) was crafted to reflect the service the university provides to all students in preparing them for success after graduation in their personal and professional lives, regardless of field of study. This mission statement was approved by the Montana Board of Regents when presented at its May 2016 meeting. Along with the institution's mission statement, MSU-Northern has developed a vision statement (also below) that further highlights its path forward in this space.

MSU-Northern's Mission Statement:

> ***MSU-Northern provides higher education to students for professional and technical careers through an institution dedicated to teaching and the pursuit of knowledge.***

MSU-Northern's Vision Statement:
> ***MSU-Northern will be known for its supportive, student-centered environment in which a unique mix of academic programs are responsive to local, regional and statewide workforce needs, offered in an atmosphere that promotes student success.***

The Montana Board of Regents requires each university in the Montana University System to formally review its mission every three years to ensure continued relevance. MSU-Northern was scheduled to review its Mission and Core Themes and to present its findings and recommended revisions to the Board of Regents in AY 2020/21. However, the review of the institution's mission was waylaid by the onset of the COVID pandemic and the administration decided to keep the existing mission and core themes until the next review in AY 2023/24.

Since its approval, MSU-Northern's mission statement has been displayed in most areas of campus in an effort to familiarize students, staff, and faculty. The mission statement and vision statement above are also found on the MSU-Northern website.

Standard 1.B: Improving Institutional Effectiveness

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.

Montana State University – Northern has developed several complementary avenues to assess and evaluate institutional effectiveness including student learning, achievement, and support. MSUN has put into place two oversight committees, Strategic Planning and Institutional Assessment, as stewards for the institutional planning and program assessment processes, respectively. Further, the General Education Committee, a subcommittee of the Academic Senate, oversees assessment of the institution's general education program. Several other institutional committees have been established related to planning and assessment at MSUN including the Tutoring Committee, developed to oversee the effectiveness of a major component of student support services, the Facilities Planning Committee, and Budget Advisory Committee. The latter two committees have not been fully utilized over the last three years as their purview was superseded by the COVID-19 Budget committee, developed in 2020 to oversee the utilization of funding to address student learning challenges during the pandemic. An additional challenge that contributed to the inactive status of the Budget and Facilities committees was the lack of a Chief Financial Officer. These committees are important to the institution and thus have now been re-established to assess the budgetary process and the planning, utilization, and maintenance of facilities.

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC), as it exists today, grew out of the now discontinued Strategic Advancement Team (SAT). The SAT was responsible for developing initiatives/goals in support of Northern's Core Themes. Likewise, these Core Themes were developed to support the mission and vision of MSUN and were the center of the Strategic Plan identified in the previous Year 7 Self Study presented to NWCCU in 2016. Unfortunately, the institution's mission fulfillment indicators were identified by reviewers of the previous Year 7 Self Study as being inadequate in providing enough usable data for a full, reliable assessment of the institution's mission fulfillment. As a result, the indicators were reviewed and updated, resulting in a more favorable outcome by the Mid-cycle evaluation. Since the Mid-cycle evaluation, MSUN has continued to utilize and expand its mission fulfillment indicators in order to more easily identify areas in need of improvement. All mission fulfillment indicators were developed when MSUN's Core Themes were still in place and were cross-linked to the specific Strategic Plan Goals to which they were aligned.

With updates to the NWCCU standards in 2020, including the optional use of Core Themes, the SPC streamlined its approach to planning and assessment by folding the institution's Core Themes into its goals within the strategic plan. This provided an opportunity for MSUN to focus efforts on the alignment of the Strategic Plan with the university's mission and vision. In particular, once the Core Themes were integrated with the Strategic Plan, the SPC began to assess the structure and content of the plan to determine whether it continued to represent Northern's mission and vision and whether the plan's key performance indicators appropriately captured progress made in achieving the institution's strategic goals. For example, among the previous key performance indicators were standard measures of student success, like retention and graduation rates, as defined by IPEDS. However, with its unique mix of certificate, associate's , bachelor's , and master's degree programs, it is clear that these definitions do not capture the progress of students in many of the university's programs. MSUN Nursing Programs, in particular, are excluded from these indicators as students in these programs are required to complete the associate's degree before matriculating into the bachelor's degree program. This means that the university has only first-time, full-time nursing students in its associate's degree program and no first-time, full-time nursing students in its bachelor's degree program. As first-time, full-time cohorts are used to measure retention and graduation rates, progress among MSUN students in its BSN program will never be reflected in that indicator.

This assessment of the previous Strategic Plan has led the SPC to update some of its sections within the last three years, along with the key performance indicators being tracked, while other parts of the Strategic Plan are still at the beginning stages of a reimagining involving input from a broad base of stakeholders on campus. The process of updating the Strategic Plan has included the recent development of a mechanism for systematically collecting data related to the Strategic Plan's key performance indicators to ensure that regular, ongoing assessment of Northern's progress toward achieving its strategic goals is both feasible and sustainable, long-term. While this mechanism has been in development, MSUN has continued to collect data based on the previously developed mission fulfillment indicators to ensure some form of assessment remains ongoing.

Finally, the SPC has encouraged other institutional areas, such as the academic colleges, student life, recruiting, university relations, and enrollment management to develop their own strategic plans that tie into the overall institutional strategic plan. The SPC receives regular updates on the progress being made on these strategic plans.

The SPC regularly updates the Chancellor and other institutional groups on adjustments to the Strategic Plan and the progress being made toward Northern's strategic goals based on current key performance indicators. At the start of the fall term each academic year, the Chancellor and his executive team present to the campus community and other stakeholders an assessment report on progress being made toward achieving Northern's strategic goals and objectives. The Chancellor also publishes this information for distribution to alumni and university donors. The community is encouraged to comment and provide input on how MSUN can continue to improve.

The Institutional Assessment Committee (IAC) has been tasked with overseeing the assessment of the student learning outcomes of the institution's academic programs as well as the assessment of non-academic units. An assessment platform, Taskstream, was purchased prior to the previous Year 7 Self Study and faculty and staff set about developing assessment plans for their individual programs. Student Learning Assessment Plans (SLAPs) were developed in Taskstream, however, in the end, the faculty did not embrace this technology and after several years with rather substantial increases in the price of the product, its use was discontinued. At that point the Office of Teaching and Learning Excellence (OTLE) was given the task of working with the Office of Institutional Research to develop a simpler, faculty-friendly tool for program assessment. In order to facilitate faculty engagement in this process, OTLE met with every department to assist in the development of program assessment plans and conducted workshops to help the faculty learn to document data to be used in the assessment process.

One of the more difficult aspects of program assessment for Northern has been to create a structure where program assessment plans are reviewed, suggestions for improvement are made available to each assessment team, updates to program assessment plans are employed, and data is appropriately utilized as part of closing the loop on this process. This process is now in place and is conducted through the IAC. As a result, MSUN is in its second year of reviewing, reporting, and assessing the continuous improvement of its programs. Further, the assessment process employed by IAC has been reviewed and the results of that review will be presented at Faculty and Staff Orientation at the beginning of the Fall 2023 semester. It is through the review of this process that assessment utilization is being fine-tuned.

General education assessment has been the most difficult assessment process to develop and utilize. The General Education Committee took on the task of developing an assessment tool and the

procedures to be followed and, therefore, adopted and modified relevant AAC&U rubrics to be utilized in assessing student learning with respect to the institution's three general education learning outcomes: Critical Thinking, Integrative Learning, and Social and Cultural Perspectives. To accomplish this task, the membership of the General Education Committee was modified, with the approval of the Faculty Academic Senate, to add more faculty from the College of Arts, Science and Education with experience teaching and assessing general education courses and conducting statistical analysis as well as faculty from the College of Technical Sciences willing to learn more about assessment. In its November 13, 2019 meeting, this committee began to discuss possible avenues for the assessment of the general education program. On January 10, 2020, the committee voted unanimously to recommend the development of an integrated general education assessment plan to the Academic Senate. From there, the work of developing and implementing the institution's current General Education Assessment Plan began in earnest. As part of this plan, the university's general education core learning outcomes are assessed each year on a rotating basis. At the conclusion of the Spring 2023 semester, the first set of artifacts in assessing student learning in critical thinking were submitted. The General Education Committee spent Summer 2023 assessing these artifacts and is in the process of evaluating the data. It is anticipated that a report on their findings will be made available to the campus community at the beginning of the Fall 2023 semester.

Finally, in an effort to assess the effectiveness of the student support available for students, Student Support Services (SSS) and the Little River Institute (LRI) track the number of students served, the tutoring hours made available, and whether the students dropped by only once or were regular users of the available tutoring and mentoring services. This information, along with other data that is required for grant reporting purposes, is presented to the Tutoring Committee on a regular basis. LRI has reported a 74 percent pass rate among American Indian students who received tutoring from LRI. SSS reports that 80 percent of all the enrolled participants served by SSS are in good academic standing.

1.B.2 *The institution sets and articulates meaningful goals, objectives, and indicators of its goals to define mission fulfillment and to improve its effectiveness in the context of and in comparison with regional and national peer institutions.*

The MSUN Strategic Planning Committee is responsible for setting goals, objectives, and effectiveness indicators that define and assess the fulfillment of the institutional mission. Prior evaluations from NWCCU have indicated that the goals, objectives, and effectiveness indicators required improvement. The SPC has worked to expand the mission effectiveness indicators to yield more specific data for analysis and evaluation, allowing MSUN to more fully demonstrate fulfilment of its mission. The current overarching goals of the institution include: 1) Strategic Growth, 2) Quality and Efficiency, 3) Engagement, and 4) Collaboration. These are supported by objectives including, but not limited to: Provide Excellent Academic Programs (2.2), Enhance Infrastructure (1.2), Ensure Students Complete in a Timely Manner (2.4), Cultivate Integrated Learning and Development (3.2), and Enhance External Partnerships (4.1). Strategies, Tactics, and Indicators have been developed for each Objective with special care given to identifying indicators that are relevant and can be measured in a sustainable manner.

