

FEBRUARY 27, 2022

# Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness

Northwest Commission on  
Colleges and Universities



GREAT FALLS  
COLLEGE  
Dental Clinic



**GREAT FALLS COLLEGE**  
MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

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## INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

*Great Falls College MSU provides high quality educational experiences supporting student success and meeting the needs of our community.*

Great Falls College Montana State University is a non-residential campus in the northcentral Montana city of Great Falls, on the plains just east of the Rocky Mountain Front and the Missouri River. The city's proximity to mountains, lakes, and rivers makes it inviting for outdoor enthusiasts, while it is also known for its vibrant arts and music scenes.

True to its mission, Great Falls College proudly serves northcentral Montana residents, awarding associate degrees, certificates, and associate of applied science degrees in 25 programs. These programs include health sciences, business, computer technology, and trades. But its reach does not stop there. An early believer in increasing access, especially for Montana's vast rural areas, the college has championed distance education and dual enrollment for years, resulting in many programs and classes offered in these delivery formats. The college also offers non-credit classes and customized training through its Center for Lifelong Learning.

The student population includes traditional high school graduates, non-traditional students (who have been out of high school for several years), and dual-credit students. In fall 2021, a majority were traditional ages 18-24 (38.6%), next were non-traditional students, aged 25 and older (34.9%), and finally students 17 and under made up 26.6%. (Totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.) In fall 2021, enrollment was 1,230 (headcount) of which 70.7% were female. The largest population groups in fall 2021 were 77.8% white, 10.5% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 4.4% Hispanic. The remaining groups were extremely small (2% Asian, .7% Black, 3% Other, and 1.5% No Response).

Students are supported by a full-service library, tutoring center, maintenance staff, student central (registrar, financial aid, admissions, records, advising), veterans' center, Native American center, disability services, and administration. Support services are available both on campus and online. Full-time and adjunct faculty are supported by the Teaching and Learning Center, which includes a full-time instructional designer.

Great Falls is home to Malmstrom Air Force Base and the Montana Air National Guard. The college has partnered with the Community College of the Air Force to become the first GEM (General Education Mobile) school in the Montana University System. This allows U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard members to earn 15 of the 64 credits needed to complete an associate degree through the CCAF at Great Falls College. Great Falls College also has been listed on the VIQTORY 2020-21 Military Friendly Schools list since 2014.

Two major health care employers anchor a healthcare community that provides access to valuable clinical instructors, as well as space for student clinical practice. The campus also includes space for four-year institutions in other communities to offer four-year programming in the Great Falls area.

Great Falls College is part of the Montana University System and is a stand-alone, two-year college, independently accredited with its own mission, vision, and strategic goals. A brief look at the college's history helps explain Montana's varied university system.

The college started as one of five vocational-technical schools in the state, initially aligned with the secondary public school system. In 1987, the state Legislature placed the schools under the authority of the Montana University System. Colleges located in communities with four-year public universities answer to those institutions. As there was no public four-year institution in Great Falls, the college became a campus of Montana State University ([system organization chart](#)). Great Falls College is independently accredited, but does have the resources of MSU-Bozeman available for legal, information technology, and major purchasing, as well as guidance on other issues, such as grants management

## PREFACE

### Chief Executive Officer/Dean

Dr. Stephanie Erdmann assumed leadership on July 1, 2021 as chief executive officer/dean, as well as chief academic officer. She came to Montana from Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College (recently renamed to Northwood Technical College) in Rice Lake, Wisconsin, where she was vice president of academic affairs and Rice Lake Campus administrator.

Erdmann holds a doctorate in business administration management from Northcentral University at San Diego, California; a master's in administrative science-project management from the University of Wisconsin; and a bachelor's in interpersonal communications management from the University of Montana. She is supported by the [Executive Team](#): executive director of operations, chief student affairs and human resources officer, institutional researcher and data analyst, director of communications and marketing, executive director of instruction (a new position overseeing the General Studies Division and supporting the other two academic divisions), and the executive assistant to the CEO/dean.

### Academic Changes

Great Falls College has seen numerous changes in the past six years. The college transitioned its general education and some specific applied programs to 8-week block scheduling (8-Week Advantage) focused on increasing retention, on-time graduation, and overall student success. The 8-week scheduling provides multiple benefits for students: focusing on fewer courses at one time, earning more credits per semester, completing pre-requisite and programmatic courses more quickly, and saving money and time overall. The scheduling also allows students to enroll in the second block of classes if they miss the enrollment deadline at the traditional semester start. The schedule is in place across campus, except in health science programs with clinical requirements, which were difficult to condense into an 8-week format.

The college has institutionalized [student learning outcomes assessment](#). The college tried several approaches before centralizing leadership into the director of assessment, a faculty member who fulfilled this position as part of a teaching workload. In spring 2021, the director of assessment became the full-time director of Teaching and Learning Innovation, overseeing assessment, the Teaching and Learning Center, and the Weaver Library. The campus also has a standing committee of faculty, led by the director of teaching and learning innovation, to support continued improvement of student learning assessment.

### Educational Dental Clinic Expansion

The college received state funding to expand its educational dental clinic, adding 12,000 square feet to the clinic and remodeling another 6,600 feet so students, faculty, and staff can work in a modern, comfortable space with increased patient privacy. This expansion allows the dental hygiene program (the only one in the state) to increase capacity from 18 to 25 students in each cohort.

## OneMSU

The college has collaborated with other units of the Montana State University system to expand Surgical Technology and Respiratory Therapy. In both programs, students complete general education and prerequisites at their home campuses, take online surgical technology or respiratory therapy courses from Great Falls College, then complete lab and clinical educational components in or close to their home communities.

