

# Montana State University NORTHERN

## Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report



Prepared for the Northwest  
Commission on Colleges  
and Universities

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**MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**NORTHERN**  
Education that Works

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## INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

Located in Havre, Montana, Montana State University-Northern is north-central Montana's comprehensive regional university, offering programs and services at the certificate, associate's, bachelor's, and master's levels. Our service area includes four American Indian reservations and numerous agriculture-oriented communities. With its emphasis on both technical and liberal arts education, MSU-Northern—an open-enrollment institution—strives to be a driver of economic mobility and lifelong learning while serving as a cultural resource in the region.

Our institution comprises three academic colleges: the College of Arts, Sciences, and Education (CASE); the College of Technical Sciences (COTS); and the newly formed College of Health Sciences (COHS). Our academic programs strive for excellence and innovation while responding to the region's economic and societal needs. Our comprehensive program offerings are listed in APPENDIX 1.

In addition to degree programs offered on the Havre campus, MSU-Northern offers a number of completely online degree programs, as well as online general education courses. Face-to-face courses and courses transmitted through iTV are available at MSU Great Falls College in Great Falls, and iTV options also exist for students at two of our four neighboring tribal colleges, Fort Peck Community College in Fort Peck/Poplar and Aaniiih Nakoda College in Fort Belknap.

In keeping with its emphasis on pathways that lead to economic mobility, MSU-Northern also offers Montana Department of Labor and Industry approved instruction for plumbing and electrical apprentices seeking to complete their Apprenticeship Related Training coursework. Finally, MSU-Northern's Advanced Fuels Center provides regionally relevant research on the development and use of bio-based renewable fuels while providing students hands-on research opportunities.

## INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES UPDATE

Since the Year One Self-Evaluation Report submitted in 2017, MSU-Northern has undergone several important changes in institutional leadership and in structure.

### Leadership Changes

#### Director of Indian Education/Tribal Liaison and Special Advisor to the Chancellor

Dr. Margaret Campbell was appointed to this newly formed position in November of 2017. Dr. Campbell works closely with the Chancellor and the Little River Institute, a Department of Education (NASNTI) funded program.

#### Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Dr. Neil Moisey was appointed to this position in December of 2017.

#### Director of Institutional Research

Mr. Jay Howland was appointed to this position in January of 2018. Mr. Howland continues to serve a faculty role in the Business Administration and Business Technology programs.

Dean of College of Technical Sciences (COTS)

Dr. David Krueger was appointed to the Dean of COTS position in August of 2018.

Interim Dean of the College of Arts, Sciences, and Education (CASE)

Dr. Darlene Sellers was appointed to the Interim Dean of CASE position in January of 2019. Dr. Sellers continues to serve a faculty role in the Masters program in Counselor Education.

Executive Director of Enrollment Management

A restructuring initiative brought together the offices of Student Support Services and Admissions, who now report to the newly formed position of Executive Director of Enrollment Management. Ms. Maura Gatch was appointed to this position in July of 2019.

Interim Dean of the College of Health Sciences (COHS) and Director of Nursing

Nursing faculty member Jaime Duke (MSN, RN) was appointed to the Interim COHS Dean and Director of Nursing positions in August of 2019. Ms. Duke is performing the Director of Nursing duties under the guidance of Dr. Mary Pappas (Ed.D, RN, CNE), who has served in the past as Interim Director of Nursing.

Executive Director of the MSU-Northern Alumni Foundation

Ms. Shantel Cronk was appointed to this position in August of 2019.

Chief Financial Officer and Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance

This position is currently in the process of being filled.

**Additional Institutional Changes**

In May of 2017, the Montana Board of Regents approved a restructuring initiative to divide the College of Education, Arts, Sciences, & Nursing (CEASN) into two separate colleges: the College of Arts, Sciences, and Education (CASE); and the College of Health Sciences (COHS). This change was implemented at the beginning of AY 2018-2019.

Due to declining face-to-face enrollment at MSU-Northern's satellite campus in Lewistown, as well as MSU-Northern's increased online course offerings, the branch was closed in July 2019.

In July of 2017, the Extended University division—which included Online Learning, Continuing Education, Summer Session, Traffic Education, the Montana Environmental Training Center, Motorcycle Safety, and the Little River Institute—was eliminated. Its individual programs remain, but they now report to the CASE Dean, the Provost, or the Chancellor. Furthermore, the Online Learning office (now the Office of Teaching and Learning Excellence) has broadened its mission to provide professional development in pedagogy for all learning environments.

Since the Year One Self-Evaluation Report, MSU-Northern has experienced a 24% turnover in faculty, with 14 new full-time faculty members joining the institution in academic years 2017-18, 2018-19, and 2019-20.

An updated organizational chart is provided in APPENDIX 2.

## PART I: Overview of Institutional Assessment Plan

*Describe your process of assessing mission fulfillment.  
Who is involved in the assessment? Is the Board of Trustees involved?*

MSU-Northern’s Core Themes were approved by the Montana Board of Regents<sup>1</sup> in November of 2011. The Mission Statement was revised and approved in July 2016. Both are clearly displayed on the MSU-Northern website,<sup>2</sup> in the academic catalog, academic guide, and student handbook, and across campus to reflect their centrality to our institution (1.A.1).

Our Mission Statement, Vision Statement, three Core Themes, and four Comprehensive Plan Goals<sup>3</sup> reflect our institution’s unique purpose as the only comprehensive university in Montana’s expansive and diverse northern frontier region. Because MSU-Northern is an open-enrollment institution and serves a relatively high percentage of low-income, first-generation, minority, and non-traditional students, we are guided by a dedication to 1) offering high-quality programs that support the academic needs of students with diverse backgrounds and diverse goals, 2) providing a student-centered and culturally enriched environment that fosters belonging, and 3) maintaining strong partnerships that help connect students with real-world skills and career opportunities.

**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.

**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 state workforce needs, offered in an atmosphere that promotes student success.

Table 1: Alignment of Institutional Comprehensive Plan Goals and Core Themes		
Comprehensive Plan Goals		Core Themes
<b>STRATEGIC GOAL 1</b> <b>Stability</b> Establish a new enrollment baseline of 1500 students	<b>STRATEGIC GOAL 2</b> <b>Quality and Efficiency</b> Provide practical, high-quality educational experiences in a timely manner	<b>CORE THEME 1</b> <b>Comprehensive Programs</b> Provide liberal arts, professional and technical programs that serve a diverse student population
	<b>STRATEGIC GOAL 3</b> <b>Engagement</b> Strengthen students' sense of belonging	<b>CORE THEME 2</b> <b>Student Success</b> Promote a student centered and culturally enriched environment that fosters student success
	<b>STRATEGIC GOAL 4</b> <b>Collaboration</b> Expand industry and alumni engagement	<b>CORE THEME 3</b> <b>Inclusive Partnerships</b> Partner with external entities to enhance and expand learning experiences

MSU-Northern’s Core Themes and Strategic Goals are closely aligned and operate in tandem with one another and promote cohesion and shared goals among administration, faculty, staff, and students. Strategic Goal 1 unites all of the remaining Strategic Goals and the Core Themes with an overarching enrollment goal of 1500 that would provide increased financial stability and thus open doors for deeper capacity-building in each of the other areas (1.A.2).