In order to collect regional comparison data on the institution's mission fulfillment indicators, MSUN has utilized the National Student Satisfaction Evaluation (NSSE) standardized surveying tool. As NSSE is a standardized surveying system, its use allows for benchmarking with regional and

national institutions. Of course, some limitations exist with the utilization of this data. First, as the data is student-reported, it captures student perception and may not represent true outcomes. As a result, MSUN is careful to utilize only those survey results where student perception is an appropriate measure (e.g, student satisfaction, connectedness, etc…). Second, the university has historically experienced a low response rate with respect to the NSSE survey. This creates issues with inference and, because of this, the university is looking into strategies for increasing student response rate.

MSUN conducted the NSSE survey in Spring 2020 and again in Spring 2023. The 2020 NSSE report provided a useful comparison with institutions of similar size and focus on student learning and engagement. For example, the report shows that the percent of seniors responding to the 2020 NSSE Survey questions relating to quality interactions with academic advisors with "Very Often" or Often" was 18 percentage points higher than the result from the same questions asked of Rocky Mt Public seniors and on par with average senior responses received at institutions within the same Carnegie Classification. On the other hand, first-year student respondents in Spring 2020 indicated that MSUN placed less emphasis on using learning support services than did Rocky Mt Public's first-year students and those from the same Carnegie Classification. Finally, MSUN fared better than its comparison institutions in the 2020 NSSE Survey data related to high impact practices. In particular, first-year students indicated greater participation in at least one high-impact practice and seniors indicated greater involvement in service learning than their counterparts at comparable institutions. Unfortunately, keeping in mind that the 2020 NSSE Survey yielded a low response rate among MSUN students, there was a lack of significance in many of the 2020 NSSE comparisons between MSUN and Rocky Mt Public. As a result, implementing an appropriate institutional response to these results would require additional sources of data.

Beyond the low response rate, one major issue MSUN has had with the NSSE Survey has been the lack of distribution and utilization of the results. Without campus-wide communication, it has been difficult to identify those strategies necessary in improving student learning and engagement and to implement those strategies consistently across campus. As such, a campus-wide presentation on the Spring 2023 NSSE Survey data, which has yet to be released, has been scheduled for Fall 2023. Further, the data will be presented to CORE leadership to open a discussion of potential responsive strategies.

Additional comparison data related to the university's effectiveness is generated through a regular evaluation institutionalized by the Montana University System (MUS). As a member of this system, MSUN is externally evaluated by the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) through a performance-based funding process. The indicators used in this funding model include overall undergraduate student retention rate, under-represented undergraduate student retention rate, dual enrollment, undergraduate completions, and under-represented undergraduate student completions. Goals related to these indicators are set annually and, if these goals are fully realized, the institution will receive 100 percent of its total share of performance funding. If the institution falls short of its goals, a lesser amount of funding is provided in proportion to the institution's success rate that year. The success of MSUN at meeting the performance indicators is made publicly available and can be compared to other institutions in the MUS via the MUS Performance Funding Metric Dashboards. For example, for FY24 Performance Funding allocations, MSUN had an Overall Index Score of 992 while MSU Billings had an Overall Index Score of 969. This indicates that MSUN was slightly more successful at reaching its goals for that particular year than was MSU Billings. Such comparisons are not used for a competitive purpose, but rather for a

check on the feasibility of the institution's annual goals and a measure of institutional progress in the context of growth at other institutions in the system.

In terms of benchmarking for individual programs, MSUN has five program areas that are accredited at either the state or national level. This includes Nursing (ACEN), Civil Engineering Technology (ABET), Education (MT OPI), Automotive Technology (ASE), and Diesel Technology (AED). These programs undergo a thorough review on a regular cycle with outcomes compared with the appropriate accreditation standards. Because of the many benefits of this external assessment process in helping programs utilize benchmarking for continuous improvement, the university has encouraged programs to seek out and apply for field-specific accreditation, where appropriate.

1.B.3 *The institution provides evidence that its planning process is inclusive and offers opportunities for comment by appropriate constituencies, allocates necessary resources, and leads to improvement of institutional effectiveness.*

The institutional and academic planning process at MSUN involves multiple campus-wide committees including, but not limited to the SPC, the IAC, the Academic Senate, the University Advisory Council (UAC), the University Facilities Planning Board, and the Budget Advisory Committee. Because of the small size of the MSUN faculty and staff population, there can be quite a bit of membership overlap among these committees. The Chancellor, as well as other members of the administration, are encouraged by committee members to attend meetings and report on items of concern or request/provide input on planning initiatives. The Chancellor also reports to the Northern Alumni Foundation Board, the Alumni through the *Aurora Borealis* newsletter, the University and community at large through the weekly online campus newsletter – the *Northern Network News* (NNN) and the Associated Students of Montana State University Northern (ASMSUN).

All institutional planning is grounded in the All N Strategic Plan 2023-2033. The current SPC is comprised of leadership from Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Enrollment Management. Turnover in Finance and Administration in the last few years has made it difficult to have full representation from that division on the SPC. However, in the absence of a CFO, the Chancellor has been instrumental in securing and dedicating resources to support the institution's strategic goals. Historically, members of the SPC worked with the members of their individual units to identify possible strategies for promoting progress in achieving the university's strategic goals. However, with the transition away from core themes, parts of the Strategic Plan are being revisited and revised using a ground-up approach whereby more members of the campus community will have opportunities to directly impact the institution's strategies to achieve its goals and confirm that the appropriate indicators of progress are being measured. For example, the Faculty and Staff Orientation for Fall 2023 will include faculty workshops dedicated to assessing whether the indicators resulting from activity in Academic Affairs are accurately capturing progress toward MSUN's strategic goals and to refining the objectives and strategies in the Strategic Plan such that the institution's efforts can be concentrated to best utilize its limited resources.

The academic planning process at MSUN originates with College faculty wanting to either improve established curriculum or propose new programs/courses that would benefit the community, region and state. Each Dean and Chair of the university's three Colleges meet with their respective College faculty members to set goals for recruitment, discuss program effectiveness, and explore ideas for updating the curriculum through the formal curriculum proposal process. Following these

conversations, College faculty prepare their curriculum proposals which are then shared by the College Deans with the Provost and the CORE Leadership team. These proposals are then incorporated into the yearly [Academic Planning and Priorities](#) report, solidifying the academic plan for the upcoming year. This report is submitted to the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) and, ultimately, the Board of Regents (BOR) for review. Each Academic Planning and Priorities report is also shared with each institution of higher education in the Montana University System for comments and concerns.

Following the review of the university's Academic Planning and Priorities report, proposing faculty are able to proceed in developing the appropriate curriculum proposal paperwork to be reviewed by the Professional Education Unit (PEU) if necessary, faculty members within the relevant College(s), the Curriculum Committee, the General Education Committee if necessary, the Academic Senate, the Provost, and the Chancellor. Once this process is complete, Chancellor-approved proposals are forwarded to OCHE and the BOR, if necessary, for consideration. This process is described and made available online through the Academic Senate [website](#) and the [BOR Academic Affairs Procedural Guidebook](#).

Each curriculum proposal must address how the proposed update to institutional programming supports the respective missions and visions of the university, OCHE, and the BOR. Additionally, proposal packets presented to OCHE and the BOR are to include financial impact and space utilization assessments as well as an explanation covering how any proposed changes fit within the university's established course/program offerings and can be supported by the space available at the institution. During the evaluation periods conducted by OCHE and the BOR, other colleges and interested community members have an opportunity to submit comments of support or concern. NWCCU is notified of any new programs to be added or if any of the current programs are to be terminated or removed from the catalog.

In terms of long-term academic planning, the institution has engaged in several points of reflection over the years. The most recent of these occurred in the development of the Montana State University-Northern SWOT Academic Program Analysis for March 2021 to February 2022. This analysis resulted from a series of meetings with the Chancellor and all faculty from each academic program on campus aimed at identifying points of strength as well as opportunities for improvement among MSUN's academic offerings. Under the university's new Provost, this work will continue, and a formal, long-term academic plan will be created through broad community engagement with the objective of improving the long-term quality and efficiency of the institution's academic programs in direct support of the Strategic Plan. SWOT analysis was also undertaken by other areas of the institution including Athletics, Student Affairs, and Student Central.

The academic planning process provides information through faculty, chairs and deans to the various planning committees on which they serve. This information is also provided to the Budget Advisory Committee for review to confirm that the funding is available for the proposed programs to be successful or to develop a plan to facilitate funding. The Facilities Utilization Committee also comes into the conversation as it can provide input on the adequacy of facilities to be utilized by the new program. Finally, the University Facilities Planning Board can then develop an approach for the Long-Range Building Plan if funding is required to modify or construct institutional buildings. The Long-Range Building Plan for MSUN is submitted every two years to OCHE to be [included in the budget proposal to the Montana Legislature for possible funding](#). This past legislative year was very good to MSUN as the legislature and governor approved $6.8 million dollars for deferred building

maintenance, improvements and upgrades along with $25 million dollars to construct the Aurora Complex.

