



MONTANA
STATE UNIVERSITY
BILLINGS

Chancellor's Cabinet Meeting Minutes
February 6, 2024

Meeting began at 2:00 p.m.

In Attendance: Chancellor Stefani Hicswa, Provost Sep Eskandari, Kim Hayworth, Mike Bazemore, Leslie Weldon, Kathy Kotecki, Kathleen Thatcher, Paula Highlander, Jen Lynn, Brandon Irby, and Natalie Preston

Absent: Krista Montague

Update:

Chancellor Hicswa announced that as part of the ongoing Retention and Graduation initiatives, new efforts have been implemented to prevent students from being dropped from enrollment due to tuition non-payment. Thanks to these efforts, only 39 students were dropped in 2023, and this spring semester, only 31 students were affected. Vice Chancellor for Student Access and Success Kim Hayworth credited Barb Shafer, Director of Business Services, and Dr. Cheri Johannes, Registrar, for creating effective interventions.

Diversity Statement and Land Acknowledgement:

Dr. Hicswa announced that the Diversity Statement and Land Acknowledgement are now public on the MSUB website. She thanked Drs. Jen Lynn and Ana Diaz for leading the committee who produced these statements. She encourages everyone to use them when appropriate, and be sure that employees do not use alternate versions in email signatures.

Mission, Vision, Values:

Chancellor Hicswa explained how accrediting bodies require evidence that colleges and universities operate in reflection of their published mission statements. She asked for the group to review and provide feedback on the Mission, Vision, and Values of MSU Billings. Discussion followed. It was agreed that these would benefit from being revisited. If any changes are made, they must be approved by the Montana Board of Regents and Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

FAFSA:

Vice Chancellor Kim Hayworth summarized recent events and changes in the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). In the past, the application has become available on October 1, but after undergoing substantive changes, its opening was delayed to December 31 and on a limited basis. Colleges and universities have been notified that they may not receive student application information until late winter or early spring. This leaves institutions unable to package financial aid offers for applicants, which may impact students' decision to attend college. V.C. Hayworth expressed concern that enrollment will be affected, and Vice Chancellor

for Administration and Finance, Leslie Weldon, expressed concern that the Financial Aid office will be impacted. V.C. Hayworth is also unsure how the application changes, in addition to the delays, will affect students and the university.

FY '25 Budget:

V.C. Weldon summarized her current work toward reducing the university's budget deficit. She is increasing transparency in the budgeting process, making the process more consistent, and working to increase efficiencies and balance the budget to eliminate drawing on reserves. These have been campus wide efforts involving all budget managers. Additionally, V.C. Weldon and Chancellor Hicswa will hold "Listening Sessions" to gather feedback from everyone on campus about how we can work together toward these goals. Upcoming sessions are:

- Thursday, February 15 **8:00 to 9:00** in Banquet A and B
- Wednesday, February 21 **1:30 to 2:30** in Banquet A and B
- Monday, February 26 **9:00 to 10:00** in Health Sciences 119
- Thursday, February 29 **1:30 to 2:30** in Health Sciences 103

Major Giving Update:

Chancellor Hicswa provided a brief fundraising update in Foundation CEO Krista Montague's absence. Based on the recommendations of fundraising consultant Gonser Gerber, the efforts of the Foundation will focus more on major giving campaigns from individual donors and less on events that typically yield smaller results. Krista will provide an update on major giving to 'Jacket Leadership Team at the meeting on February 13.

Accreditation Update (Year 6):

Director of Accreditation and Assessment Kathleen Thatcher provided an overview of MSU Billings' current accreditation cycle and timeline. MSU Billings is on year 6 of a 7-year cycle and she is working to compile data from many areas of campus to include in the Year 6 Report, called the Policies, Regulations, and Finances Review (PRFR). The feedback MSUB receives during its year 6 visit will be helpful in preparing for the comprehensive visit in year 7 which will assess overall institutional effectiveness. Accreditation visits are an opportunity for the university to shine, but also to engage cooperatively to identify areas and plans for improvement.