**Defining and Assessing Mission Fulfillment**

MSU-Northern’s annual process for assessing mission fulfillment is carried out by the Institutional Assessment Committee (IAC), which falls under the purview of the Office of the Provost/Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and is co-chaired by the three academic deans. The committee consists of both faculty and staff and meets regularly during the academic year. APPENDIX 3 outlines the makeup of the IAC, including its executive committee.

Since the Year One Self-Evaluation Report submitted in 2017, the IAC has initiated a number of revisions to the annual review process in order to promote broader participation and shared responsibility among various campus constituencies as well as clearer institutional communication surrounding the process. These changes include:

- The establishment of two to four specific, numbered indicators for each of the eight Core Theme objectives. Indicators also identify key reference documents and responsible parties involved in data reporting (see APPENDIX 4).
- Benchmarks for each indicator for each reporting period to guide incremental change.
- A definition of acceptable achievement at 75% or above the current benchmark.
- A visual system of categorization to communicate the level of action needed at three different performance indicator achievement levels: Meeting/Exceeding Target, Approaching Target, Moving Away from Target (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Levels of Achievement for Performance Indicator Results	Fulfillment Progress	# of achievement result levels in each performance category (1 result pending)
Meeting or exceeding the target (100% or above target). Continued effort required to maintain acceptable performance.	★	13/30
Approaching the target (75-99% of target). Continued monitoring and interventions required to reach acceptable performance.	↑	14/30
Moving away from the target (less than 75% of target). Immediate action required to reach acceptable performance.	↓	2/30

MSU-Northern **defines Mission Fulfillment** as “Meeting/Exceeding the target” (green level) or “Approaching the target” (yellow level) for ≥ 75% of the indicators for each of its Core Themes objectives. Because averages can mask individual areas of underperformance, we do not average achievement indicator levels within the categories.

As is evident in APPENDIX 4, all of our Core Themes objectives currently reach the “Meeting/Exceeding” or “Approaching” level with  $\geq 75\%$  of their corresponding indicators. In the conclusion of this section, we will address our plan to revisit objectives and indicators, where applicable, to ensure the data being collected is meaningful and actionable.

**Timeline for Assessing Mission Fulfillment**

The above revisions to the annual assessment process have helped shift MSU-Northern’s institutional assessment process toward a “regular, systematic, participatory, self-reflective, and evidence-based” mechanism for data-driven planning and action (5.A.1). The articulation of specific Core Themes indicators and benchmarks, and the creation of a system for monitoring and evaluating progress towards the Core Themes objectives (APPENDIX 4) have also allowed the IAC to implement a regular timeline for its annual review cycle, as outlined below:

<b>Table 3: Annual Review Cycle Timeline for Mission and Core Themes Fulfillment</b>	
July 1	IAC Executive Committee requests data for the year from key university programs and services personnel to contribute to the annual review of the Core Themes objectives. Data is recorded in the Core Themes Indicators chart (APPENDIX 4).
Oct. 15	IAC reviews the new data in light of the established benchmarks and uses it to draft institutional planning recommendations. The IAC also reviews the Core Themes performance indicators themselves to ensure that they are still reliable and meaningful indicators of achievement for the objectives.
Oct. 30	IAC reports findings to Core Leadership Committee (the Chancellor’s cabinet) with recommendations to address underperforming results. At this time, IAC also solicits input from the Core Leadership Committee, and key programs and services personnel, if existing Core Themes indicators and/or benchmarks are not proving to be reliable and meaningful.
Nov. 15	The new Institutional Assessment Plan is finalized and updated on the website.
Monthly	Monthly meeting of IAC Executive Committee to ensure data collection and action steps where underperformance has been determined. Entire IAC meets to sustain broad communication and coordination regarding Institutional Assessment Plan.

**Sustainability of Annual Review Process and Mission Fulfillment**

As is reflected in the Core Theme Indicators chart in APPENDIX 4, the Institutional Assessment Committee at MSU-Northern has made significant progress since the Year 1 Self-Report towards defining mission fulfillment in “meaningful, assessable, and verifiable indicators of achievement” (1.B.2). The collection, analysis, and communication of relevant data among key offices and programs on campus has allowed the IAC to begin more effectively evaluating MSU-Northern’s progress toward its Core Themes objectives and to recommend changes based on the data collected. The creation of a clear timeline, as presented in Table 3, is a significant step towards increasing the long-term sustainability of the process of assessing mission fulfillment.

*Are your core themes and objectives still valid? Is the institution satisfied that the core themes and indicators selected are providing sufficient evidence to assess mission fulfillment and sustainability? If not, what changes are you contemplating?*

A recently approved policy by the Montana Board of Regents requires that each university in the Montana University System formally review its Mission and Core Themes every three years to ensure continued relevance. MSU-Northern is scheduled to review its Mission and Core Themes and to present its findings and recommended revisions to the Board of Regents in AY 2020-2021. The mission fulfillment assessment process outlined above has already played an important role in guiding MSU-Northern towards productive reflection about the status and relevance of its Mission Statement and Core Themes, as well as the corresponding Core Themes objectives and indicators.

On the whole, our Core Themes and Core Themes objectives, as shown in APPENDIX 4, are valid and have served thus far as a useful framework for collecting diverse data points that provide evidence towards our assessment of mission fulfillment. In order to address the long-term sustainability of the process and ensure that we continue to appropriately “define mission fulfillment in the context of [our] purpose, characteristics, and expectations” (1.A.2), MSU-Northern is contemplating the following changes:

**1. Aligning the Mission Statement more succinctly with Core Themes.** Because the Mission Statement was reformulated in 2016 without a reformulation of the older Core Themes from 2011, the two do not reflect one another as succinctly as they might. As both are formally reviewed next year, care will be taken to ensure that the Mission Statement appropriately encapsulates the essence of each of the Core Themes, which are still largely considered to be valid, and which will likely be modified only slightly, if at all. The areas in which modifications to the Core Themes are being considered are described in the points below.

**2. Revising indicators for Core Theme objective 2.2.** As stated in the “Defining and Assessing Mission Fulfillment” section above, the institution is not satisfied that the designated indicators for Objective 2.2 (“Provide a student-centered environment conducive to success”) are providing comprehensive enough evidence, as currently structured, to contribute appropriately to the assessment of Core Theme 2 (Student Success). The primary problem identified in this context is a lack of definition for the term “student-centered” and the difficulty associated with trying to capture and measure such a broad term in a reliable and meaningful way. As a result, the institution has decided to reintroduce the administration of the annual National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) survey to serve as a key source of regular institutional data, beginning in 2019. One of the most important advantages of the NSSE data is its ability to provide a detailed analysis of individual question response patterns as well as aggregated scores within broader categories that represent specific student engagement themes (i.e., Academic Challenge, Learning with Peers, Experiences with Faculty, Campus Environment). The NSSE data will therefore allow us to more methodically diagnose and target any areas in need of improvement as we strive to provide a “student-centered environment.” The NSSE also sorts student responses by cohort, which makes it easier to determine the timing of proposed interventions to address areas in which the institution is underperforming or perceived to be underperforming. Accordingly, we anticipate that the NSSE will help us more effectively close the loop and monitor the effects of action steps in a consistent and systematic way.