Throughout each and every planning process, the Chancellor meets with a wide variety of groups to solicit input and ideas for the betterment of the institution. He routinely meets with student groups, community groups, and regional groups to update the vision of the institution and request ideas for improvement and support.

1.B.4 *The institution monitors its internal and external environments to identify current and emerging patterns, trends, and expectations. Through its governance system it considers such findings to assess its strategic position, define its future direction, and review and revise, as necessary, its mission, planning intended outcomes of its programs, and services, and indicators of achievement of its goals.*

MSUN monitors a number of internal and external sources for emerging trends and expectations from the potential employers of all our students. Internally, MSUN depends on the faculty to utilize the annual program assessment process to monitor and improve upon program effectiveness. OTLE provides support in this process as well as professional development programming focused on trends in pedagogy across multiple modalities that encourages faculty to expand and continuously improve as educators. OTLE also encourages collaboration between faculty in ways that can benefit both instructors and likewise their students in broadening their applications of knowledge. For example, once a year for the past 7 years, OTLE hosts the Annual Innovative Teaching and Learning Festival (formerly known as the Media Festival) where faculty present innovative teaching techniques they have implemented in the classroom. The festival has provided and continues to provide a forum for the sharing of best practices in teaching and an opportunity for collaborative discussion and mentoring among faculty. In addition, OTLE, with the Faculty Academic Senate sub-committee for Instruction, Research, and Faculty Development, hosts a monthly Brown Bag Lecture Series featuring faculty members who present the research they are currently involved with or are planning to be involved with. Faculty and staff are encouraged to submit proposals for funding in pursuing professional development projects in their areas. OTLE itself has a Faculty Advisory Committee that provides qualitative feedback on OTLE activities and assists the office in identifying the technical and professional development needs of faculty at MSUN.

Faculty that are part of the program assessment process and engage with OTLE programming are able to utilize the campus-wide collaborative network generated through OTLE to view the various tools programs are using to assess student learning outcomes. They can then update or modify their own assessment techniques accordingly and, ultimately, improve the quality of the degree programs offered to MSUN students. Likewise, faculty involved in the general education assessment process on campus have benefitted from workshops offered by the General Education Committee that focus on helping faculty create integrated projects or papers that demonstrate the effectiveness of the general education courses. Committee members are currently collaborating with OTLE to offer a reading group for faculty that will help them identify ways to integrate specific general education skills and assessment methods into their capstone courses. When combined with the collaborative networks resulting from this process, faculty are able to share ideas and modify their approach to general education assessment, ultimately improving the effectiveness of the MSUN general education program.

Institutional data is also made readily available to faculty and staff so that trends in enrollment by program, retention, student credit hour generation, DWF rates for gateway courses etc… can be

easily monitored and acted upon. This data is accessible through the [Office of Institutional Research](#) and the [Office of Admissions and Registration](#). Additionally, faculty are able to initiate academic alerts when a student is struggling, enabling the enrollment management team and faculty advisors to intervene and provide solutions. Each of these pieces of information allows for prompt course correction as well as long-term policy changes, if applicable.

System-level benchmarking allows the university to monitor overall trends in higher education in Montana. These benchmarks are made possible through data published by the [MUS Dashboards](#), including information on American Indian enrollments, Dual Credit enrollments, Full-time Equivalent (FTE), Headcounts, Graduation Rates, Degrees Awarded, Workforce Development (the percentage of graduates that work in Montana), and First-Time Freshman. These data are useful for setting goals and objectives to support the institution's strategic plan and allow MSUN to identify whether changes in their own data trends are institutionally isolated or part of a shared experience with respect to other MUS institutions.

Other data available for review that provide cues regarding external trends are the [IPEDS Data Feedback Reports](#), data from the U.S. Census Bureau – Center for Economic Studies – [Post Secondary Employment Outcomes](#) Explorer, and the National Student Clearinghouse Post-Secondary Data Partnership through the MUS website. Again, this data provides the institution with information to assess mission fulfillment as well as the ability to monitor how MSUN is meeting the strategic goals as compared to other institutions within the system and nationally.

Five degree program areas at MSUN are also assessed by state and/or national program accreditation organizations. MSUN Education programs are evaluated by the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) for the State Board of Education. Education students also take a standardized exam, PRAXIS II, as part of the State OPI licensure recommendation process. The Civil Engineering Technology program must meet the standards for the national Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). MSUN Nursing programs are nationally accredited through the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN). The Automotive Technology program is accredited through Automotive Service Excellence Education Foundation (ASE). The Diesel Technology program achieved accreditation through the Associated Equipment Distributors Foundation (AED) in 2019. The baccalaureate Business program uses the CompXM exam which is published by Capsim as their final exam in the capstone course, BGEN 494, required by the program. All of these external accreditation bodies provide standardized student learning outcomes that programs must meet along with national or state benchmarks that programs can use to assess themselves and student learning while monitoring changes in trends and expectations in field-specific content.

Finally, MSUN seeks input on emerging technology, trends and expectations of employers through its robust roster of industry advisory boards. Specifically, MSUN houses eleven active industry advisory boards that meet at least once a year and advise twelve program areas across campus, including: Diesel Technology, Automotive Technology, Agricultural Technology, Plumbing/Pipefitting, Electrical, Welding and Manufacturing, Business Administration, Civil Engineering Technology, Education, and Nursing. Advisory board meetings feature faculty presentations on program assessment, program needs, and requests for feedback from board members in the context of trends and innovations that are occurring in the field. Some board members also regularly hire MSUN graduates, so these meetings provide an opportunity for faculty

and board members to identify gaps in readiness that may need to be addressed through updates to program curriculum.

In short, MSUN gathers a wealth of information from internal and external sources in order to monitor changes in academic and industry trends and expectations and to assess and refine its own programs, accordingly. The main issue that MSUN has yet to solve is how this information can be distributed and used effectively in decision making at an institution level for coordinated, continuous improvement related to MSUN's mission and vision. It is apparent that more specific data sharing, data evaluation, and data-informed decision-making processes need to be developed and implemented. This self-study has provided the opportunity to start that construction.

Standard 1.C: Student Learning

1.C.1 *The institution offers programs with appropriate content and rigor that are consistent with its mission, culminate in the achievement of clearly identified student learning outcomes that lead to collegiate-level degrees, certificates, or credentials and include designators consistent with program content in recognized fields of study.*

MSUN's mission is to "provide higher education to students for professional and technical careers through an institution dedicated to teaching and the pursuit of knowledge". Diesel technology, education, nursing, agriculture, and business are some of programs that have been the foundation of the educational offerings of MSUN, reflecting the focus of the institution's mission on professional and technical careers. Program offerings support the needs of the local region and the state and are kept up to date with respect to industry trends through close contact with an array of active advisory boards. All programs are developed, maintained, taught, and assessed by qualified faculty that are experts in their fields. Further, a large number of programs at MSUN are accredited by external entities ensuring compliance with state and/or national standards. The combination of faculty expertise, close communication with industry, and participation in accreditation processes ensures that program content remains relevant and rigorous. All programs have clearly identified student learning outcomes listed in the course catalog along with an overview of each program, the types of degrees/certificates offered, and requirements for the successful completion of each degree.

1.C.2 *The institution awards credit, degrees, certificates, or credentials for programs that are based upon student learning and learning outcomes that offer an appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing and synthesis of learning.*

The programs offered at MSUN, developed by faculty with extensive backgrounds in their subject areas, were designed to provide students with the fundamental knowledge necessary to be successful in the career or profession of their choice and the skills necessary to expand on this knowledge in the future. Most career/professional fields have identified the specific competencies and knowledge base that must be acquired by those who desire to be successful in the field. MSUN follows up on these expectations by consulting with employers and program advisory boards to verify that the programs are offering relevant curriculum and that students are achieving the program's expected outcomes. MSUN also encourages faculty to actively seek out professional development opportunities as those opportunities make it possible for them to learn about the evolution of field-specific best practices and to implement those innovative ideas within the curriculum, ensuring that programs remain nimble in their ability to adapt to the changing needs of future employers.

Programs/courses developed by faculty members must undergo a rigorous review process before being added to the catalog. College faculty, Academic Senate and its relevant subcommittees, the Provost, and the Chancellor comprise the system that vets any changes to the curriculum to ensure that institutional standards are met with respect to the depth, breadth and sequencing of the content covered within the proposed course or program. Further, every program has clearly defined student learning outcomes that are assessed, internally, on an annual basis with the support of the IAC and the OTLE. Beyond these internal checks on program structure and quality, a number of programs use external exams to assess student competencies upon program completion. For example, the ASN Nursing Program utilizes data from the NCLEX-RN exam as a measure of program graduate preparedness as an entry level nurse.

As is consistent with Department of Education and BOR policy, MSUN courses are structured such that one credit hour is equivalent to 15 contact hours per semester. Consistency in course structure as well as use of the appropriate level of content and pedagogical quality are supported through OTLE as they offer diverse workshops and trainings for full-time and adjunct faculty in a number of areas related to best practices in in-person and online teaching. Further, online course design trainings offered through OTLE include information and guidance regarding "Regular and Substantive Interaction" (RSI). RSI is emphasized for new faculty during their LMS and course design orientation trainings, and for continuing faculty through periodic course design workshops. For example, the pre-semester checklist provided to faculty through OTLE's Brightspace Training explicitly covers the requirements for RSI, asks faculty to acknowledge an understanding of RSI, and asks faculty to commit to adhering to RSI in conducting all courses.