### Great Falls College and the Pandemic

When the COVID pandemic forced institutions across the county to shut their doors, several factors helped Great Falls College weather the storm. The college's 8-Week Advantage truly became an advantage in that students had completed the first block of classes when the campus shut down, preventing the educational disruption experienced on many other campuses. The second block started in the remote delivery model.

Another advantage was that faculty had been offering classes and some degrees online and remotely for years, so students were used to learning through multiple modalities.

Through careful but rapid planning, faculty and staff worked to ensure students would be successful after the move to campus-wide remote learning. Faculty used simulation, lecture capture, and WebEx/Zoom, and maintained high-quality standards for online and remote learning. Seventeen faculty (including four adjuncts) completed the Quality Matters Teaching Online Certificate. Several faculty members adopted the Hyflex teaching model, a flexible hybrid mode allowing students to attend in person, via a live-stream, or asynchronously online if they cannot attend during the allotted class time.

The Teaching and Learning Center provided resources and training to help faculty understand and adopt high-quality remote teaching methods. The instructional designer helped faculty convert to online courses. The Information Technology Department equipped faculty with technology to teach remotely. The Weaver Library loaned laptops and wireless hot spots to students. Science instructors converted on-site labs to assignments that could be completed remotely. The college took advantage of [federal COVID funds](#) to upgrade IT network infrastructure, purchase equipment, modify classrooms to improve distance delivery, purchase safety supplies to protect students and employees, and to provide student financial assistance.

Student Affairs professionals used technologies similar to the teaching technologies to maintain frequent contact with students. The Academic Success Center was accustomed to offering online tutoring, the Testing Center was experienced with online testing and the Weaver Library and the Bookstore were accustomed to serving distance students. These services were successfully scaled up to serve ALL enrolled students remotely, but the experience of delivering services to distance students was well established.

In addition, healthcare programs loaned ventilators and donated personal protective equipment to community medical facilities.

One of the biggest challenges was providing hands-on experience for students in trades and health sciences. As soon as it was deemed safe, students were allowed on campus to complete

hands-on tasks as long as they could be isolated in individual workstations. Healthcare students worked in the college's simulated hospital environment until they could be safely placed back in community clinic settings.

On the recommendation of the Faculty Senate, the [Executive Team](#) voted to offer students the option of having Pass-Not Pass recorded on their transcripts for spring 2020. They were required to meet with an advisor to make sure they understood unintended consequences (honors, athletic eligibility, transfer, competitive entry programs, repeat courses, term GPA, cumulative GPA, etc.).

As in-person commencement was not allowed and students were unenthusiastic about online commencement, the college mailed out memorabilia in "Commencement in a Box." Graduates could view the recorded [video ceremony](#) featuring commencement speakers. The Class of 2020 also was invited to attend in-person commencement exercises in spring 2021.

Throughout the disruption, the campus prepared a [Plan for a Healthy Campus](#), which was updated regularly. The plan continues to be available on a [web page](#), which also contains links to other resources and Frequently Asked Questions.

By summer 2020, the college began allowing faculty and students back on campus while enforcing strict safety protocols. The Dental Clinic (the expansion was not yet completed) underwent a "field hospital" makeover, where individual exam spaces were isolated using plastic sheeting and ventilation to reduce air contamination.

Employees began returning to campus throughout the summer. Virtually all returned to work by Aug. 1. On-campus classes resumed in fall 2020 with mask mandates and social distancing in place, including rearranging classrooms. Instructors kept attendance records for contact tracing and were prepared to move to remote or hybrid teaching as needed. Students who had to attend remotely could tune in to face-to-face classes or view class recordings. Fall 2021 was again under a normal schedule, while campus officials kept a close eye on changing conditions and remained prepared to act if deemed necessary by the county health department.

# STUDENT SUCCESS AND INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND EFFECTIVENESS

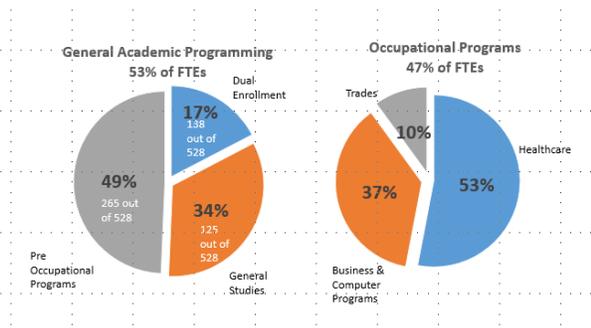
## Standard 1.A. Mission

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

*Great Falls College MSU provides high quality educational experiences supporting student success and meeting the needs of our community.*

Great Falls College MSU’s mission statement reflects a commitment to student success and to the community that has remained solid since its inception.

Its mission to provide high quality educational experience is reflected in its focus on both workforce and transfer education. General academic programming represents 53% of the full-time equivalent students (although it should be noted that 49% of the general academic programming serves pre-program students preparing for occupational programs); occupational programs serve 47%.



Since its beginning, the college has provided a significant amount of its occupational programming to serve future healthcare providers, followed by business and computer technology, and finally for trades. These areas reflect demand from the community and region. The college demonstrates its commitment to student learning and achievement through its emphasis on course,

program, and college student learning outcomes assessment, its long-standing internal academic program review, its promotion of program-specific accreditation and third-party licensing and exams; its connections to the community through its program advisory committees; and its commitment to meeting students where they are.