**3. Integrating stronger language into Core Theme 3 regarding the institution's role as a leading driver of economic mobility, and tracking corresponding indicators.** Recently, MSU-Northern was recognized as the #1 higher education institution in Montana and #15 in the nation for economic mobility.<sup>4</sup> Rankings focused on MSU-Northern's "mobility rate," or the number of students who started college in the bottom 20 percent of income distribution and reached the top 20 percent. This is a powerful indicator of success for Core Theme 1 (Comprehensive Programs), Core Theme 2 (Student Success), and Core Theme 3 (Inclusive Partnerships). However, we have not formally tracked this data in the past.

Since its inception in 1929, MSU-Northern has strived to create opportunities for rural students, often with low-income backgrounds, and has placed a strong emphasis on career preparation and relationships with potential employers. As is stated in our Vision Statement, alignment with regional workforce needs is a key purpose of the institution, and a necessity for the region. As Core Theme indicator 3.3.1 already demonstrates, two-thirds of our Montana resident students have found employment in Montana for all four quarters of the year following graduation.

In many ways, then, the recent economic mobility data was no surprise. However, it is clear that we, as an institution, need to more effectively capitalize on this important strength and ensure continued monitoring of mobility data in order to 1) effectively communicate the value of our institution to the public, 2) use the economic mobility message and data to encourage persistence, and 3) ensure that all programs are contributing to economic mobility by sharing successful strategies between high-performing and underperforming programs (e.g., successful industry partnership initiatives or collaboration with the Career Center).

The current proposal is to begin including economic mobility data as indicators for Objective 3.3 ("Through partnerships stimulate economic development of our region") and to continue considering ways to more directly weave the economic mobility theme into the broader mission of the institution and its corresponding objectives as those are formally reviewed next year.

**4. More clearly integrate and define the role of general education within the institution's stated Mission and Core Themes.** MSU-Northern's focus on providing career preparation with a strong liberal arts foundation is reflected by our institutional 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." The general education core curriculum is referenced here through the phrase "pursuit of knowledge." However, although the general education core is included in the institution's mission statement, the IAC and general education committee find that MSU-Northern does not sufficiently address the purpose of our general education core curriculum in its definition and assessment of mission fulfillment. Following approval of the General Education Mission Statement in AY 2018-19, an action plan for General Education was developed by the Interim Dean of the College of Arts, Sciences and Education and the general education committee with the goal of redefining and reshaping the general education core. The new general education core framework will include educational learning outcomes for specific areas of competency, rather than knowledge fields. As the IAC reviews the validity of its Mission and Core Themes, the new general education model will be integrated.

## **PART II: Closing the Loop on Student Learning Assessment**

### **Assessment of Student Learning and Services**

MSU-Northern has made significant strides in systematizing and strengthening the assessment process to address Recommendation 6 following both the Year Seven Self-Study and the Year One Self-Evaluation Report. A more detailed explanation of MSU-Northern's assessment cycle and review process can be found in the "Response to Recommendation 6" section of the Addendum.

The assessment of student learning is overseen by the Provost and guided by the IAC, which is comprised of both faculty and staff. The committee communicates the assessment cycle's process and timeline to the institution and collaborates with the Office of Teaching and Learning Excellence (OTLE) to promote assessment activities that align with the University's Mission and Core Themes and to provide training to faculty and staff as they participate in the assessment cycle.

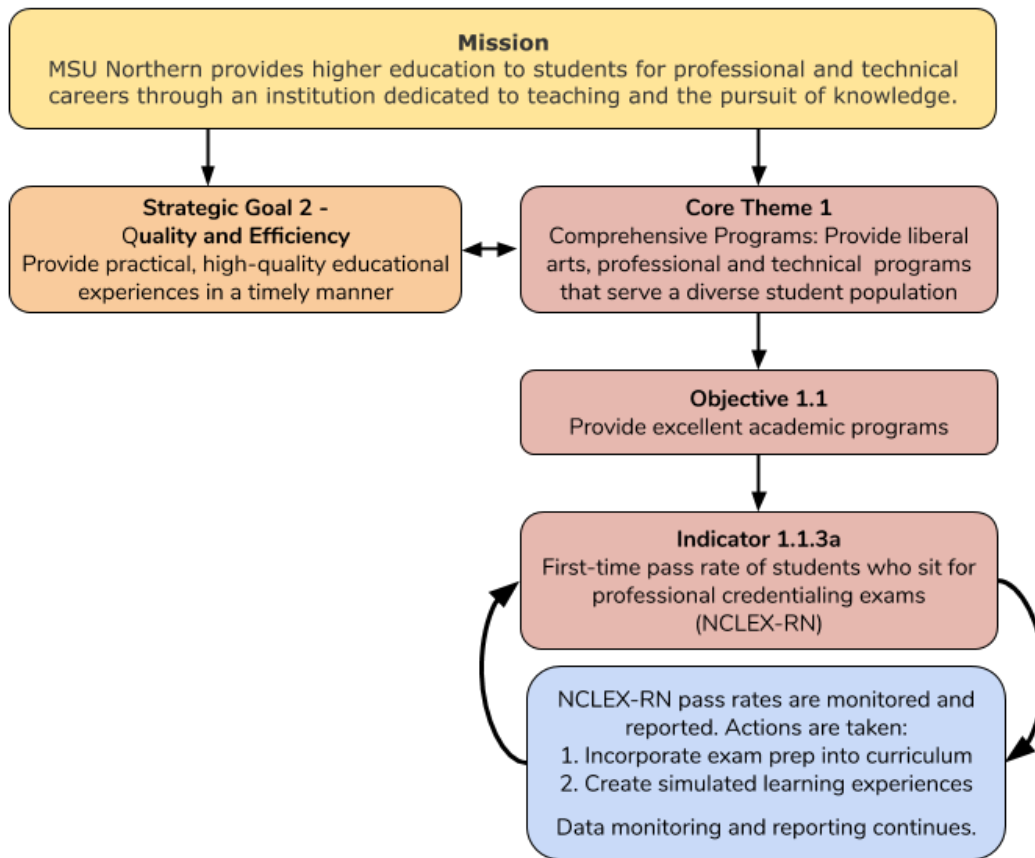
In 2016, MSU-Northern adopted the assessment management system "Taskstream" in an effort to centralize and streamline assessment tracking and assessment review. Taskstream allows users to map anticipated outcomes to the Core Themes to which they correspond. Program faculty and general education faculty assess student learning goals and outcomes for their respective academic programs, and directors of non-academic (services) programs and offices assess the operational objectives and outcomes of their respective units. Within the Taskstream platform, faculty and staff responsible for assessment are expected to identify and map outcomes, create an annual assessment plan, and enter annual assessment findings, including action steps for closing the loop.

IAC teams review each program's assessment plan by November 15th each year to ensure all criteria are met, with an emphasis on closing the loop. The review rubric (see "Response to Recommendation 6" in the Addendum) is currently built into Taskstream. Reviewer feedback is recorded in Taskstream for users to view and incorporate into future outcomes assessment.

Moreover, through the Program Review<sup>5</sup> process, all academic degree and certificate programs are systematically reviewed every seven years with regard to the following: centrality to Mission and Core Themes; productivity; demand (internal and external), quality, size, and cost effectiveness. The Program Review report is reviewed by program faculty, Faculty Senate, Academic Council, the Provost, and submitted to the Montana Board of Regents.