As was stated in the 2.G.7 of the MSUN Year 6 Self Study, the university employs several strategies to confirm that academic credit awarded, whether on-ground or through distance learning, is awarded to the student completing the work. This includes utilizing a single-sign-on authentication system for Brightspace access; TurnItIn software to detect academic misconduct; and, in rare cases, Respondus Lockdown Browser to prevent students from accessing other webpages while taking an exam. OTLE also works with faculty as they build into their syllabi writing assignments that occur early and often such that students can build upon their own work, providing, among other benefits, faculty with an opportunity to keep an eye on author consistency. Applying these strategies to course/program design allows the institution to have confidence that student learning as well as the rigor, breadth, depth, sequencing, and synthesis of learning that are carefully built into the curriculum are reaching the appropriate audience and are being accurately assessed and, ultimately, credits/degrees are appropriately awarded.

According to BOR policies 301.11 and 301.12, every associate's-level program requires students complete a minimum of 60 credits and an approved general education program or, in the case of an associate's degree in applied science, a program of study designed to prepare students for immediate employment. According to BOR policy, every bachelor's-level program requires students to complete 120 total credits, unless an exception is provided by the BOR. Further, Policy 303.1 states that courses within a specific major can make up 30 to 48 of the total semester hours required for graduation with half of those credits taken at the upper-division level. With its compliance with these policies, MSUN ensures that the rigor of the curriculum provided by each program is consistent with the degree being awarded upon completion.

Policy 303.1 also calls for major programs to conclude with a capstone course. This is an area in which the institution is investing efforts to improve. Specifically, MSUN administration is currently

working with faculty to develop capstone courses for each and every academic degree program. Capstone courses are, indeed, standard in many disciplines and are already offered as part of several programs at the institution. For example, students in Civil Engineering Technology take ETCC 499, Capstone: Senior Project II, in which they implement a faculty-approved technical project that draws upon program-wide curriculum, prepare a formal written report, and present project findings to the public. On the other hand, there are some professional and technical fields where capstone courses are less common and are not being offered. By encouraging the development of these types of courses in all fields, programs across the university will provide a more consistent educational experience for students throughout its student body regardless of field of study and will have a more consistent tool with which to assess program effectiveness, providing an institution-wide set of artifacts and data on these assessments.

1.C.3 *The institution identifies and publishes expected program and degree learning outcomes for all degrees, certificates, and credentials. Information on expected student learning outcomes for all courses is provided to enrolled students.*

MSUN publishes the expected program and student learning outcomes in the "Programs" section of the annual catalog that is posted on the Registrar's website. Enrolled students are able to access course descriptions through this same course catalog in the "Course Descriptions" section. Further, student learning outcomes for all courses are presented in course syllabi made available to enrolled students through their course's shell in Brightspace and may also be made available in hard copy on the first day of class depending on course modality.

1.C.4 *The institution's admission and completion or graduation requirements are clearly defined, widely published and easily accessible to students and the public.*

The institution's admission requirements along with the completion or graduation requirements are defined and available in the University catalog, which is available online through the University Registrar's website. Further, all certificate and degree programs have program sheets and academic maps available through the University website.

MSU-Northern also has a program, called Degree Works, that allows the student and faculty advisor to monitor the progress of that student through their chosen degree program/s. This program also allows the student and faculty advisor to do "What If" analysis whereby the student can see how graduation requirements would change if a change of major were to be requested. They can see how the classes already taken fit into the new degree and what classes they will need in order to complete this new degree. It also monitors the graduation requirements of 39 credits of upper-division coursework and 120 credits or more to complete the degree program. These graduation/completion requirements are also readily available in the University catalog.

Finally, the Advising Center website provides students with resources to help them navigate degree selection and registration and track progress to graduation. The site also helps students connect with their academic advisor so they can have their program-specific questions answered as well as receive general academic guidance.

1.C.5 *The institution engages in an effective system of assessment to evaluate the quality of learning in its programs. The institution recognizes the central role of faculty to establish curricula, assess student learning and improve instructional programs.*

As discussed in 1.B.1, MSU-Northern has made a variety of efforts, that have evolved over the years, to develop a user-friendly, meaningful, and sustainable program assessment system.

MSUN adopted the program assessment software program Taskstream in 2016 in an attempt to centralize assessment data and streamline access; however, the technology itself ultimately posed an additional learning curve that hindered participation, and its use was discontinued in 2021.
As a result, a new approach was pursued. In Spring 2021, the Director of MSUN's Office of Teaching and Learning Excellence (OTLE) researched academic program assessment systems at other institutions and then developed template documents for assessment plans and reports, as well as a Sharepoint site in which to collect each academic program's submissions each year. OTLE staff assisted faculty in transferring any existing program assessment plans from Taskstream into the new template and modifying/developing assessment plans for each program. The program assessment system is clearly laid out on the MSUN website to help ensure consistent communication about the process. Today, the majority of programs at the institution have developed assessment plans and participate in an annual program assessment reporting process.

During this process, OTLE also worked with the IAC and faculty representatives from Academic Senate to implement an assessment review rubric and corresponding review process with the goal of providing each program with recommendations on their assessment plan and report. The review process has been completed for AY 22 and AY 23. In short, developing an effective system of assessment has been a process of continuous improvement and has been adjusted as new information and new resources have become available.

 In the current iteration of program assessment, faculty are tasked each fall with finalizing and entering their program's assessment data from the previous academic year into an assessment report that draws from their established program assessment plans. Given this data, faculty assess whether the program curriculum, student learning outcomes, or course objectives need to be revised. At the same time, they review the program's established student learning outcomes and update their assessment plan for the current year. Ultimately, they submit an assessment report for the prior year and an assessment plan for the upcoming/current year for each degree program.

The IAC then reviews each program assessment report and provides feedback on the assessment process, evidence used, and any resulting updates to the program's assessment plan. The timing of this process is useful: if it is determined that courses need to be added to, or deleted from, an assessed program, or if any other significant changes need to occur, faculty can begin the curriculum change proposal process in the fall for implementation at the start the following academic year.

This institutional program assessment process is separate from the program assessment required of the numerous MSU-Northern programs that are accredited through an external accrediting body. However, these processes of internal and external assessment work together to reinforce an environment of continuous program improvement. Specifically, because accreditors have field-specific student learning outcomes that need to be addressed for a participating program to remain in good standing, program faculty often include accreditation-related outcomes in their annual institutional assessment (in addition to any other programmatic outcomes they would like to measure). This helps programs stay on top of data collection and affords faculty the opportunity to reflect on program performance annually rather than trying to synthesize their accreditation data exclusively on a multi-year cycle; thereby, providing a significant benefit from annual institutional

program assessment to externally accredited programs. Further, by meeting the field-specific standards of external accreditors in addition to conducting their own internal assessment, program faculty are able to access an additional, third-party source of feedback as well as benchmark their program's outcomes with state and national norms. As such, this value added from external accreditation for programs also conducting annual institutional assessment bolsters the institution's ability to effectively assess its programs.

As important as individual program assessments are, the work the IAC has recently done to review the effectiveness of the overall structure for program assessment at the institution is key. To this end, the IAC conducted an [assessment](#) of its own work and released its findings in May 2023. These findings, which will be presented to faculty at the Fall 2023 Faculty and Staff Orientation, indicated areas of strength within the assessment structure as well as areas for improvement. Among the positive findings was: 1) an increase in program assessment participation with the transition from Task Stream to a new Sharepoint/MSWord template process, and 2) an increase in the identification of areas for program improvement with the addition of a "closing the loop" section in the program assessment report. These outcomes are particularly promising as MSUN recognizes that effective program assessment cannot take place without the central involvement of those responsible for developing, assessing, and updating program curriculum. So, increasing faculty understanding of, and involvement in, program assessment adds potency to the effectiveness of MSUN's program assessment process.

Areas of this institutional process found in need of improvement involved: 1) improving communication with programs in terms of timeliness, process, and expectations, and 2) addressing assessment viability for programs that have no clear point person for assessment or for programs with a large majority of faculty that are new to the institution. The IAC is currently in the process of closing the loop on the results of this review by producing a concrete plan of actions to be taken this academic year to address the improvements needed in the current program assessment process.

1.C.6 *Consistent with its mission, the institution establishes and assesses, across all associate and bachelor level programs or within a General Education curriculum, institutional learning outcomes and/or core competencies. Examples of such learning outcomes and competencies include, but are not limited to effective communication skills, global awareness, cultural sensitivity, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and logical thinking, problem solving, and/or information literacy.*

MSU-Northern has recognized, with the encouragement and help of NWCCU, that the process the institution previously utilized for evaluating the effectiveness of the General Education core was lacking. Because of this, over the past seven years, there has been a great deal of discussion as to the best way forward for assessing General Education and, for the two most recent of those years, the Academic Senate sub-committee for General Education has been working on developing a system for conducting an assessment of courses utilized in the General Education core. Prior to the Mid-Cycle Review, general education was assessed using courses that filled the objectives of each category of the General Education Program. MSUN has seven categories of general education courses that must be fulfilled and, within each category, there are a number of classes that will fulfill its outcomes. With the findings and recommendations of the previous NWCCU evaluations, the General Education Committee adjusted the focus for assessment and revised the learning outcomes to be assessed in the General Education Program. The student learning outcomes assessed through this new approach, which was officially implemented at the start of AY23, are: 1) critical thinking, 2) integrative learning, and 3) social and cultural perspectives. Each of these are to be assessed on a

three-year rotation with one student learning outcome assessed per academic year. The process calls for faculty teaching capstone courses for baccalaureate degree programs to submit artifacts including course syllabi and student-produced final projects (including project descriptions/instructions) annually. These projects are to be evaluated by the General Education Committee using that year's relevant AAC&U VALUE rubric. For AY23, the General Education Committee evaluated artifacts for student performance in critical thinking. This work was completed in Summer 2023. The next step will be to have the committee analyze the data resulting from their review of the artifacts and present the results to the campus community in Fall 2023. This presentation will include the committee's recommendations for improving student performance in the area of critical thinking and will be followed up with the development of a plan, to be completed by the end of Spring 2024, to close the loop. This plan for closing the loop will be implemented in Fall 2024.