By working through its advisory committees and partnerships with various community organizations, Great Falls College ensures that its academic offerings meet evolving community needs. The college further serves the community by offering extensive self-enrichment and continuing education programming through [Lifelong Learning](#), in serving as a community gathering place, and in operating a professional [testing center](#) for industry.

## 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.

Great Falls College has several formal assessment processes to evaluate institutional effectiveness: strategic planning, student learning assessment, academic program review, administrative program review, and its budgeting process. Evaluation is also triggered by external forces, such as Montana University System requirements and benchmarks, NWCCU requirements and standards, and external accreditation and industry standards, often manifested in formal licensing and exams.

### Strategic Planning

The college uses its strategic plan for ongoing institutional evaluation and planning. When the current accreditation cycle began, the college reacted to feedback on the previous Year Seven report and rewrote its strategic plan, organized into four core themes with objectives and indicators for each theme. Subcommittees of the College Planning, Budget and Analysis Committee (CPBAC) developed annual goals and action plans and reported progress to the CPBAC and the Executive Team.

Peer reviewers from NWCCU in 2018 noted a disconnect between the Core Themes and the indicators meant to measure them. The college, through its College Assessment, Analysis and Accreditation Committee (CAAAC), responded to this challenge and determined that some of the college's current initiatives did not fit cleanly into the existing Core Themes. The resulting revised strategic plan was based on three strategic goals with metrics, annual goals, and long-term goals for each. These were approved by the Montana Board of Regents in December 2019. Progress on the goals was reported monthly to the Executive Team and the CBPAC. A final report (See Appendix 4: Strategic plan 2016-2022) demonstrates progress between approval and fall 2021, when planning began for a new strategic plan.

The Executive Team is leading the latest effort, gathering input and information from various campus groups, in three categories: Opportunities — expand enrollment and engage communities; Inclusivity — remove barriers and provide support; Excellence — learn, assess, and innovate. College leadership will use the results on the metrics to assess institutional effectiveness.

### Student Learning Outcomes Assessment

Faculty participation is critical to the success of student learning assessment process. Faculty assess learning outcomes at the course level and are the driving force behind effective program-level and institutional learning outcomes assessment. The director of teaching and learning innovation guides the assessment process, working collaboratively with program directors, department chairs, individual faculty, and the [Student Learning Assessment Committee](#).

This committee comprises faculty representatives from all academic divisions and is chaired by the director of teaching and learning innovation. The committee serves as champions of outcomes-based student learning assessment, promoting its importance to the college mission. The committee supports ongoing and effective assessment practices by mentoring faculty colleagues and making recommendations supporting the development and improvement of institutional student learning assessment processes, policies, and procedures.

For the annual assessment report, the director of teaching and learning innovation collects data according to schedules set by the general education departments and individual programs. The director reviews and aggregates data to develop draft department and program reports, to which departments and programs respond and update as needed. Department and program reports are further aggregated into an institutional assessment report focused on the College Learning Outcomes and themes discovered across program/department reports.

In addition to an annual meeting to review data, collaborate, and update assessment plans and curriculum maps, faculty will also receive feedback and coaching, supporting curricular and instructional quality. Previous [assessment reports](#) demonstrate progress and results.

### Internal Academic Program Review

One key measure of institutional effectiveness is the strength of the college's academic programs. Internal academic program review (IAPR) contributes to institutional effectiveness by guiding academic programs through rigorous self-assessment.

The primary goals are to enhance the alignment of the college's academic programs with fulfillment of the college mission. To achieve these goals, internal program review procedures encourage strategic self-study and planning. Internal program review is based on self-inquiry, review, and improvement. The college reviews programs on a five-year cycle. This cycle may be accelerated for any program at the discretion of the chief academic officer based on a need identified in annual program snapshot data prepared by the institutional researcher.

The annual program snapshots are distributed to program directors and division directors each fall. The [snapshot](#) includes enrollment, retention, degree production, job placement, and wage data. Program directors and division directors use the information to make decisions about their programs.

"I always closely look at this data for my program when it comes out even if I don't have to report/reflect on it. ... I consider this information when planning conversations with my advisory board and/or thinking about programmatic assessment." - Kerry Dolan, Accounting and Business department program director. As examples she points to two significant changes driven by snapshot data. One was that elective courses for the AAS Accounting degree were restructured to support students who may transfer to a bachelor's program. This was supported by the consistently (relatively) high transfer rate reported on the snapshot. Transferability continues to be a consideration when adding new courses and approved electives. Second, was the addition of the Accounting Internship (ACTG 298), supported in part by a desire to improve the employment rates reported on the snapshot.

The Internal Academic Program Review Committee (IAPRC), currently a committee of the Faculty Senate, comprises faculty members and key administrative personnel. The committee establishes the process and tools for academic program review with the goal of supporting programs in self-study and contributing to institutional decision-making and resource allocation.

Program directors complete a self-study report and presentation to the committee using the same metrics identified within the annual program snapshot reports, along with feedback from the program's advisory committee and graduate surveys. The committee reviews the information using weighted evaluative criteria, assessing efficiency and effectiveness, and making one of three recommendations to the Executive Team: 1) program continuation, 2) discontinuation, or 3) continuation with modification.

Programs are scored based on their ranking against other programs using these criteria and ranked into quintiles. The decision for continuation, discontinuation, or continuation with modification relies on this ranking to establish alignment with the college mission.

Program review is conducted in the fall and reported to the Executive Team in December and to the CPBAC in early January, in time for any recommendations that require funding to be considered when budgeting commences in February. The committee chair also reports to Faculty Senate in February.