### **Example 1: Closing the Loop on Student Learning in the Nursing Program (ASN)**

The Nursing ASN program at MSU-Northern provides a representative example of how our institution has effectively operationalized our Mission and Core Themes review process alongside academic program learning assessment to close the loop on student learning.

**Image 1: Operationalizing Mission Fulfillment in the Nursing ASN program**

A central component of MSU-Northern's Mission is the institution's commitment to providing education that prepares students for professional careers, which it does through a dedication to teaching. Strategic Goal 2, Core Theme 1, and Objective 1.1 refer to the central role that academic program quality has in this process. In order to ensure program quality, MSU-Northern monitors the pass rates of students in select programs who sit for professional credentialing exams. These include the NCLEX-RN (National Council Licensure Examination) for the Nursing ASN program, the FE (Fundamentals of Engineering) exam for the Civil Engineering Technology program, and the Praxis II exam for Education programs. All three standardized exams provide reliable feedback about whether or not the appropriate level of student learning is being achieved within the corresponding academic programs.

This particular example will focus on Core Theme Indicator 1.1.3a, the NCLEX-RN licensing exam first-time pass rates, and will demonstrate the ways in which MSU-Northern and its Nursing department have used data from this process to invest in resources to improve student learning outcomes.

In addition to tracking student learning outcomes via course assessment, course-based program assessment, completion rates, student and employer surveys, and various other measures, the Nursing department has continually monitored ASN students' first-time NCLEX-RN pass rates as a key learning assessment measure. Tracking first-time pass rates is necessary for programmatic (i.e., ACEN) accreditation purposes, but it also provides critical feedback about the efficacy of the program's course structure and pedagogical practices. The following demonstrates how the

Nursing department and the institution as a whole have used this data to invest in changes to improve teaching and learning in the Nursing ASN program.

The Nursing department defines its own threshold for acceptable achievement for first-time NCLEX-RN exam pass rate each year as 80% or higher. The ideal level of achievement is to be on par with the national average, which fluctuates but sits at an average of 84.6% over the last five years. The first-time NCLEX-RN exam pass rates are published on the Department of Nursing’s website.<sup>6</sup> Over the last five years, first-time pass rates were as follows:

Table 4: NCLEX-RN pass rates for Associate of Science in Nursing graduates				
2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
82.6%*	N/A**	81.82%	64%	74.47%
* As of June 30th. A new quarterly report will be available September 30th. ** No students took the NCLEX-RN in 2018 because no new students were accepted in Fall 2016 due to a teachout period before the implementation of the new state curriculum.				

The first-time NCLEX-RN pass rates before 2017 were far below the 80% “acceptable achievement” target. At the same time, industry advisory board feedback was indicating a desire to see graduates better prepared for and more comfortable in clinical settings.

Over the course of the next three years, Nursing faculty and administrators have worked alongside university administration to invest in and implement a series of interventions to improve student learning for the Nursing ASN program, including:

Incorporating exam preparation and exam feedback into the curriculum:

- a. Faculty encouraged students to use the Hurst Review program for NCLEX exam preparation for 2017, saw improvement in pass rates, and began building the Hurst Review program into the Adult Nursing III course during students’ 4th semester for subsequent cohorts. The curriculum includes a three-day live content review at the beginning of the semester, continual review with intermittent modules (called “Elevate”), and finally, an NCLEX predictor test at the end of the semester to identify improvement areas. If students fail the predictor test, they retake the predictor. If students are unsuccessful in passing the NCLEX-RN their first time, they receive an RN coach through Hurst to help them identify weak areas and plan intensive review before taking the NCLEX-RN exam for a second time.
- b. Faculty have also begun using Kaplan Review in all areas of the ASN program to help prepare students for their NCLEX-RN. Students take a Kaplan Integrated test at the end of each course to determine where areas of improvement are needed, then remediate each test. Students complete Kaplan “Focused Questions” to improve their metacognitive skills.
- c. The department continues to use Mountain Measurement NCLEX-RN performance reports to make strategic changes to course test questions, activities, labs, and program services.

Creating simulated learning experiences:

- a. Simulation practice correlates with deeper learning and increased quality and safety in the clinical environment. Beginning in Spring 2018, the department has therefore brought in a mobile simulation truck for students to practice hands-on medical scenarios for a day each

semester. Except for Spring 2019, when a SIM-MT grant covered the truck's cost, it has been paid for by a combination of departmental, donor, and student fee funds.

- b. Faculty have also begun providing students with more simulation opportunities by incorporating Sherpath medical simulation software into 2nd and 3rd semester coursework.
- c. Mobile simulation trucks present a significant expense over the long-term. MSU-Northern and the Nursing Department are currently investing resources to establish a permanent nursing simulation lab to ensure students' clinical competencies. They have obtained two Perkins grants for two high-fidelity simulation manikins. MSU-Northern has also invested in the VALT simulation recording system, which allows faculty to record simulation scenarios and then play them back with the students to "debrief" their performance.

*Are your indicators, for the selected examples, proving to be meaningful?  
Do you have too many indicators or too few? What has the institution learned so far and what changes are contemplated? What has been your progress to date using the data?  
Do the data tell you what you are looking for? If not, what changes are you contemplating?*

Indicator 1.1.3a (NCLEX-RN first-time pass rates) has proven to be a meaningful indicator due to its ability to signal the need for improvement in pedagogical methods (deeper learning) and student learning support. It has also been able to provide quantitative support for observations that advisory board members were sharing. As a result, MSU-Northern's Nursing ASN program has been able to improve NCLEX-RN pass rates and affirm its reputation as a high-quality program with successful graduates. Likewise, the continued success of the Nursing program reflects fulfillment of MSU-Northern's mission to provide excellent academic programs that prepare students for professional and technical careers through dedication to teaching.

The current number of Core Themes indicators for this particular example (Core Theme objective 1.1: Provide excellent programs) is deemed to be sufficient at this time. However, due to the success associated with tracking first-time NCLEX-RN pass rates to close the loop on student learning, MSU-Northern plans to begin creating a more streamlined communication process for sharing credentialing exam pass rates for all academic programs with professional examinations. As Indicators 1.1.3b and 1.1.3c demonstrate, this process has already begun.