As with program assessment, the General Education assessment process will undoubtedly evolve as data is collected and analyzed and the campus community works to close the loop.

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 outcomes.*

Throughout the development of the MSUN Program Assessment process and the General Education Assessment process, much thought was given to identifying appropriate, measurable indicators of progress. OTLE worked very closely with each program to ensure their student learning outcomes and measurable indicators were aligned with the goals of the program and the institution. Further, the General Education Committee carefully designed the General Education Process around the sustainable evaluation of classroom artifacts using modified versions of well-established AAC&U VALUE rubrics. Because the General Assessment Committee is only in its first year of assessment data collection, there has not been an opportunity to demonstrate how analyzing the data and closing the loop has impacted curriculum or overall student learning. However, with multiple cycles of the Program Assessment process completed, examples of programs utilizing assessment data to make improvements in course content, pedagogy, and/or assessment method are available.

For example, when faculty assessed the AY23 student learning outcomes for the Accounting minor, it was discovered, through the program assessment data, that students in the program did not reach the acceptable target for Outcome 1: Identify, illustrate, and describe enterprise and transaction cycles and business processes. This was a decrease in performance as compared with the prior year. Based on this finding, program faculty have changed their approach for AY24 to one of mastery-based learning where students must demonstrate competence in a standard before progressing to new material. The rationale behind this approach is that, because foundational concepts in accounting build very closely upon one another, a lack of mastery in one area will limit a student's ability to understand more advanced concepts. This new approach is being implemented in Fall 2023 and the artifacts from AY24 will be collected and analyzed to determine whether there is a resulting improvement in student performance with respect to the program's student learning outcomes.

It is not only academic program assessment that has produced evidence of continuous improvement at MSUN. Indeed, OTLE itself assesses its services annually and updates its processes as a result. Some of the data analyzed through this assessment comes from surveys administered to students regarding their experience with Brightspace, MUSN's online Learning Management System. Over the last few years, this survey data has resulted in an increased presence of OTLE at student

orientation, new training topics for faculty related to impediments identified by students, and an increased collaboration with high school counselors in an effort to increase training in Brightspace among dual enrollment students. This has truly been an example of continuous improvement as, each year, the office is able to narrow the focus of new initiatives to the success of increasingly specific student populations.

1.C.8 Transfer credit and credit for prior learning is accepted according to clearly defined, widely published, and easily accessible policies that provide adequate safeguards to ensure academic quality. In accepting transfer credit, the receiving institution ensures that such credit accepted is appropriate for its programs and comparable in nature, content, academic rigor, and quality.

Over fifteen years ago and as the result of a Legislative Performance Audit in 2004, the Montana University System (MUS), with specific funding from the Montana Legislature, called faculty and university administrators together to develop the Common Course Number (CCN) system. The CCN was designed to make it easier for students from one MUS institution to transfer to another MUS institution and to increase the level of "transparency and predictability" in the transfer process. As part of this process, course outcomes were standardized across the system and any new courses added to the CCN network were required to be reviewed by content faculty at all MUS institutions. Since that time, all CCN course equivalencies and MUS transfer policies have been made available online through the MUS website, with a searchable course guide available for added convenience. MUS also has the CCN Quality Audit and CCN Faculty Councils at work to keep the CCN system accurate and up to date. The result is that, when a student transfers to MSUN from another institution within the MUS, any course reflected on the student's official transcript that is part of the CCN system is transferred by the Transcript Evaluator in the Registrar's Office to the student's MSUN transcript, directly, as prescribed by the CCN's standardized course outcomes.

In the case where a student wishes to transfer a course to their MSUN transcript from a non-MUS institution, the university has developed, and made publicly available, all applicable existing transfer agreements. Course equivalencies within these agreements were determined through a thorough process by which faculty have evaluated, based on area of expertise, the syllabi and student learning outcomes of specific courses at other institutions and determined whether those courses approximate the student learning outcomes of any particular course at MSUN. If a student wishes to transfer a course from a non-MUS institution that is not part of an existing transfer agreement, that student works with an advisor to submit a course substitution form along with the catalog description and/or syllabus of the course to be transferred to the Dean of the College where the course would normally be taught. From there, faculty within the College with expertise in the course's subject area evaluate the request and accept or decline substitution. Substitutions that are approved are entered into the student's MSUN transcript through the Registrar's Office.

As with transfer credits, credits awarded through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) are grounded in well-established institutional and system-wide policies made publicly available on the MSUN website and in accordance with the BOR's PLA Policy and Procedures which is also made available online. MSUN programs that utilize PLA have been approved to do so by the Academic Senate and the Board of Regents. Students may be awarded credit based on PLA through satisfactory performance on specific national or challenge exams, credit recommendations from ACE or NCCRS, and/or portfolio assessment. Portfolio assessment is conducted by faculty with expertise in the area where prior learning has occurred. If awarded, PLA credits cannot exceed twenty-five percent of the

credits required by the student's chosen degree program and are not considered as part of residency requirements.

1.C.9 The institution's graduate programs are consistent with its mission, are in keeping with the expectations of its respective disciplines and professions, and are described through nomenclature that is appropriate to the levels of graduate and professional degrees offered. The graduate programs differ from undergraduate programs by requiring, among other things, greater: depth of study; demands on student intellectual or creative capacities; creative expression, and/or relevant professional practice.

MSU-Northern's two graduate programs are in keeping with its mission emphasizing teaching and the pursuit of knowledge as well as preparation in professional careers in either Counseling or Education. Further, MSUN graduate programs support the institution's vision of responsiveness to area needs as each program provides students from across the Hi-Line, region, and state with access to advanced curriculum in these areas. The Master's of Science in Education (MEd) program in Instruction and Learning seeks to engage graduate candidates in five areas that enhance instruction including assessment, technology, diversity, theory and practice, and critical thinking. The MEd program in Counselor Education has two areas of emphasis – School Counseling and Clinical Mental Health Counseling. The program is designed to meet the professional preparation necessary to work in schools, agencies or community organizations as a mental health provider. The former program does not lead to licensure, while the latter offers a pathway for Class 6 School Counselor licensure in the state of Montana.

Candidates in MSU-Northern's graduate level programs must maintain a 3.0 GPA. The faculty-developed curriculum requires a high level of critical thinking and self-assessment, and the seamless integration of technology as a tool in applying theory to practice. Both programs reflect capstone coursework or clinical experiences that draw from a deeper understanding of professional education, its influences, and its impacts.

The promotion, review, and evaluation of graduate programs falls under the purview of the Graduate Council, a ten-member subcommittee of the Academic Senate. The Graduate Council's attention to policies, procedures, and graduate student welfare also serves to shape and maintain graduate studies. As with undergraduate programs, graduate programs are subject to annual program assessment as well as Academic Program Review rotations conducted by OCHE. These review processes carefully attend to quality program assurance. The Instruction and Learning program and the Counselor Education program underwent a simultaneous review in 2020-2021 with clear decisions to support and maintain each program. The OCHE review noted the most recent Montana Office of Public Instruction review in 2017 that cited commendations for both programs.

Standard 1.D: Student Achievement

1.D.1 Consistent with its mission, the institution recruits and admits students with the potential to benefit from its educational programs. It orients students to ensure they understand the requirements related to their programs of study and receive timely, useful, and accurate information and advice about relevant academic requirements, including graduation and transfer policies.

As the sole public university in the upper half of Montana, MSU-Northern's [mission and vision](#) drive the institution's recruitment and [admissions policy](#). To ensure access for students to attain professional and technical careers and to be supportive and student-centered, MSU-Northern recruits and supports traditional, college-bound, first-time students; nontraditional students; transfer students; and students from underrepresented populations within the local, state, and regional communities.

Traditionally, recruiting at MSUN has been set up with a director of recruiting and two to three recruiters. Each recruiter is responsible for a region of Montana and the surrounding area and makes arrangements to meet with students and counselors at high schools, technical schools, and two-year community colleges. At one time, recruiters were visiting technical schools in Washington, Oregon and Idaho.

Recruiting at MSUN changed with the onset of the pandemic, resulting in a need for more outreach to potential students via social media and email. This shift in recruiting methods was a challenge which required some rethinking regarding strategies for enrollment management communication This resulted in the position of [Director of Social Media and Communications](#) being created and filled within Enrollment Management in 2021. The communications work done through this position was, and continues to be, in addition to the work done through [University Relations](#), which helps to update interested parties on and off campus on developments at MSUN through the distribution of the online campus newsletter, [Northern Network News](#) (NNN).