The committee (IAPRC) also continuously reviews its own processes and procedures to ensure consistency with institutional planning, structure, and needs

#### External accreditation

Many programs have specialized external accreditation standards, which often include budgeting and resource allocation benchmarks set solely by the program itself. Although external accreditation does not usually have prescriptive standards, the program director is expected to set these benchmarks.

One example is the financial benchmarks set by the Physical Therapist Assistant program. The program director uses information gathered from the institution through program review, which assesses the financial impact of the program, including prerequisites. Some of the data gathered include unduplicated headcount and financial impact per full-time equivalency (FTE).

Additionally, the program director reviews the annual budget with the chief financial officer regarding headcount and the break-even point. With this information, the director can assess program effectiveness and recruitment needed to obtain the headcount benchmark. Staying within the program capacity, the director follows up with surveys and pass rates to make sure there is appropriate space and resources for students.

#### Administrative Program Review

Administrative departments, including student support services, undergo a process similar to academic program review. However, these areas are compared to themselves, rather than to each other. The review was designed by a committee of employees from non-academic areas and was piloted in 2018. All non-academic areas participated in administrative program review

in 2019 to support iterations to the process and to help establish baseline data. All non-academic or administrative departments are reviewed on a three-year cycle.

The review consists of a self-study completed by each non-academic department. The self-study guides departments through setting goals, reflecting on effective practices and those that may need revision, and identifying departmental needs. Administrative program review is intended as a continuous improvement device for each department to monitor progress and improvement, as well as to support institutional resource allocation. ([Sample self-study](#)).

The APR committee evaluates self-studies using a rubric that allows members to assign scores and offer feedback for each criterion:

- Mission, Goals, and Objectives
- Policies and Procedures
- Resource Adequacy
- Organizational Context and Impact
- Communication and Stakeholder Feedback
- Budget and Efficiencies

The committee's findings are submitted to the Executive Team and to the department. Findings may include actions required of the departments, as well as recommendations, commendations, and suggestions for resource allocation. Findings also are shared at the College Planning, Budget, and Analysis Committee's (CPBAC) January meeting to support transparency and shared information across campus. These results also provide important data for the college to use in evaluating institutional effectiveness in non-academic areas and guiding resource allocation.

### **Budgeting**

The college's budgeting process provides another opportunity to assess institutional effectiveness in its financial positions. It begins with a report in August or September from the Budget Office to the Executive Team and the CPBAC. A detailed [budget](#) is also published on the CPBAC website.

In October, the Budget Office provides a financial impact report on program revenue and expenses. In early summer, the final CPBAC meeting of the academic year, the Budget Office gives a budget against spending report for the current year and a preliminary budget for the coming fiscal year. The Executive Team receives updated budgets throughout the summer.

The information is used to make budget decisions that support the college's mission, strategic plan, and goals. For example, based on information provided, the Executive Team decided to use institutional funds to support the Dual Credit Coordinator position, which was previously grant funded, to help its dual enrollment students be more successful and transition to full-time college students, thus increasing retention and enrollment. These are two of the college's strategic goals and are tied to the dual enrollment component of the Montana University System's performance-based funding model, discussed below.

As another example, faculty lines have been reallocated to fit institutional needs. Data showed the number of general education students declining yet the college is adding two entry-level business degrees in fall 2022. Therefore, the Executive Team approved converting a Writing faculty line to a business and computer technology line.

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.

Great Falls College has several mechanisms for setting goals, objectives, and indicators – including its strategic plan and the Montana University System performance funding. Strategic Goal 2 from the 2016-2022 plan can be compared to regional and national peers. Other goals and indicators are set in the university system performance funding formulas. The college can compare itself with other units of the university system.

### Strategic Plan

The most recent strategic plan was adopted in December 2019 with Goals, Actions (Objectives) and Metrics (Indicators). The goals in the strategic plan (See Appendix 4: Strategic plan 2016-2022) are tied to the state’s performance funding model, which prioritizes retention and completion.

### Montana University System Performance Funding

The Montana University System implemented performance funding in FY2015, setting aside some state funding for campuses that meet performance goals. The overall goal is: “Utilize performance funding as a system-wide strategy to increase degree production and help reach the State’s goal of increasing the percentage of the population with a higher education credential from 40% to 60%.” The funding indicators are degrees/certificates awarded and under-represented/at-risk graduates, retention rates and under-represented retention, dual enrollment, remedial success, and credit accumulation. Institutions are measured on the increase over their own three-year average, resulting in a weighted score for each indicator. These are measured against a statewide growth target. Any campus failing to reach the growth target receives a percentage of the performance funding. [Montana University System Funding allocations](#) (Great Falls College, slide #14).

Although developed as a funding incentive, the data provide an opportunity for Great Falls College to compare its performance against other Montana campuses.

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.

Great Falls College MSU has planning efforts that involve various campus constituencies, allowing multiple voices to be heard. Responsibility for planning rests with the Executive Team, which has charged the College Planning, Budget and Analysis Committee (CPBAC) “with

gathering and interpreting institutional data to evaluate performance and effectiveness at the institution, division and department levels.”

This committee of 25 [members](#) represents faculty, staff, and students. Committee members are charged with disbursing information and gathering feedback throughout campus.

