



**Chancellor's Cabinet Meeting Minutes
September 1, 2026, 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

The Chancellor's Cabinet advises the Chancellor by providing guidance and support for the university's highest priorities and governance processes.

In Attendance: Chancellor Hicswa, Lee Vartanian, Kim Hayworth, Tia Brown, Kathleen Thatcher, Suzette Nynas, Andrew Bonner, Dan Carter, Kathy Kotecki, and Krista Montague

Absent: Natalie Preston

SHOUTOUTS

Dan Carter, Director of University Communications and Marketing, was given a shoutout for organizing the Centennial kick-off event last Wednesday, August 26. Dan expressed appreciation for everyone who helped make the event such a success.

Kathleen Thatcher, Director of Assessment and Accreditation, was given a shoutout for her roll out of the strategic vision at the State of the University Address along with Dr. Tom Rust for his presentation of our history.

Ryan Morris was given a shoutout for the installation of the campus seal in the walkway between the administration and student union buildings.

Dan Carter and Jessica Plance, Digital Media Manager, were given shoutouts for the alumni interviews they have been conducting as part of the centennial celebration, including one with Krista Montague's grandfather.

INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION

RAFTs and Contracts

Tia Brown, Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance, provided an update on the improvements she is making to the Recruitment Authorization Form (RAF) and contract process. Her approval will be required on these documents going forward. MSUB will be moving away from using P-cards for regular purchases in favor of using the Smartbuy system when appropriate.

Requests for Inventory of Fee Changes

Vice Chancellor Brown gave an overview of the process for requesting fee changes. Requests are due to Barb Burows, Director of Business Services, by October 3. Student fee guidelines are linked [here](#).

Strategic Vision - Increasing Retention and Graduation Rates

Kathleen Thatcher discussed next steps for implementing the strategic vision and new values to substantially increase graduation and completion rates. Provost Vartanian discussed how the Process Reimagine and Redesign (PRR) recommendations fit within strategic vision implementation work. The Chancellor presented longitudinal graduation data (see attached) and pointed out that our graduation rates are among the lowest in the country for regional public institutions. Discussion followed.

Enrollment Update

Dr. Kim Hayworth, Vice Chancellor for Student Access and Success, reported that enrollment numbers are tracking up compared to last year. Enrollment in graduate programs has decreased again this year. Census will be finalized September 30. Discussion followed.

Retention Update

Vice Chancellor Hayworth reported that retention rates are higher than the same week last year. Students who were awarded Yellowstone Excellence Scholarships (YES) were retained at a high percentage and significantly higher than non-YES Scholars.

Federal Accreditation Landscape

Kathleen Thatcher reviewed the proposed federal changes to accreditation. The new regulations may be approved as early as November. Discussion followed.

UPDATES

Natalie Preston, Executive Assistant to the Chancellor

This September 24, MSU Billings will host the Board of Regents Meeting in the Glacier Room. Wear yellow and blue and be ready to show your Yellowjacket pride as we welcome these important guests to campus. All faculty and staff are encouraged to attend and should register at [this link](#).

Kim Hayworth, Vice Chancellor for Student Access and Success

Faculty Workshops

Disability Support Services and the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships are offering a workshop for faculty updating them on important changes for the upcoming academic year. Faculty have been invited to attend one 45-minute session from September 1-3 to learn about:

- **Disability Support Services** – enhancements to the Accommodate platform to aid faculty in accessing student information, communication, and accommodation logistics
- **Financial Aid** – student courseloads & what faculty need to know about The One Big Beautiful Bill (OB3)

Tuesday, September 1

2:30-3:15 pm (Virtual)

Wednesday, September 2

9-9:45 am (Tech B001 @ City College)

3:30-4:15 pm (COE 328 @ university campus)

Thursday, September 3
8:30-9:15 am (Virtual)

TRIO Update

The MSUB Office of TRIO Programs is still waiting to hear if our Talent Search and the Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) will be funded for an additional five years. The original deadline for news is August 31, 2026. MSUB EOC has one additional year of funding, but Talent Search funding would end in September 2026.

NAAC

The NAAC received a grant from the Steele-Reese Foundation grant of \$30,000 for one year to strengthen transfer pathways and culturally grounded support for Tribal College students transitioning to MSU Billings. The NAAC is currently searching for a part-time Tribal College Liaison funded by the Steele-Reese Foundation grant.

The NAAC will be hosting the Elder in Residence Program again for the 26-27 academic year. The first Elder will be hosted Oct. 19-23, 2026. In the coming weeks, visit the NAAC webpage for more information.

FAFSA news

Through the amazing teamwork between Admissions, Office of TRIO Programs, and Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships, the new student FAFSA filing is up by 289 or 30% over this same week in 2025. Last year, about 80% of new students filed the FAFSA. Increasing FAFSA filing was a strategic recruitment goal for MSUB this year!

Kathy Kotecki, Dean of Student Engagement

University Police:

We have 2 new officers hired and both have started: Edward Stafford and Brian Keserich. Brian is not POST certified so will be going to the Law Enforcement Academy beginning Sept. 2nd. Edward is already POST Certified and is currently completing our UPD Field Training Officer program.

Student Health Services:

The team is expanding the lab testing services available to students. In addition, we are moving away from charging students small lab fees and are working to ensure that these testing services can be covered through the existing SHS fee.

Housing:

Occupancy:

As of Tuesday, August 25th, we have 390 students (222 new, 167 returning) signed up to live on campus.

This week last year we had 378 completed, with 234 new and 144 returners. The goal for this Fall was 400 – we are so close!!

301 exemption requests

- 203 approved
- 89 pending

Lainie Troxell has been hired as the Rimrock Hall Director. Lainie graduated from MSUB this past Spring and was an RA and member of the Softball team.

Center for Engagement:

Welcome Week kicks off Sunday, September 6th with a full week of programs and events!