The challenge for the university in the area of recruitment has historically been in staff turnover. High turnover among recruiters has meant that there is a need to bring staff up to speed on the university and its programs nearly every year. Further, the Director of Recruiting recently resigned after less than one year in the position with the prior Director having been at MSUN for only two years. With the loss of the Vice Chancellor of Enrollment Management and the Director of Recruiting, the university has been set back in implementing its current [recruitment plan](#).

One of the keys to recruitment at MSUN lies within its fourth strategic goal: Collaboration. Partnerships that have been carefully developed by faculty, staff, and administration with industry members, Tribal Colleges, Community Colleges, technical schools, and high schools have led to scholarships, articulation agreements, and student advising that aid in the matriculation process. Further, and in support of Strategic Goal #3, Engagement, MSUN invites high school students from across the region to come to campus each fall to participate in TekNo Expo and ShowCASE. These are programs where high school students are able to interact directly with faculty members working in an area of interest and engage with faculty-developed, hands-on demonstrations so they can become more familiar with a specific program and begin to imagine the possibilities that a college education holds. Once a student has applied to MSUN, they are subject to the admission requirements as presented below, one of which must be satisfied for admission to be granted.

- Enhanced ACT Composite Score of 20 or higher,
- SAT Combined Verbal and Math Standard Score of 1440 or higher,
- High School Grade Point Average of 2.50 or higher,
- Test Optional: The Montana Board of Regents of Higher Education has ended the requirement that students provide ACT or SAT test scores for admission to its campus. This change is effective immediately and for the foreseeable future. If a student has ACT or

SAT scores and they are submitted, then the student can use them instead of a supplemental assessment administered to determine math and English placement.

- Rank in the upper half of the student's graduating class.

There are exceptions to these admission requirements for several applicant populations including: non-traditional students (students that graduated from high school at least three years prior to enrollment), summer only students, and part-time students taking seven or fewer college or university level credits (this includes Dual Credit students). Home schooled students and international students also have specific requirements they must meet to enroll. Individuals 21 years old or older and non-high school graduates have two additional admissions options. An applicant with a GED may be admitted as a "conditional freshman." Conditional freshmen must complete a required program of study in the first semester. Upon completion of the required courses with satisfactory grades (C average or better), the conditional status is removed. The prescribed course load consists of basic courses that provide a foundation for success in college-level work. This policy emphasizes the importance of scaffolding for success in upper-level courses.

MSUN participates in the Montana University System (MUS) project called "Apply Montana", which allows a student to submit one application for all the Montana institutions of higher education. Montana resident students can apply to any Montana institution for free through this program. Both of these features assist in removing application barriers for in-state students.

Including undergraduate and graduate students, MSUN has a student body percentage of 18.8 percent Native American as compared to other MUS (Montana University System) schools. Additionally, 22.8 percent of MSUN's student body population is first generation and 37 percent are Pell eligible students.

MSU-Northern provides "how to apply" checklists and requirements for many types of students including; freshman, transfer, readmit (a student who is returning to MSU-Northern), adult, international, graduate, and home school students. These targeted checklists provide a path for students to take to apply to MSU-Northern. Once admitted, MSU-Northern mails a checklist in the acceptance packet to each student, that includes: an acceptance letter, admission checklist, and information on the student's portal, MyInfo. In addition to the mailed checklist packet, information is published on the Admitted Students page on the website. The Admitted Students page also contains information regarding applying for Financial Aid, applying for Housing, and registering for both Summer Orientation, Advising, and Registration (SOAR) days and Navigate Northern days (New Student Orientation).

All incoming students are advised during Summer Orientation, Advising, and Registration (SOAR) days. Information on registering for SOAR using the Intent to Register form is provided through email, mail, and text communications between incoming students and the Admissions Office. During SOAR, incoming students' majors are verified, admission and financial aid paperwork is completed, and each student meets with a faculty member in their meta-major area to receive advising and prepare a course schedule for the first semester of classes. During this advising and registration session, faculty work with students to understand their chosen major, share what the relevant 2-year/4-year academic maps look like, and assist students in selecting courses of interest that meet program and general education requirements. SOAR days also provide an opportunity for students to learn how to log into the various platforms that they will use during their time at

Northern, including Degree Works, MSUN's degree auditing software, and Banner My Info, where students are able to register for the fall classes selected with their faculty advisor and view their student information. Further, during SOAR days, students meet with the support offices that are available to them during their time at Northern. This includes Financial Aid, the Career Center, Residence Life, Student Support Services, and Accessibility Services. If a student is unable to attend SOAR in person, both phone and virtual appointments are available. After the first semester, students transition to their full-time faculty advisor. Students are informed of their full-time faculty advisor through communication that comes from the Registrar's office. Every semester before registration opens, the Registrar's office sends an email communication informing students of the timeline for registration and provides information regarding faculty advisor assignments and the contact information needed to schedule an advising appointment. At the same time, the Registrar's office sends all faculty advisors a list of their current advisees, along with updated contact information so faculty can reach out to their advisees and schedule appointments. This list also includes the advisor pin numbers students need to enroll. This mechanism requires students to interact with their faculty advisors each semester, allowing faculty advisors to stay on top of each student's progress towards their degree.

First year faculty are not assigned as advisors, giving them a full academic year to learn about their program and to learn the process of advising on campus by working with seasoned advisors. The Office of Teaching and Learning Excellence (OTLE) provides faculty training and guidance on advising through workshops, Faculty Learning Communities, and additional professional development opportunities including training through the Office of the Registrar that covers Degree Works, substitution/waiver forms, and graduation paperwork. There is also an updated Advising Resources page on the MSUN website that provides detailed information on:

- Faculty Advisor Guide and Checklist
- How to use Degree Works
- Current Term Class Schedules
- How to Register-For Students
- Common Registration Errors and How to Fix
- Important Dates and Deadlines
- Important Registration Forms
- Catalog - Including Course Descriptions

Advising requirements and responsibilities are also published in the MSUN catalog. Faculty who have gone through a few rounds of advising serve as mentors to newer faculty.

As presented in the MSUN Responses to the Recommendations from Past Reviews (RRPR), MSUN restructured its recruiting and retention offices into one main area of the administration building. This area is referred to as Student Central. Student Central continues to enhance communication between the recruitment and retention offices. The last two years, the area has provided a great space for the offices to be available for incoming students during the Student Orientation and Registration SOAR dates. It is essentially one stop for students to be advised, check on financial aid, talk with Student Support Services, and work with the Career Center. This collaborative interaction continues to have positive impacts on recruiting and retention.

Navigate Northern (New Student Orientation) is required of all incoming students. This two-day orientation offers students the opportunity to learn about and interact with all institutional and support offices on campus at one time and in one location. These offices include:

- Admissions Office: To ensure the admission checklist is complete
- Financial Aid: To review aid package and complete necessary forms
- Business Office: To complete the Confirmation of Attendance and establish a payment plan, if needed.
- Faculty Advising: To provide a double check of the student's schedule
- Office of Teaching and Learning Excellence: To provide support and ensure the student knows how to log into, and successfully use, Northern's LMS (Learning Management System), Brightspace
- Student Support Services: which includes accessibility services and tutoring and career counseling
- Tutoring Central: which is currently a part of Student Support Services
- Campus Tours: To enable students to become familiar with, and comfortable on, the campus before classes begin

Navigate Northern also features workshop tracks on Brightspace support, Student Health, Campus Safety, Bystander Intervention; offers engagement activities to acclimate students to campus and campus life; and provides an opportunity for Residence Hall check-in to be completed.

Once enrolled, MSU-Northern provides students with access to Degree Works, a degree auditing platform, to ensure that they have accurate information regarding academic requirements, graduation requirements, and progress toward timely completion. This platform allows students and faculty to make informed decisions during the advising process by providing information on transfer equivalencies and all MSUN academic programs, including minors and certificates. There is also a feature in Degree Works that can be used to educate a student on what courses will be required if they decide to change their major, the "What If" scenario.

In addition to Degree Works, students have access to academic maps that illustrate the paths students can pursue in each major field of study for timely graduation. These academic maps are located on each program page on the MSUN website as well as in the Catalog available on the Registrar's website. They are reviewed on a yearly basis and updated when changes to the curriculum are made. In an effort to continuously improve communication between students and faculty/support offices on campus, MSUN is currently looking into adopting a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. This system, EAB Navigate, would allow students to make appointments for advising, and request appointments with financial aid and other campus offices all in one portal. This system would also allow advisors and support services to offer timely and relevant interventions to at-risk students in order to increase each student's chance of success. Whether this specific system is ultimately adopted or not, MSUN will continue to explore ways to communicate with, and provide resources to, its prospective and current students to ensure they have access to the building blocks needed to achieve their educational goals.

Finally, the Tutoring Committee continues to work with Student Support Services (SSS), the Little River Institute (LRI) and Faculty to address the tutoring needs of students. Faculty help to identify

and screen tutors as well as assist the tutors as needed. The Tutoring Committee is working to provide data and suggestions to the Executive Team for ways to improve the tutoring capacity of the institution.