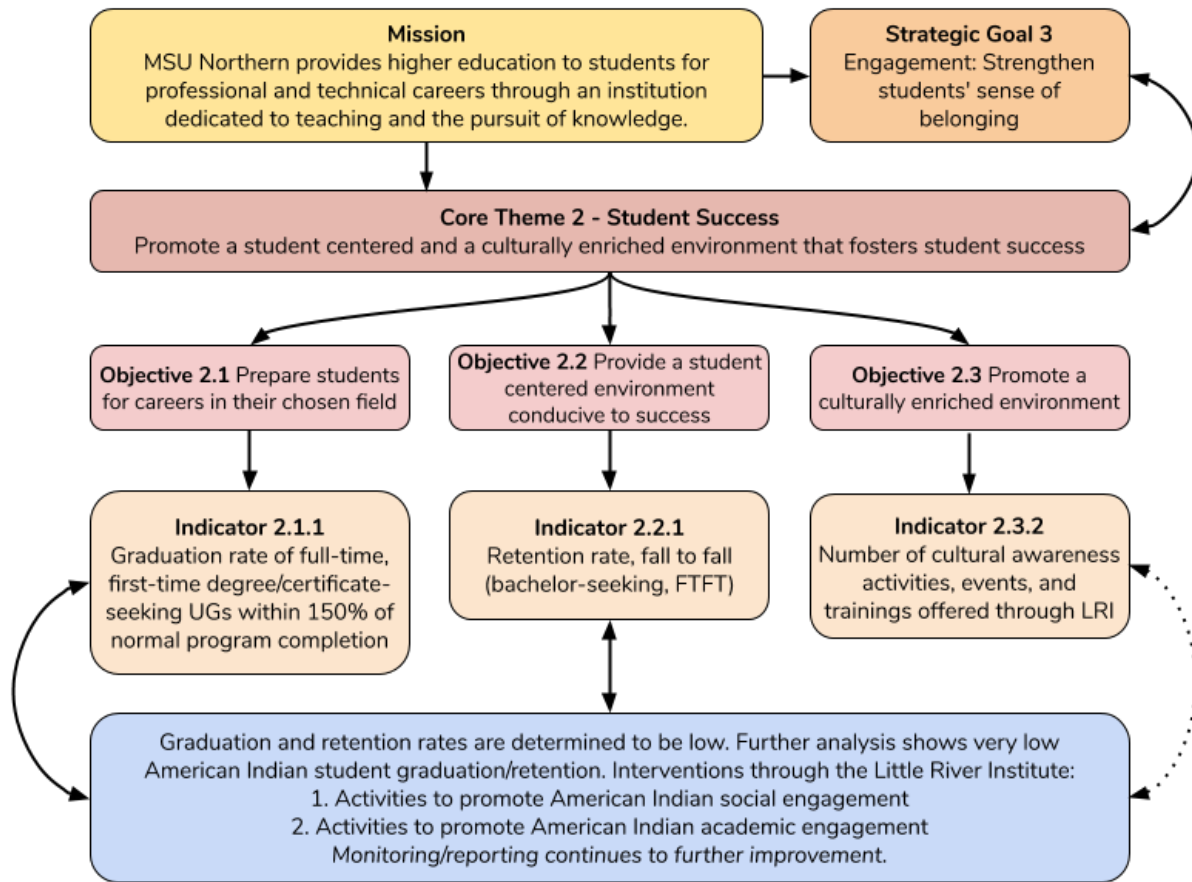
### **Example 2: Closing the Loop on Student Learning through the Little River Institute**

The Little River Institute, a US Department of Education Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTI) grant funded program at MSU-Northern provides another representative example of how our institution has effectively operationalized our Mission and Core Themes assessment process alongside services assessment to close the loop on student learning.

A central component of MSU-Northern's Mission is a commitment to guiding students to graduation so that they can flourish in their chosen career paths. Strategic Goal 3, Core Theme 2, and Objectives 2.1 and 2.2 all refer to the important role that a student-centered environment plays in ensuring that students are successful in the completion of their program of study. Indicators 2.1.1 (graduation rate) and 2.2.1 (retention rate) work together to signal potential issues with the campus environment that require further investigation. For this particular example, indicators 2.2.4 (percent of students using tutoring through Student Central) and 2.3.2 (number of cultural awareness activities offered) also come into play.

As an open enrollment institution serving many at-risk students, MSU-Northern constantly strives to improve retention and graduation rates. In AY 2016-17, overall graduation and retention rates were 59% and 29%, respectively (by IPEDS parameters; see APPENDIX 4). These rates are on par with national averages for public open enrollment institutions, but concerning nonetheless. MSU-Northern began looking to other data to help determine how it could improve student success. With the newly formed Little River Institute (funded by a NASNTI grant beginning in Fall 2015), MSU-Northern began tracking American Indian student retention and graduation rates alongside the overall rates. At that time, retention and graduation rates for American Indian students were 36% and 12%, respectively at MSU-Northern. With an American Indian student population of around 15% of the overall student population, the challenge to improve their retention was an opportunity to positively impact not only the communities in our service area but also the future enrollment, graduation rate, and fiscal stability of the institution.

**Image 2: Operationalizing Mission Fulfillment through the Little River Institute**



In accordance with the NASNTI grant project proposal, the Little River Institute (LRI) implemented a number of activities beginning in AY 2016-17 to increase the academic and social engagement of American Indian students with the goal of improving their success:

Activities to improve social engagement:

- a. **Gathering space.** The LRI was provided the entire 2nd floor of the Student Union Building to house meeting space for the Sweetgrass Society (an American Indian student group), a gathering/study space for students, and space for tutoring and mentoring services. This has involved extensive remodeling and updating, paid with both grant and institutional funding.
- b. **Culturally responsive mentoring.** The LRI director, professional tutors, and the peer mentors have created a welcoming community in the LRI space and are all available to guide students through the many obstacles they face during their time in college (cultural, academic, bureaucratic, financial, child care, etc.). All staff have been trained in cultural responsiveness.

Activities to improve academic engagement: (related to Indicator 2.2.4)

- c. **Culturally responsive tutoring.** LRI employs a professional tutor for Writing and one for Math/Science, as well as student peer tutors. Tutoring staff work to establish rapport with faculty of high-risk courses so that they send students to the LRI tutors and often even invite them to attend lectures or allow them to be "embedded" in class. Tutors often take on mentoring roles in addition to tutoring.
- d. **Professional development on cultural diversity and cultural responsiveness (directly related to Indicator 2.3.2).** The LRI has facilitated an increasing number of presentations, workshops, and activities for faculty and staff over the past 2.5 years, aided in part by the creation of a new position, the Director of Indian Education/Tribal Liaison. Example activities include: guest lectures by American Indian education experts; trainings on Montana's Indian Education for All (IEFA) Act; and three Indigenous Education Conferences. With the guidance of LRI staff and visiting experts, several MSU-Northern faculty have also participated in curriculum development projects that included principles of indigenous pedagogy.

As Table 5 shows, the LRI activities have proven to be a major success and are serving as a model for other MSU-Northern services offices, and for other colleges in Montana and the US.

Table 5: Little River Institute impact on American Indian student success					
	AI student enrollment percentage	F to S retention for AI students (first time, full time)	F to F retention for AI students (first time, full time)	Course pass rate for AI students w/ LRI tutoring	AI student engagement in mentoring
pre-LRI	12%	57%	36%	N/A	N/A
2017	13.5%	81%	42%	90%	35%
2018	15%	65%	56%	92%	43%
2019	18%	86%	TBD	TBD	TBD

Correspondingly, retention and graduation rates overall have been climbing at MSU-Northern: from 59 to 66% and 26 to 33%, respectively. The designated gathering and study space, culturally responsive tutoring and mentoring activities, and professional development for faculty and staff offered through the LRI have all contributed immensely to a more student-centered, culturally enriched environment at MSU-Northern that enables student success.

*Are your indicators, for the selected examples, proving to be meaningful?  
Do you have too many indicators or too few? What has the institution learned so far and what changes are contemplated? What has been your progress to date using the data?  
Do the data tell you what you are looking for? If not, what changes are you contemplating?*

Indicators 2.1.1 (graduation) 2.2.1 (retention) have been critical indicators with their ability to signal the need for deeper analysis so that systemic problems and/or risk factors correlated with low student persistence could be pinpointed. As a result, the institution has been more regularly analyzing graduation/retention data to determine factors that make students more “at-risk” for non-persistence, and targeting interventions accordingly. In the case of the LRI, a dual-pronged intervention model aimed at increasing both the social and the academic engagement of American Indian students has been extremely successful at improving retention/graduation and bringing MSU-Northern closer to our Mission through Core Theme 2, “Student Success.”