### Operating Budget

The CPBAC leads strategic and annual (operational) planning and works with the college’s leadership to strategically allocate resources “to improve overall institution effectiveness and achieve the priorities as set forth by the strategic plan.” ([Policy 104.1](#))

The college follows a well-established budget planning schedule and process. In February, the budget office sends each department a budget planning sheet that shows actual spending for the past four years and the current year budget. Departments propose a line-item budget for the next three years, along with explanations for any major changes. The three-year look gives the departments and the college an opportunity to plan for initiatives that may need additional resources in the next several years.

The executive director of operations compiles the budget proposals and presents them to the CPBAC. The committee makes recommendations to the Executive Team on numerous governing decisions, including setting enrollment projections and the budget. The CPBAC also makes recommendations to the Executive Team on changes to the budget if revenue does not meet expectations or spending needs are greater than what is budgeted. Annual operating budgets receive final approval from the Montana Board of Regents at its September meeting.

### Long range Building Plan

Great Falls College MSU participates in the Montana University System’s long-range building planning. Because the Montana Legislature meets every two years to allocate state funding, long-range building planning begins in the summer (odd-numbered years) a year and a half before the Legislature convenes. Great Falls College solicits input from departments and divisions and develops a preliminary project and priority list. These submissions are followed by campus visits, presentations, and discussion, culminating in submission of campus project lists to their flagship university. Early the following year, the state Board of Regents and university presidents develop a consolidated long-range building priority list. The Board of Regents presents its approved priority list to the state Architecture and Engineering Division for inclusion in the state construction budget. The Legislature convenes beginning in January of odd-numbered years to pass the state budget.

### Institutional Planning

One objective of the College Planning, Budget and Analysis Committee (CPBAC) is to work with the Executive Team on strategic planning. There have been two such efforts since 2016. The first started with a wide-ranging set of committees made up of members of the CPBAC. These committees were assigned to one of the core themes: Academic Preparation, Community Development, Transfer Preparation, and Academic Workforce Development. The groups developed objectives for each theme, as well as core indicators, metrics, and seven-year action

plans for each objective. These were approved by the CPBAC and Executive Team. Each subcommittee monitored its action plans and reported on metrics to the CPBAC.

Following the NWCCU mid-cycle peer review, another CPBAC committee (College Assessment, Analysis and Accreditation) revised the plan to address the recommendation that the “Core Indicators efficiently and accurately demonstrate the achievement of intended outcomes,” as well as other components of the plan that had become outdated. This revision was adopted by the CPBAC and Executive Team in 2019. Since then, the committee has provided monthly progress reports to both bodies. A final report on that plan was adopted in early 2022 (See Appendix 4: Strategic plan 2016-2022).

The Executive Team embarked on a new strategic plan effort in fall 2021. The team held a retreat to outline three intentional focus areas (Opportunities, Inclusivity, and Excellence) and has been soliciting input from all campus entities about goals and objectives that relate to these focus areas.

### Joint Directors

Much of the day-to-day planning and assessment take place in another CPBAC committee, Joint Directors, which consists of representatives from the academic and student services departments. The committee provides a venue for academic and student affairs personnel to work together to fulfill the committee’s purposes to identify issues, gaps, and problems; and to analyze and identify appropriate solutions

This group works through the granular details of initiatives, such as how to implement the 8-Week Advantage scheduling and to enable students to enroll in the second block. Recently, Joint Directors focused on increasing student retention by forming a First-Year Experience group which identified gaps in the first-year student experience. Their work resulted in a [Student Resources webpage](#), a resource course in the learning management system, and input on the online orientation software being implemented.

### Academic Planning

Academic planning is also inclusive and allows for input. Some steps are dictated by external agencies, such as NWCCU, the Montana Board of Regents (BOR), and Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE). Others are driven by internal policies and procedures.

Planning for new programs begins with the [Academic Planning and Priorities Report](#), due each May to the state commissioner’s office. To prepare for this report, the Academic Affairs Leadership Team meets with divisions and departments to vet new program ideas — both from academic affairs and student services. The report is presented to the college Curriculum Committee, a subcommittee of Faculty Senate, and the College Planning, Budget and Analysis Committee. In the report, the college outlines academic priorities and how they fit with the mission and strategic plan, a description of how priorities were determined, a description of programs that may be pursued, and a discussion of any areas that might be lower priorities (including plans for disinvestment, moratorium and/or termination).

The next step is to submit a [Request to Plan](#) to the commissioner’s office and the Board of Regents, specific to the program being proposed. These requests include a description of the program; the need for the program; resources required; efforts to collaborate with other university system units; a description of how the program fits with the college mission, strategic plan, and existing program array; and explanation of how the program aligns with the Academic Planning and Priorities Report submitted annually (see above). The Request to Plan document is submitted to Montana State University, the commissioner’s office, the chief academic officers of the other university system units and to the Academic, Research and Student Affairs Committee (a state Board of Regents standing committee), who all review the plan. It is then submitted to the Board of Regents for formal approval.

Planning then returns to the division director and program director to submit a proposal to the college Curriculum Committee. This submission includes all the information in the Request to Plan, as well as additional information such as documentation of advisory committee approval, descriptions of the program’s fit within the institution and existing programs, curriculum details, implementation plan, and program assessment plan. If approved, the proposal is submitted to Montana State University and to the commissioner’s office and chief academic officers of the Montana University System. The approved program proposal is submitted to NWCCU and to the Department of Education, as appropriate. [Diagram of proposal planning.](#)

Program modifications are not included in the Academic Planning and Priorities or Request to Plan procedures but do undergo the same scrutiny by the college Curriculum Committee. Substantive program changes must also be approved by the state commissioner’s office.