1.D.2 Consistent with its mission and in the context of and in comparison, with regional and national peer institutions, the institution establishes and shares widely a set of indicators for student achievement including, but not limited to, persistence, completion, retention, and postgraduation success. Such indicators of student achievement should be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, first generation college student, and any other institutionally meaningful categories that may help promote student achievement and close barriers to academic excellence and success (equity gaps)

In alignment with the strategic plan, MSUN has established measurable mission fulfillment indicators that allow the institution to monitor its effectiveness in fulfilling its mission.   These metrics include, but are not limited to, data on persistence, retention, completion, accreditation of degree programs, student employment after graduation, and student engagement. The SPC has worked with the Office of Institutional Research to make a large portion of these data available to the campus community through internal dashboards. Indicators not available through the Institutional Research dashboards are often required to be manually collected from multiple sources on campus and, thus, are not easily made readily available. Much of the data available through Institutional Research can be filtered to reveal trends in areas of interest such as program of study or by student type and can be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other demographic categories. These metrics and dashboards along with the data collected through a more manual process are used in the decision-making process in topics related to persistence, retention, and completion. As was discussed in 1.B, with the recent revisions to the Strategic Plan, the university is taking a second look at the indicators that have been previously used to measure institutional progress and are working with Institutional Research to develop a database that will make the collection of indicator data more sustainable, thereby allowing decision-makers to have more consistent access to it.

MSUN utilizes the general Montana University System (MUS) dashboards, the MUS Performance Based Funding dashboards, and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) for obtaining information from like institutions that serves to provide additional context in which to view campus-specific data. For example, the institution's [2020 IPEDS Data Feedback Report](#) reveals that the graduation rate for the 2013 cohort of first-time, full-time, degree/certificate-seeking, undergraduate America Indian or Alaska Native students at MSUN was 12 percent. The report also shows that this result fell below the average graduation rate for the same student population at comparable institutions across the country at 33 percent; raising concern and providing the university with the opportunity to reflect on how it could better support its American Indian students so that their outcomes were more aligned with national norms. In 2015, MSUN received a NASNTI grant to improve retention and completion among the university's American Indian student population. Because of the implementation of student success initiatives beginning in 2015 for American Indian students as a result of this grant, it is rewarding to review the institution's [2022 IPEDS Data Feedback Repor](#)t showing that the graduation rate for the 2015 cohort of American Indian or Alaska Native students at MSUN was 5 percentage points higher than it had been in 2020, rising to 17 percent. This information is made even more meaningful when put in the context of a decline in the graduation rate among American Indian and Alaska Native students at comparable institutions. If there were national factors contributing to lower levels academic success among American Indian or Alaska Native students, it appears that Northern was able to overcome those

trends with the student success strategies it employed. As this data continues to be examined each year, MSUN will be able to gain a better understanding of the strategies that make the largest impact on the success of its American Indian students, controlling for trends at other institutions.

In addition to these data, MSUN periodically reports on metrics including persistence, retention, and completion at the Board of Regents meetings so the Regents can assess the attainment of goals for the MUS Strategic Plan.   As detailed in 1.B.2, these metrics are used as key components of the scoring system for the MUS performance based funding model. Additional data is made available through the assessment of student services on campus that are sponsored through federal grants. For example, as was touched on above, MSUN has a significant population of Native American students; many of whom are first-generation college students. In pursuing avenues for more effectively serving these students, the University was successful in developing, submitting, and obtaining a grant for a Native American-Serving Nontribal Institutions (NASNTI). This grant allowed for the development of the Little River Institute (LRI) with the overall goal of increasing the on-time graduation rates of Native American students at both the Bachelor's and Associate's levels and the secondary goal of increasing retention rates of Native American students whether they be first-time, full-time students, or transfers.

Similar to the NASNTI funded LRI, MSUN is home to its TRIO funded Student Support Services (SSS), a program that was established at the institution over 30 years ago. This program serves first-generation and low-income students as well as students that qualify for support through the office of Accessibility Services. SSS provides career development and exploration, academic tutoring, academic study skills development, introduction to technology services, and a variety of other support components for these students in order to increase retention, persistence, and graduation.

As both of these programs are required to assess the effectiveness of their activities in serving their target populations in order to continue to receive federal funding, they generate a great deal of data that, when disseminated, sheds light on many of the mission fulfillment indicators examined at the institution level. Unfortunately, it is rare that this data is disseminated to more than a few individuals on campus and, because of this, the institution has yet to integrate the data analysis resulting from the assessment of these programs with its more general mission fulfillment indicator data analysis. By not finding a way to bring together information from these disparate sources in a meaningful way, the university is missing an opportunity to more fully capture the effectiveness of its mission fulfillment efforts.

Indeed, one of the deficiencies in mission fulfillment assessment the self-study has illuminated is that the consistent, complete, and sustainable dissemination of data for a systematic decision-making process is often lacking or incomplete. It is apparent that the university collects meaningful data. However, there is much work to be done to ensure the data is presented to decision-makers at all levels in a timely and organized fashion such that MSUN can tie outcomes to specific institutional policies or initiatives and close the loop consistently over the long term.

1.D.3 The institution's disaggregated indicators of student achievement should be widely published and available on the institution's website. Such disaggregated indicators should be aligned with meaningful, institutionally identified indicators benchmarked against indicators for peer institutions at the regional and national levels and be used for continuous improvement to inform planning, decision making, and allocation of resources.

As mentioned previously, MSUN collects a wide range of data related to student success. This data is most readily available on the MSUN website through the Office of Institutional Research, and the Registrar's Office. In addition, for those on campus, there is the password protected Institutional Research Apps site, known as IRVM, where the Institutional Research Office and Enrollment Management present data internally on enrollment, number of majors, graduation rates, retention rates and other important data. This information is vital for faculty, staff, and administrators to identify student success trends specific to their area of influence. For example, a faculty member in the Diesel Technology Program can access enrollment data that is filtered on PELL status, age, gender, race/ethnicity, student type, residency, degree type, and so on. This can help program coordinators understand the composition of the program's student population and identify underrepresented groups across campus that may require more outreach.

A variety of student success data, some of which is also disaggregated by race/ethnicity, is also made available by the university to IPEDS and can be accessed publicly via the National Center for Education Statistics College Navigator. Further, the last three years of IPEDS Feedback Reports, which provide graduation rates by race and ethnicity, are posted publicly on the Institutional Research website to provide additional access to this information.

As mentioned in 1.D.2, Little River Institute and Student Support Services also collect student success data related to their specific support activities for the purpose of federal reporting as do programs with external accreditation. These data are made available to the Department of Education and OCHE, who make the data available to the public according to their policies and procedures. The university is currently working to provide consolidated data reports regarding the outcomes of these specific programs that can be posted on the Institutional Research website.

Perhaps the vehicle through which data on student achievement rates are most accessible to the public is the MUS dashboard system, which is also inked to on the Institutional Research website. These dashboards allow anyone to review first-time, full-time freshman retention and persistence rates by student type, gender, and race/ethnicity. The MUS American Indian Student Success dashboard also displays institution-specific student success data for not only American Indian students, but for students from other racial or ethnic backgrounds in many cases. This dashboard illustrates outcomes related to retention, graduation rates, and completer counts, among others. In addition to this dashboard system, information and metrics regarding retention and completion as well as minority student achievement, in particular Native American students, is shared publicly at the Montana Board of Regents meeting, which occurs every two months during the year.

All data made publicly available through MUS and IPEDS is structured such that comparisons can be made with institutions within the system and/or throughout the state, region, and nation, respectively. Through the MUS performance-based funding model, MSUN sets annual goals related to these indicators and receives funding in direct relation to the achievement of those goals as a proportion of all funding distributed throughout the system. With all MUS institutions participating in the performance-based funding model, comparisons are made among them with respect to the goals being set and the progress made each year, all of which is made publicly available.

MSU-N's metrics and indicators are used in campus decision making and allocation of resources on a regular basis. The metrics and indicators are reviewed in the CORE Executive and CORE Leadership team meetings prior to the final budget meetings. In addition, the Budget Advisory Committee provides a prioritization of projects for any money that is not allocated and used by the

end of the academic year. This past year, the deans were asked to have faculty submit proposals for needed items for their classroom, laboratory, or projects. By reviewing these data, requests for funds are placed in the context of student success and a justification can be made for moving money to best address the needs for improving classroom instruction, instructional support, tutoring, other necessary instructional needs related to student success, or marketing to attract students to the institution.

Further, the metrics of enrollments and retention that are made available at the program-level help programs target and attract students and inform actions taken for closing the loop on program assessment of student learning outcomes. This program-level data is also useful for recruiters in the development of a recruiting strategy each year as well as for [Tutoring Central](#) as the data provides information regarding upcoming demand for tutoring services in particular areas, impacting hiring and scheduling decisions at both SSS and LRI.

1.D.4 The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing indicators of student achievement are transparent and are used to inform and implement strategies and allocate resources to mitigate perceived gaps in achievement and equity.

Much of the data used to monitor student success is available through the university's Banner System. Every student has a Banner ID which follows them if they transfer to another institution within the MUS. This ID is attached to information regarding the student's academic record, financial aid, socioeconomic indicators, and so on. At the end of the third week and the last week of each semester, the university creates freeze files that act as a census for comparing student information over time. The benefit of using Banner to house the institution's data is that the Registrar and Institutional Research are able to pull data in a straightforward, transparent manner, streamlining the data collection process for some very foundational indicators of student success. This data is then made available on their websites and through IRVM.

Analyzing Banner data is a bit more complex. Institutional Research is able to write reports that provide data tables that can be filtered as well as visual representation of the indicators being measured. This allows every member of the campus community to analyze trends they may want to explore. More advanced analysis, however, must be done by individuals at the university with expertise in data analysis and is typically reported to a smaller audience.