The LRI now serves as a model for broader retention efforts. For instance, due to the effectiveness of the LRI’s tutoring model, all tutoring services on campus have been examined and restructured to improve overall access, efficiency, and effectiveness. A tutoring committee was formed in August 2018 under the oversight of the Provost’s Office, resulting in collaboration between the LRI, TRiO/Student Support Services, and faculty to ensure that all tutoring needs on campus are being met. Tutoring services were previously scattered throughout campus, making it difficult for students to understand their options. Now, students can go online to request a tutor at “Tutoring Central” on the university webpage, or email [tutoring@msun.edu](mailto:tutoring@msun.edu) with a request. Faculty can also make referrals. (Students can still “walk in” to either TRiO/SSS or the Little River Institute to request tutoring as well.)

The restructuring has helped students and faculty navigate the tutoring resources on campus. Moreover, with the exception of the LRI, the other tutoring services previously did not track pass rates of students receiving tutoring. Tutoring Central has now purchased software and a student ID scanner to enable better tracking of students receiving tutoring and the impact that the tutoring has on pass rates, retention, and graduation. An indicator has been added to Core Theme objective 2.2 to help track tutoring effectiveness throughout the entire campus. This indicator (2.2.4) will adapt to reflect “pass rates” once the tracking software is implemented.

As is elaborated in the conclusion section of Part I, further work is needed to define and measure “student-centered” in a reliable and meaningful way. The reintroduction of the annual NSSE survey in 2019 will serve as a starting point to thoroughly and consistently measure whether or not retention interventions, such as those described above, are working.

*How are data being collected, analyzed, utilized and the findings communicated to constituents?*

Prior to the creation of Core Themes indicators, a number of data points were being collected, monitored, and utilized to make decisions at the individual academic (or services) department



level, or at the College level, but they were often not communicated well at the macro level. The IAC has made a number of changes to enable a better data overview that fosters data-driven decisions at the institution level. As is presented in Table 3, “Annual Review Cycle Timeline for Mission and Core” (Part I), data is scheduled to be collected by the IAC Executive Committee beginning July 1 of each year and recorded in the Core Themes Indicators chart. The IAC then analyzes findings and makes recommendations to the Core Leadership Committee and key programs and services personnel, with a request for any necessary revisions to any indicators or benchmarks. Action steps are monitored on a monthly basis thereafter via IAC meetings.

### **PART III: Continued Work Toward Year Seven**

*Moving forward in Year Seven, what will you need to do?*

The analysis in Part I and II has led the IAC to recommend the following as we move toward the Year Seven Review:

As elaborated in the conclusion section of Part I, MSU-Northern must continue to refine its Mission and Core Themes to ensure better alignment with one another, and to ensure broad consensus on the continued relevance of both. Institutionalizing this process for the long term will require focused effort on the part of the IAC. Throughout this process, the IAC will work to more effectively ensure that data and conclusions regarding MSU-Northern’s mission fulfillment are appropriately communicated to constituencies and the public.

MSU-Northern has taken critical steps towards creating an Institutional Assessment Plan, including key indicators and a specific timeline for data collection and review. These contribute to a legible and sustainable process that should inform administrative and budgetary decisions. As the IAC continues to collect and use data, Core Themes indicators need to be continually reviewed and refined to ensure that they continue to be meaningful and useful. The institution must make greater efforts to document the ways in which administrative and budgetary decisions have been based on these indicators and on the intent to achieve their respective benchmarks. Institutionalizing this process for the long term will require focused effort on the part of the IAC. Likewise, MSU-Northern must continue work to more thoroughly document the alignment of its Strategic Plan with its Mission and Core Themes objectives.

Finally, MSU-Northern will need to revise its institutional assessment plan and the documentation of its assessment processes to effectively address and reflect the new NWCCU standards that were released in September 2019.

## ENDNOTES

1. <https://mus.edu/board/>
2. <http://www.msun.edu/aboutmsun/mission.aspx>
3. <http://www.msun.edu/aboutmsun/strategicplan.aspx>
4. <https://www.zippia.com/advice/best-colleges-economic-mobility-state/>. Data compiled by Opportunity Insights, a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization located at Harvard University.
5. <https://www.msun.edu/provost/assessment/progreview.aspx>
6. <https://www.msun.edu/academics/nursing/>

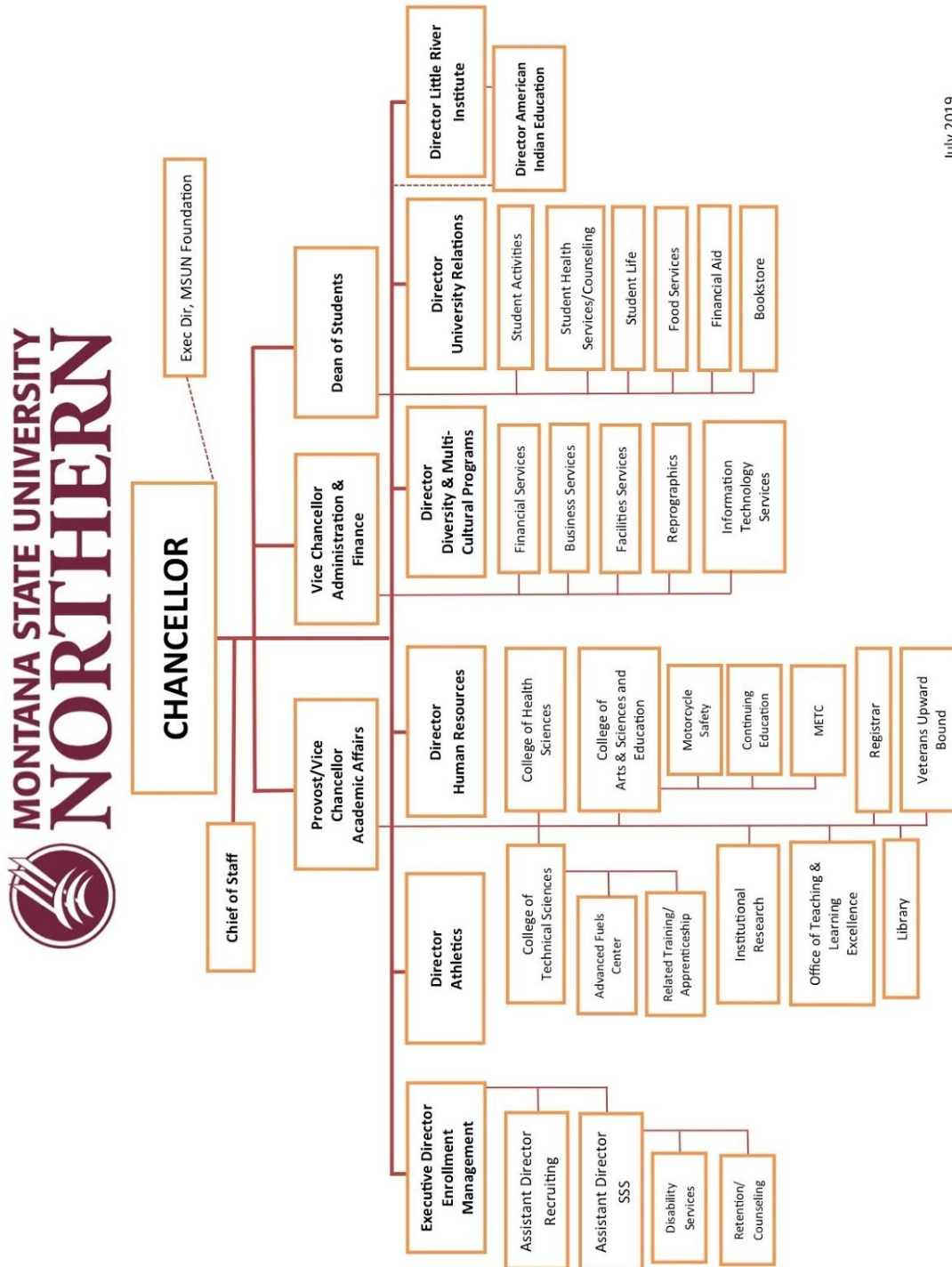
**APPENDIX 1: MSUN Comprehensive Program List**