Department Reports:

Kathleen Thatcher:

Kathleen welcomed Hannah O'Donnell to her department. Hannah will focus on facilitating program level accreditation with faculty. The department is preparing for the Year 6 Institutional Report (PRFR) as well as the program level accreditations that are coming within the next eighteen months.

Jen Lynn:

Dr. Lynn reported that the Academic Senate is working to update its policy on Artificial Intelligence under the leadership of John Pannell who also serves on a committee with the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE), working toward the same goal of establishing guiding principles. Dr. Hicswa added that a campus wide AI policy would be helpful. Dr. Lynn announced that faculty are also working on course rotations and plans of study and how they are attached to the curricular process. The faculty are eager to engage in the upcoming budget conversations. The Faculty Excellence Awards are planned for February 20.

Paula Highlander:

Paula Highlander announced that Human Resources and the Wellness Champions will host the next Well Check event on February 29th in the Beartooth Room. She reminded everyone to please answer the Healthy Minds Survey. There is an employee appreciation night at the February 18th basketball games and all are encouraged to come and enjoy.

Sep Eskandari:

Provost Eskandari is working on faculty evaluations and enjoys this season of reading contributed materials on all the great work that our faculty are doing. He hopes to see everyone at the Faculty Excellence Awards on February 20, and the Student Research and Creativity Symposium on April 12. Dr. Eskandari also reported that, based on current census numbers, MSUB's retention rate is 78.62, which is 2% higher than the previous year. This improvement reflects the hard work of many people. Work is underway to transition to a single email address for each student, and the goal is to have this project complete by Summer 2025, so it coincides with the Learning Management System transition planned for that date. Provost Eskandari is gathering input on the Dean search for the College of Business. He will also be working to restructure the Office of International Studies so it will report to the Office of Academic Success by the beginning of the next fiscal year.

Brandon Irby:

Brandon Irby, Director of Communications and Marketing, has been meeting regularly with the Deans from each college, and has been meeting with department chairs and directors. The Branding Committee is gaining focus and will convene on Wednesday.

Leslie Weldon:

V.C. Weldon has been working in cooperation with Brandon Irby to create the webpage location and format for MSU Billings policies. The goal is to have this complete by the end of February. She has also been working with Barnes & Noble College to prepare for First Day Complete and hopes to have it implemented by Spring 2025.

Kathy Kotecki:

Dean of Student Engagement Kathy Kotecki is working to hire an Associate Dean of Students. She is receiving and processing fall applications for housing, and her department is hiring

Resident Advisors. Student Health Services is testing and treating many positive flu and COVID-19 cases. Kathy is also serving on the statewide Prevention Education Council, which aims to improve required online education for students entering college in cooperation with the OCHE Student Advisory Council.

Mike Bazemore:

Director of Intercollegiate Athletics Mike Bazemore announced that after extensive student sports surveys and in coordination with the Office for Civil Rights to ensure adherence to Title IX, MSU Billings will no longer feature Triathlon among its sport offerings. Basketball is now in the second half of the conference schedule, and both the men's and women's teams are currently in first place in their conference. The Yellowjacket Athletics Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony was last week, and six new former 'Jackets were inducted. Athletics is administering searches for a women's soccer coach and head men's basketball coach. The Chi Alpha Sigma Induction is upcoming on April 2.

Kim Hayworth:

Vice Chancellor Hayworth announced that she updated Ed Brown's title to Director of Admissions and Assistant for Strategic Initiatives to reflect his work with Leslie Weldon and Barnes & Noble College on the First Day Complete implementation. Associated Students of Montana State University Billings (ASMSUB) has changed their meeting night to Thursday at 5:30, effective this week.

Important Spring Dates:

- Financial Aid open labs every Tuesday in the Student Union Building through end of February
- Health and Safety Expo at City College Friday, February 16th
- Preview Day March 14th
- Pow Wow April 5th and 6th

Meeting ended at 4:00 p.m.

Notes by Natalie Preston