The Vice Chancellor of Enrollment Management commonly utilizes Banner data to identify areas in student success where targeted efforts would be fruitful. This analysis is presented to the CORE Executive and CORE Leadership teams. It is in these committees where strategies are put forth and processed and further distributed. The executive team meets weekly while the leadership team meets every two weeks.

Because deans and directors are members of the CORE Leadership Team, they can all communicate with faculty and staff under their supervision regarding any relevant data findings presented during CORE meetings and solicit input on strategies and needed resources. Members of student government, the Association of Students at Montana State University Northern (ASMSUN), also have a seat on the leadership team and are privy to any analysis presented to the group. This affords them the opportunity to also report the presented information to their constituents and solicit input from their organization on strategies and resource allocations.

An example of this process in action is the recent use of data to improve equity among MSUN's financial aid eligible students for AY23. In this case, Banner data was used to analyze the distribution of scholarships across all aid eligible students, and it was discovered that some students were receiving a disproportionately large scholarship award while others were receiving a smaller amount or none at all. Because of this, the method for distributing scholarship aid was adjusted and there was a substantial increase in the number of students eligible for financial aid that were able to receive scholarship funds. Specifically, for AY22, $247,485 in scholarships was distributed to 184 students on Awards Day for the following academic year. However, on Awards day in Spring 2023, $300,360 was distributed to 247 financial aid-eligible students. This was a 34 percent increase in the number of students awarded and resulted in 63 additional students receiving scholarship aid where they may not have otherwise.

The process for collecting and analyzing data not available through Banner has proven to present a more complex problem to the university than the process involving Banner data, exclusively. Indicators related to advisory board activity, student performance on licensure exams, student satisfaction or perception regarding campus climate, and other indicators are collected through either surveys or by individual programs. This data has been, up to this point, stored in a decentralized way and the existing data governance process did not allow for an easy way for the data to be shared with the institution so that it can be included in campus-wide analyses.

As a result, when these data have been needed to assess mission fulfillment or progress toward strategic goals, they had to be manually collected and entered. This produced an inconsistent data collection schedule and left room for human data entry errors. To improve the availability of needed assessment data, the SPC collaborated with Institutional Research to streamline the process of gathering non-Banner data through the creation of a [database](#) that allows data stewards across campus to enter their decentralized data directly into a centralized repository. For the non-Banner strategic planning data, the database is structured such that each indicator is attached to the specific goals that it is measuring. The database also includes a data dictionary for consistency in reporting across time, any target values, and the party responsible for entering and maintaining the information.

The platform used to develop this new database can also house databases for other groups across campus that need a mechanism for collecting and storing information not available in Banner and, while the processes for utilizing the SPC database and the overall platform are still in development, it is hoped that, once implemented fully, this development will increase the capacity of the institution to conduct analysis related to assessment and student success and add transparency and confidence to the data being used.

As was discussed in section 1.C, to date, both Banner and non-Banner data have been used to impact the strategic decisions of MSUN leadership. From curriculum changes to the hours of operation of the dining hall, as data becomes more readily available, a culture of making data-informed decisions at all levels is taking shape.

Conclusion

The mission of Montana State University – Northern is:

MSU-Northern provides higher education to students for professional and technical careers through an institution dedicated to teaching and the pursuit of knowledge.

MSUN is fully committed to its mission and vision as a 4-year regional university serving the students, the community, the region, and the state. The institution is also committed to demonstrating that its mission and vision are being fulfilled by developing the tools and processes needed to provide evidence of continuous improvement. It is in this area that the university has made significant strides since its Year 7 Report of 2016.

MSUN continues to assist faculty in developing and improving both general education and program-specific assessment plans, identifying and measuring student learning outcomes that are consistent with the institutional mission, and continuously improving instruction by closing the loop. The Office of Teaching and Learning Excellence is assisting faculty in these areas and is providing support, resources, guidance, and space for networking opportunities that can lead to innovation and creativity and is conducive of positive faculty morale. Additional support is provided by the Institutional Assessment Committee, the General Education Committee, Institutional Research, and the general leadership of the university as the transition to a culture of continuous improvement requires the full buy-in of the entire community.

MSUN has also demonstrated an alignment of its resources with the pursuit of its strategic goals. Decision-makers have had access to the data necessary to direct resources according to the institution's priorities set through planning. This is made apparent in the development of new programs, a redistribution of scholarship funds, investment in professional development among faculty and staff, and new construction/repairs of facilities on campus.

Indeed, as discussed throughout the self-study, MSUN develops and implements initiatives to improve student success and to further progress toward its strategic goals. The institution then collects and examines evidence of the effectiveness of these initiatives and makes adjustments to make them better. However, the university still has a lot of work to do in revising the key indicators used to assess the updated strategic plan; developing more formal, sustainable processes that tie budget allocation decisions to strategic goals and assessment results; improving the ability of the institution to collect and maintain decentralized data needed for assessment and analysis, disseminating relevant data to decision-makers at all levels, and encouraging the consistent application of effective assessment plans across campus.

Further, despite the progress that has been made, the university has experienced stops and starts in the development and implementation of assessment processes across campus. One contributing factor to this variation has been the significant personnel turnover at the institution over the last several years. This turnover can result in confusion regarding assessment practices, past results, and data definitions. In an attempt to correct for this and maintain institutional familiarity with the assessment processes that are in place, the Institutional Assessment Committee was developed to review and provide feedback on all program assessment plans and an annual program assessment cycle which includes planning, reporting, and closing the loop has been institutionalized.

Additionally, a method for collecting, reporting, and storing non-Banner data has been developed and will be implemented in the near future. Finally, ongoing training is being provided by OTLE to help those conducting assessment to maintain consistent, effective practices.

Overall, MSUN is proud of the progress that has been made in the area of institutional effectiveness and remains committed to moving forward in its efforts to implement and demonstrate continuous improvement.

Addenda

1. Year 6 Report Findings

MSUN received the Evaluation Committee's review regarding the Fall 2022 Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review (PRFR) dated February 27, 2023. This review concluded that there were no findings for MSUN regarding its Year 6 Report.

2. Distance Education

MSU-Northern maintains an identity verification process for students enrolled in online courses to ensure that each student enrolled is the one whose work is being evaluated. This includes the following safeguards.

Only students officially registered in courses via MSU-Northern's Banner student information system are given access to courses in the Brightspace learning management system (LMS). The two systems are integrated such that Brightspace online courses are automatically created and populated based upon continuous extracts from the Banner system. Brightspace maintains a private, secure, cloud-based environment to prevent access by unauthorized persons and thereby protect student data and privacy.

Brightspace's login page is integrated with the institution's single-sign-on (SSO) authentication system, which uses a Banner-assigned NetID for each unique user. NetIDs consist of a completely random string of letters and numbers for data protection purposes. Students and instructors must authenticate every time they access Brightspace and participate in online coursework. The first time they use the password portal they must go through the new user setup and verify their identity; likewise, password changes require identity verification. The university also has a policy requiring faculty, staff, and students to create complex passwords. Enforcement of this policy, for student violations, is handled by the Dean of Students.

OTLE maintains a license for Respondus Lockdown Browser and TurnItIn software to help ensure the integrity of online programs. Lockdown Browser is primarily used in the case of proctored in-person exams. This secure web browser prevents students from accessing other webpages and opening other programs or files while taking an exam and also blocks such functions as copying, pasting, and printing while taking an exam. Respondus Monitor, which relies on webcam video technology during online exams, is available on a limited basis. Alternatively, faculty may require in-person proctored examinations as they see fit. Both instructors and OTLE support staff are able to

track and restrict student IP addresses through Brightspace for testing purposes. Both can also set unique passwords that they can provide to proctors for each exam.

Instructors may opt to use TurnItIn for any uploaded Brightspace assignments. TurnItIn is plagiarism detection software that will check student submissions against the TurnItIn database to generate an originality report. The originality report will record what percentage of the submission either matches or is highly similar to text from a wide variety of sources within the TurnItIn database. The originality report will also specifically identify which portions of the text are similar or identical to existing sources and provide links to those sources for comparison. The primary intent of adopting TurnItIn was to provide an instructional tool promoting student learning related to information literacy, academic integrity, originality, creativity, and writing skills; however, instructors may also use TurnItIn to help determine whether material students quoted, paraphrased, summarized or used in any way was properly cited or plagiarized. Online students at MSU-Northern are subject to the same Student Affairs Policies and Procedures as face-to-face students, including Policy 601.2 Academic Misconduct.

No charges are specifically associated with the identity verification (username and password) process. Fees associated with online course delivery (which includes the LMS and 3rd party software mentioned above) are published in numerous locations, including the Business Services website, and are also itemized in each student's assessments in the student information system, Banner, when students confirm their registration and accept their charges.

To remain in compliance with the NWCCU and Department of Education's requirements for Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI), MSUN, with the help of OTLE, provides professional development, including a Summer 2023 Course Design Workshop, for faculty teaching online courses. The Office has also provided online material explaining RSI to faculty and providing examples of how they might incorporate RSI into their course design.

Distance education courses and programs are an important piece of the institution's curricular offerings and allow MSUN to provide accessible professional education to a diverse student body from across the Hi-Line. This is in direct alignment with the university's core values as a public institution as well as its mission to provide "higher education to students for professional and technical careers through an institution dedicated to teaching and the pursuit of knowledge". With oversight from College Chairs, training through OTLE, and assessment conducted through program assessment plans, faculty are able to carefully monitor all courses, regardless of modality, for consistency in rigor, RSI, and student learning.