<p><b>Master's Level</b> Counselor Education, MEd Instruction &amp; Learning, MS</p>	<p><b>Associate's Level</b> Agricultural Mechanics Technology, AAS Agricultural Technology, AAS Automotive Technology, AAS Program of Study in Business, AS* Design Drafting Technology, AAS Diesel Technology, AAS Electrical Technology, AAS Manufacturing, AAS Program of Study in General Education, AA* Nursing, ASN Pipefitting, AAS Plumbing, AAS</p>
<p><b>Bachelor's Level</b> Agricultural Operations Technology, BS Applied Science, BAS Automotive Technology, BS Biology, BS Business Administration, BS* Business Technology, BAS* Civil Engineering Technology, BS Community Leadership, BA* Criminal Justice, BS* Diesel Technology, BS Diesel Technology: - Equipment Management Option, BS - Field Maintenance Option, BS Elementary Education (K-8), BSEd Graphic Design, BA Health Promotion, BS Liberal Studies, BA Native American Studies, BA Nursing, RN-BSN Completion* Secondary Education: - Broadfield Social Science (5-12), BSEd - English (5-12), BSEd - General Science (5-12), BSEd - Health &amp; Physical Education (K-12), BSEd - Industrial Technology (5-12), BSEd Trades Management, BAS*</p>	<p><b>Certificates</b> Diesel Technology, CAS Wastewater Collection, CAS Wastewater Treatment, CAS Water Distribution, CAS Water Treatment, CAS Welding Technology, CAS</p>
<p><b>Degrees in Great Falls</b> Elementary Education (K-8), BSEd Counselor Education, MEd Business Administration, BA Business Technology, BAS</p>	<p><b>Minors</b> Accounting* Agricultural Mechanics Technology Applied Agriculture Art (K-12) Automotive Technology Biology Business Technology* Community Leadership* Criminal Justice* Diesel Technology Health Promotion Marketing: Technical Sales &amp; Service* Native American Studies Psychology* Reading Specialist (K-12) Small Business Management* Traffic Education (K-12)</p>

\*online option available

APPENDIX 2: MSUN Organizational Chart

Retrieved from: <http://www.msun.edu/admin/policies/100/OrgChart-Jul2019.pdf>



July 2019



### APPENDIX 3: MSUN Institutional Assessment Committee Members

Dr. R. Neil Moisey, Provost/Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs\*

Dr. David Krueger, Dean, College of Technical Sciences‡\*

Dr. Darlene Sellers, Interim Dean, College of Arts, Sciences, and Education‡\*

Ms. Jaime Duke, Interim Dean of the College of Health Sciences‡\*

Mr. Jay Howland, Director of Institutional Research\*

Dr. Lindsey Brandt-Bennett, Curriculum Developer\*

Mr. Chris Wendland, Controller\*

Dr. Steven Wise, Dean of Students\*

Ms. Alisha Schroeder, Registrar\*

Ms. Maura Gatch, Executive Director of Enrollment Management\*

Dr. Margaret Campbell, Director of Indian Education

Ms. Marianne Hoppe, Interim Chief Information Officer

Ms. Suzanne Hunger, Human Resources Director

Mr. Dan Ulmen, Director of Facilities

Mr. Steven Don, Chair, College of Technical Sciences

Dr. Valerie Guyant, Chair, College of Arts, Sciences, and Education

Dr. Cristy Ozburn, Assistant Professor, Psychology

Mr. Joshua Meyer, Associate Professor, Automotive/Diesel Technology

‡Committee Co-Chairs

\*Executive Committee Members

## APPENDIX 4: Mission Fulfillment Indicators and Data

Table 6: Levels of Achievement for Performance Indicator Results	Fulfillment Progress	# of achievement result levels in each performance category (1 result pending)
Meeting or exceeding the target (100% or above target). Continued effort required to maintain acceptable performance.	★	13/30
Approaching the target (75-99% of target). Continued monitoring and interventions required to reach acceptable performance.	↑	14/30
Moving away from the target (less than 75% of target). Immediate action required to reach acceptable performance.	↓	2/30

MISSION FULFILLMENT INDICATORS														
Core Theme #1 – Comprehensive Programs: Provide liberal arts, professional and technical programs that serve a diverse student population														
#	Indicator - See next sheet for description of measure.	Responsible Party	Key Source Documents	AY 16-17		AY 17-18		AY 18-19		Benchmark Description	Current Benchmark	Time Period for Current Results	Current Results	Fulfillment Progress
				FA16	SP17	FA17	SP18	FA18	SP19					
Objective 1.1 – Provide excellent academic programs														
1.1.1	Number of academic programs with external programmatic accreditation	Provost, College Deans	Catalog	4	4	4	4	4	4	maintain	4	AY 18-19	4	★
1.1.2	Percent of reviewed academic programs that receive a "recommendation to retain and grow" decision through Board of Regents' Program Review	Provost	BOR Program Review documents	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	maintain	100%	AY 18-19	100%	★
1.1.3a	First-time pass rate of students who sit for professional credentialing exams (NCLEX)	Provost, College Deans	Exam score reports	-	81.82%	N/A (Teachout phase for new state curriculum)	-	82.6% (to date)	82.6%	national pass rate	TBD (5-yr avg 84.6%)	AY 18-19	82.6%	↑
1.1.3b	First-time pass rate of students and recent graduates who sit for professional credentialing exams (FE)	Provost, College Deans	Exam score reports	50%	50%	42.9%	66.7%	66.7%	66.7%	ABET comparator	38%	AY 18-19	66.7%	★
1.1.3c	Pass rate of students who sit for professional credentialing exams (Praxis II prior to program completion)	Provost, College Deans	Exam score reports	77%	77%	67%	100%	100%	100%	Dept of Ed requirement	80%	AY 18-19	100%	★
1.1.4	Total enrollment (census headcount)	OIR	IRYM	1232	1182	1154	1119	1082	1111	3% increase each fall	1269	Fall 2018	1112	↑
Objective 1.2 – Cultivate teaching and learning excellence														
1.2.1	Percent of full-time faculty who attend at least one training with Office of Teaching & Learning Excellence	OTLE	Attendance log	N/A	N/A	61.8% (34/55)	74.5% (38/51)	74.5% (38/51)	74.5%	100%	100%	AY 18-19	74.5%	↑
1.2.2	Percent of full-time faculty receiving support from professional development fund in the last 3 years	Provost	Provost's Report	31% (18/58)	31%	23.6% (13/55)	31.4% (16/51)	31.4% (16/51)	31.4%	50%	50%	AY 18-19	31.4%	↓
1.2.3	First-year student rating of MSUN in areas of Academic Challenge, Learning with Peers, Experiences with Faculty, Campus Environment (NSSE Engagement: % of categories on par with or above performance of other Rocky Mountain public colleges)	OIR	NSSE Report	90% (9/10)	90%	N/A - to be completed in 2019	N/A - to be completed in 2019	N/A - to be completed in 2019	90%	100%	100%	AY 16-17	90%	↑
1.2.4	Senior student rating of MSUN in areas of Academic Challenge, Learning with Peers, Experiences with Faculty, Campus Environment (NSSE Engagement: % of categories on par with or above performance of other Rocky Mountain public colleges)	OIR	NSSE Report	90% (9/10)	90%	N/A - to be completed in 2019	N/A - to be completed in 2019	N/A - to be completed in 2019	90%	100%	100%	AY 16-17	90%	↑
Total indicators in acceptable range												3/4	75%	