Planning for ongoing academic programs is supported by Internal Academic Program Review, as outlined in Standard 1.B.1. Annual program snapshots and the program self-evaluations give the campus information needed for careful planning.

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.

### Internal

Because the Montana University System uses performance funding for a portion of the state allocation, Great Falls College regularly tracks those metrics: completion, retention, remedial success, dual enrollment, and credit accumulation. Many initiatives are driven by the need to improve student achievement as measured by these metrics. A [state dashboard](#) also allows the college to compare its performance with other units in the state.

Strategic plan reports are provided regularly to both the Executive Team and the College Planning, Budget and Analysis Committee (CPBAC) by the College Assessment, Analysis, and Accreditation Committee (CAAAC). These reports include data from the institutional researcher and information from internal entities working on these initiatives.

An important source of internal monitoring is the student learning outcomes assessment for course, program, and college learning outcomes. Institutional assessment reports to the campus provide valuable insights into the college's effectiveness in student learning and the potential need to focus resources on areas that should be supported and strengthened.

Information about academic programs is gathered through the formal Internal Academic Program Review process. The institutional researcher prepares an annual program snapshot ([Sample snapshot](#)) of the past five years. These data, along with a program self-evaluation are presented to the Internal Academic Program Review Committee, which makes recommendations to the division directors and the Executive Team.

A similar process was implemented in 2018 for non-academic and administrative departments. A key difference is that because departments have such varying functions, the review does not have set metrics. Instead, departments set goals and evaluate their performance on those goals. These are reviewed by the Administrative Program Review Committee, which provides feedback to the departments and reports to the Executive Team.

The college uses other data sources to assess the success of individual campus initiatives. For example, after implementing a change to 8-week blocks of instruction, the college began collecting qualitative and quantitative data on the initiative. A [report](#) summarizing the results was delivered to multiple campus groups, as well as to the Montana State University Council and the Montana Board of Regents.

Campus entities regularly collect data to help guide decisions. A few examples are below:

The Executive Team reviewed data on the number and enrollment in night classes to determine if they were viable and found such classes were being replaced by online options.

An inventory of high-impact practices in use revealed confusion amongst faculty between high-impact practices and effective teaching strategies. Using that data, the director of teaching and learning innovation created workshops on these practices and incorporated a reflection on them into the student learning outcomes assessment process to encourage discussion.

A "Mini-Byte" program was started several years ago to allow community members to take the first week of a regular online course at no charge to enable them to experience college at minor risk. Attendees could choose to continue the class by regular admission. After several years, data showed the program was underused, so it was discontinued.

After implementing a new advising model in fall 2019 for new students, the Executive Team reviewed retention data to analyze its impact and subsequently continued the model.

The college monitors its innovative Connections 101 program, operated jointly with the Great Falls Public Schools and Montana Department of Labor and Industry, with regular data reports. This program allows at-risk students to enroll at no cost in a program that combines college readiness with career exploration to prepare these students for college or the workforce.

Two data sources that span the internal and external categories are the IPEDS annual reports and the National Student Clearinghouse Post-Secondary Data Partnership project. Great Falls College submits information to IPEDS and uses the comparison with IPEDS defined peer institutions to measure itself against its peers. The State of Montana has joined the Post-

secondary Data Partnership, which means all units of the Montana University System will have access to the following data points to compare with other institutions: gateway-course completion; credit accumulation rate; credit completion ratio; retention and persistence; transfers; completion rates and earned credentials at two-, four-, six-, or eight-year intervals; credentials conferred and time to credential.

### External

The college employs several approaches to monitoring its external environment: engaging with industry and program advisory committees; gathering national, state, and regional labor market data; participating in national data gathering (IPEDS); partnerships with secondary schools; community listening sessions; and tracking requests for programs not offered.

College faculty and staff collaborate with industry in the region. These include conversations about internships or apprenticeships; regular meetings to organize schedules for healthcare clinical experiences; recruiting professionals to be adjunct faculty, classroom speakers, and clinical instructors; and serving as formal members of community and professional agencies. All these contacts give the college a sense of its external environment, as well as providing informal feedback on how graduates are faring in the workplace.

All AAS programs have a program advisory committee of industry representatives, which meets at least once a year to advise the program about curriculum, industry trends, enrollment/recruitment, retention, and completion.

Two important sources of external data include program accreditation and third-party licensing and credentialing. Many [health science programs](#) are accredited by professional bodies. The self-evaluation required by these bodies provides valuable information about these programs individually and in relation to their peer institutions. Many Great Falls College programs also prepare students for third-party licensure or certifications. These can provide useful information for planning.

The college uses both the Montana Department of Labor and Industry and EMSI Burning Glass databases as external information sources about employment openings, trends in new fields, and current and projected wages. The Bureau of Business and Economic Research presents an [annual economic outlook report](#) that analyzes both the state and regional economies. This information is used to assess the demand for programs and the return on investment for students in various fields. The college uses the information, as well as data from the U.S. Department of Labor's O\*Net, when planning for a new program, revising a program's curriculum, or terminating a program. Input is also sought from the local Chamber of Commerce and economic development authority.

### Institutional Effectiveness

Great Falls College uses reports from the above internal and external sources to evaluate institutional effectiveness. Responding to a steady decrease in enrollment since 2012, the college has turned its attention to retention and completion as major indicators of institutional effectiveness. The health of the institution is tied to these factors – not only because of the financial implications but also in the viability of the academic and student support programs.

The college carefully gathers data and reports on initiatives it has implemented to improve retention and completion rates.