Core Theme #2 – Student Success: Promote a student centered and a culturally enriched environment that fosters student success															
#	Indicator	Responsible Party	Key Documents	AY 16-17			AY 17-18			AY 18-19		Current Benchmark	Time Period for Current Results	Current Results	Fulfillment Progress
				FA16	SP17	FA17	SP18	FA18	SP19						
<b>Objective 2.1 – Prepare students for careers in their chosen field</b>															
2.1.1	Graduation rate of full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates within 150% of normal time to program completion	OIR	IPEDS	26% (2010 cohort)	33% (2011 cohort)	TBD					26.8%	AY 17-18	33%	★	
2.1.2	Percent of students who participate in Career Fair	Career Center	Career Fair Report	47.2% (581/1232)	44.4% (513/1154)	54.9% (594/1082)					50.7%	AY 18-19	54.9%	★	
2.1.3	Percent of students enrolled in cooperative education (co-ops)	Career Center, Registrar	Banner	14.7% (181/1232)	15.3% (176/1154)	15.2% (164/1082)					15.6%	AY 18-19	15.2%	↑	
2.1.4	Percent of surveyed recent graduates working in a related field to their major	Career Center	Graduate Survey Report	89%	89%	TBD					100%	AY 17-18	89%	↑	
<b>Objective 2.2 – Provide a student centered environment conducive to success</b>															
2.2.1	Retention rate, fall to fall (bachelor, first-time, full-time)	OIR	IPEDS	59% (2015 cohort)	60% (2016 cohort)	66% (2017 cohort)					62.6%	AY 18-19	66%	★	
2.2.2	Student Social Engagement aggregate score (scale of 4)	Dean of Students	Student Life Survey (Dean of Students)	2.79	2.85	2.89	2.82	2.92	2.87		3.01	Spring 2019	2.87	↑	
2.2.3	Student Satisfaction with Academics aggregate score (scale of 4)	Dean of Students	Student Life Survey (Dean of Students)	2.78	2.71	3.10	3.12	3.22	3.16		2.99	Spring 2019	3.16	★	
2.2.4	Percent of students who used tutoring services through Tutoring Central	SSS, LRI	Tutoring Central log	no centralized data	no centralized data	9.5% (103/1082)			7.2% (80/1111)		10%	SP 2019	7.2%	↓	
<b>Objective 2.3 – Promote a culturally enriched environment</b>															
2.3.1	Percentage of underrepresented minority students enrolled at MSUN (to reflect Hill County)	OIR	OIR Report	24.4%	-	23.1%	-	25.8%	-		28.8%	FA 2018	25.8%	↑	
2.3.2	Number of cultural awareness activities, events, and trainings offered through Little River Institute	LRI	Governor's Tribal Relations Report	N/A	9	20					10	AY 18-19	20	★	
2.3.3	Students' average agreement with the statement that "MSUN is dedicated to diversity and inclusiveness."	Dean of Students	Student Life Survey (Dean of Students)	N/A	3.04/4.00	3.03/4.00					4.00/4.00	AY 18-19	3.03/4.00	↑	
											Total indicators in acceptable range		3/3	100%	



Core Theme #3 – Inclusive Partnerships: Partner with external entities to enhance and expand learning experiences														
#	Indicator	Responsible Party	Key Documents	AY 16-17		AY 17-18		AY 18-19		Benchmark Description	Current Benchmark	Time Period for Current Results	Current Results	Fulfillment Progress
				FA16	SP17	FA17	SP18	FA18	SP19					
<b>Objective 3.1 – Use external partnership input to develop or enhance programs/disciplines</b>														
3.1.1	Number of academic program areas with an industry advisory board	Provost, College Deans	Provost's Report	6	7	7	8	8	Increase each year	8	AY 18-19	8	★	
3.1.2	Number of employers represented at Career Fairs	Career Center	Career Fair Report	78	83	83	86	86	Increase each year	84	AY 18-19	86	★	
3.1.3	Percent of co-op students who receive "very good" score or higher by employers on overall performance	Career Center	Co-op Employer Survey	94%	87%	87%	94%	94%	100%	100%	AY 18-19	94%	↑	
Total indicators in acceptable range 3/3 100%														
<b>Objective 3.2 – Expand students' collaborative/external learning experiences</b>														
3.2.1	Percent of program areas with required co-op, field experience, research, or capstone course	Provost, College Deans	Provost's Report	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	maintain	100%	AY 18-19	100%	★	
3.2.2	Percent of seniors who report participating in 2+ high-impact learning practices (NSSE)	OIR	NSSE Report	68%	N/A - to be completed in 2019	N/A - to be completed in 2019	N/A - to be completed in 2019	N/A - to be completed in 2019	80%	80%	AY 16-17	68%	↑	
3.2.4	Percent of students enrolled in cooperative education (same as 2.1.2)	Career Center, Registrar	Banner	14.7% (181/1232)	15.3% (176/1154)	15.3% (176/1154)	15.2% (164/1082)	15.2%	3% increase each year	15.6%	AY 18-19	15.2%	↑	
Total indicators in acceptable range 3/3 100%														
<b>Objective 3.3 – Through partnerships stimulate economic development of our region</b>														
3.3.1	Percent of graduates with MT residency who found employment in MT for all 4 quarters of the next year	OIR, MUS, DLI	MUS Data Warehouse; MT DLI	66.41% (n=262)	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	maintain	66%	Results pending	-	Results pending	
3.3.2	Northern Alumni Foundation endowment	NAF	NAF Annual Report	\$6,227,129	\$6,336,351	\$6,336,351	TBD	TBD	3% increase each year	\$6,413,943	FY 17-18	\$6,336,351	↑	
3.3.3	Scholarship dollars awarded by NAF	NAF	NAF Annual Report	\$426,107	\$452,131	\$452,131	TBD	TBD	3% increase each year	\$452,056	FY 17-18	\$452,131	★	
Total indicators in acceptable range 2/2 100%														