The most far-reaching initiative has been the adoption of two 8-week block schedules in each semester, called the 8-Week Advantage. The college has tracked data since this initiative's inception. Campus and university system [reports](#) from the pilot in 2017 looked at retention, success (credits completed), pass rates, and administrative challenges. This and annual reports since then have guided modifications and spurred campus-wide implementation. Careful examination of health care clinical scheduling demands guided the decision not to implement the change in these programs.

A [May 2021 report](#) allowed the campus to examine data on retention, completion rate of courses attempted, completion of college-level math and writing, and pass rates from before and after full implementation. The report included the following results:

- First-time, full-time fall 2018 cohort had a 1-year retention/completion rate higher than the fall 2014-2017 cohorts.
- Matriculated students are completing more credits.
- Students maintained the same proportion of completed credits in spring 2020 despite COVID impact.
- First-time students completed college-level math and writing at a higher rate in the first year than previously.
- Students completed a higher proportion of Great Falls College courses with passing grades than previously.

The college realized that the second block gave students an additional opportunity to enroll. The report showed that 70 students in fall and 54 in spring were able to enroll in the second block.

The college has devised an ongoing student achievement plan to regularly gather and analyze data (see Appendix 5 - Student Achievement Data & Communication Plan).

The college also uses information from Internal Academic Program Review and Administrative Program Review self-evaluations and committee recommendations to monitor programs and departments, to determine if targeted resources are needed, or to reallocate resources. The Executive Team receives annual reports from both review committees.

## 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.

Great Falls College MSU offers the Certificate of Applied Science (CAS), the Certificate of Technical Studies (CTS), the Associate of Applied Science (AAS) in fulfillment of its mission to provide workforce training. The Associate of Science (AS), the Associate of Arts (AA) and the Montana University System Core are all offered to fulfill its transfer mission.

Every course has clearly defined student learning outcomes aligned to meet the appropriate program outcomes. Course and program outcomes are also mapped to the college's learning outcomes: Communication, Critical Thinking, and Professionalism. A chart showing the outcome alignment from course to program to college is included in every course syllabus.

New programs and program changes are approved by faculty serving on the college's Curriculum Committee, a subcommittee of Faculty Senate. New programs and substantive changes are also reviewed by the Montana Board of Regents and the NWCCU.

The college is organized into three divisions, headed by a division director. Each division comprises departments (math, English, Humanities, etc., in General Studies) or programs (applied programs such as nursing, welding, etc.) Curriculum changes are proposed by department chairs or program directors (in consultation with appropriate faculty) and the division director. Faculty members, program directors and division directors have the necessary credentials and industry experience to ensure the content and rigor are appropriate.

The college adheres to Montana Board of Regents [policy](#) for faculty and administrator credentials and experience. In addition, each program has an advisory committee of industry professionals who review curricular changes and provide feedback. Furthermore, the college employs adjunct instructors who are currently working in industry and provide additional current expertise, rigor, and relevancy to courses and programs.

Course rigor is also ensured through Great Falls College's adherence to the Montana Board of Regents [policy](#) on Common Course Numbering. Faculty participate in system-wide committees to establish course learning outcomes within their field of study. The Montana Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education notifies each campus when an area is to be reviewed and facilitates faculty meetings.

Concurrent dual enrollment courses must meet the college learning outcomes. Concurrent instructors submit a course syllabus, including the outcome alignment chart, a sample assignment, and final course assessment. College department chairs meet with the concurrent instructors (who must meet the same qualifications as adjunct faculty) and conduct class visits and evaluations to ensure rigor and outcomes are met.

Courses are scheduled in accordance with the college's [credit hour policy](#). Faculty evaluation includes a review of course syllabi – including outcomes and their alignment with program and

college outcomes — sample assignments, instructional materials, and assessments. The evaluator reviews online course shells and visits in-person classes. The process and forms are in the [Faculty Evaluation Handbook](#) and the [Adjunct Evaluation Handbook](#).

Program rigor is reviewed internally every five years by the Internal Academic Program Review Committee. In accordance with the [Board of Regents Policy](#), internal program review is conducted for all degrees and certificates to enhance alignment of the college's academic programs and their quality with community and state needs. To achieve this purpose, internal program reviews include a self-study as well as data on completion rates and job placement. Further, internal program reviews provide information for curricular and budgetary planning decisions for the divisions and the college.

Industry recognized credentials provide another measure of program rigor. Some credentials are embedded in courses and programs, such as Microsoft and Cisco certifications within the computer technology programs and American Welding Society qualifications in the welding program. Other programs, particularly in the Health Sciences, culminate in national certification exams, such as NCLEX for nursing and CST for surgical technologists.

Great Falls College actively pursues program accreditation from individual accrediting agencies. Adhering to the standards of these outside accrediting agencies helps ensure the programs have appropriate content and rigor to allow graduates to succeed.

Qualified faculty design course curricula that include course outcomes and program outcomes aligned to the college's learning outcomes. Faculty also identify the assessment tools for achieving the program and degree outcomes. The assessment tool for each course outcome is identified in the Outcomes Alignment Chart in each course syllabus. Learning outcomes can be assessed through exams, hands-on skill demonstrations, clinical practice, portfolios, projects, or written assignments. Faculty create and distribute grading rubrics for assignments.

The course syllabus also contains a grading scale and other information relevant to assessing achievement of learning outcomes. Additional information about student achievement for specific programs is found in the program handbooks. The college's grading scale is published in its [grading policy](#).

The number of credits in each program follows Montana Board of Regents [policy](#) and is listed in the college's catalog. Great Falls College adheres to [minimum grade requirements](#) set by the Board of Regents and lists these in the college catalog.

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.

Program curricula are developed by knowledgeable and experienced faculty based on guidelines from program-specific accrediting agencies, advice from advisory committees (industry experts), Montana University System General Education core requirements, and in collaboration with faculty in similar programs at other campuses. Programs clearly list pre-requisite and co-requisite courses in the college catalog to ensure students are prepared in their field of study. They have a suggested sequence of coursework listed in the catalog and in

program materials to guide students. The assessment tool for each outcome is also listed in the Outcomes Alignment Chart in each course syllabus.

New programs undergo rigorous review by the program's advisory committee, the college Curriculum Committee, the College Planning, Budget and Analysis Committee, and the Executive Team. Program outcomes are listed on the program approval form while course outcomes and assessment methods are included on the course approval form. New programs are also reviewed by the Montana Board of Regents and NWCCU.

The college has an established assessment process with templates for faculty and program directors. In collaboration with the director of teaching and learning innovation, programs develop their own assessment schedule of which outcomes will be assessed each year. Faculty teaching General Education courses follow the Gen Ed Core assessment schedule. Faculty meet annually to discuss assessment results and make changes in the department/program plans.

Course learning outcomes are listed in the syllabus (syllabus [template](#)) and are mapped to program learning outcomes and College Learning Outcomes. These are found in the program and department [assessment plans](#) available on the assessment website. [College learning outcomes](#) and all program learning outcomes ([click here for sample](#)) are published in the catalog.

Programs have minimum grade requirements that students must meet to progress in the program.

As a final check, once a student has applied for graduation, the registrar conducts a graduation audit to ensure the student has completed all requirements for the certificate and/or degree.

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.

Student learning outcomes are listed in the course syllabus ([template](#)) and are mapped to program learning outcomes and College Learning Outcomes. The syllabus is available in class, and/or through the D2L Brightspace learning management system. [College learning outcomes](#) and program learning outcomes ([click here for sample](#)) are published in the online college catalog. General graduation requirements as well as program-specific completion requirements are published in the catalog as well.

Programs and departments move from 100- to 200-level courses to identify a progression in skills and depth of information. The college also identifies courses as prerequisites or co-requisites to ensure students are progressing logically and are prepared for the more advanced courses. Information on prerequisites is in the college's [Policy 212 Prerequisites](#). Prerequisite and corequisite designations are listed in the college's online [catalog](#), both in the course descriptions and in the list of required classes for a program.

Academic divisions also list program outcomes in the handbooks students receive during program orientation. The outcomes support both the college mission and the program goals.

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.

Great Falls College is an open and rolling admissions institution. Students can apply for and enroll in a degree or non-degree program easily and at multiple times throughout the year.

The college operates under [Board of Regents Policy 301](#) which states that students must have graduated from a high school accredited by the state accrediting agency (using a diploma or final high school transcript) or have a high school equivalency completion assessment designated by the Montana Board of Public Education (GED or HiSet).

There are multiple points of entry for admission to the college due to the 8-Week Advantage. Students may start classes at the beginning of any 8-week block within the academic year (two blocks in fall semester and two in spring semester plus one in summer term).

Information about admission requirements and steps for enrolling is centrally located on the college [admissions website](#) and within the online [catalog](#). Additionally, when students are entered into the college's prospective student database (either through self-identifying at admissions visits, events, or programs, or through name purchases and data downloads), they are added to an extensive prospect communication plan operated by a Client Relationship Management (CRM) system. Students receive information about admissions requirements and how to apply via email, text, and direct mail. Students may also contact the Admissions office through email, telephone, or personal visit.

The college relies on the Admissions website to convey information about programs and features of the college, as well as step-by-step application instructions. Information about campus visits, tuition and fees, and academic programs is on this page. Additionally, the website is organized according to student type: First Time, Transfer, Readmit, Military, Non-Degree Seeking, Dual Enrollment, and International.

Any first-time or transfer student applies for admission through a statewide central application system, developed and implemented (fall 2020) by the Montana Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, in collaboration with institutions throughout the state. Students are directed to the [Apply Montana](#) application portal from all admission links on the college website. The central application allows students to apply to any of the 16 campuses in the Montana University System.

The campus also uses paper and electronic applications for specific groups, including readmit students, dual enrollment students, military General Education Mobile (GEM) students, and multi-campus students. Information and applications for those groups are available from the admissions website.

In addition to general admission requirements, nine academic programs (Dental Assistant, Dental Hygiene, Paramedic, Physical Therapy Assistant, Practical Nurse, Registered Nurse, Respiratory Therapy, Surgical Technology, and Welding Technology & Fabrication) are competitive entry and require separate applications and checklists. Information about program and application requirements and enrollment steps are on each program's website and in the application itself.

The application for any student includes required safety and security questions. If necessary, the student is notified by the admissions evaluator and instructed to complete a safety and security packet. The Admissions and Advising departments work together to process these applicants and follow established policy and procedures.

### Graduation Requirements

Each program lists graduation requirements and a suggested sequence of courses in the online catalog. The college also uses [DegreeWorks](#), a web-based degree audit and tracking system, to help students and advisors monitor progress. DegreeWorks provides an accessible, convenient, and organized way for students to know where they are academically and how to plan their progress. Worksheets display progress and list remaining courses. Students and advisors also can create “what-if” scenarios to explore other degrees.

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.

### Background of Student Learning Assessment at Great Falls College

Great Falls College has developed an effective system of student learning assessment after undergoing various [changes](#) since its implementation in 2007. One change is a conscientious shift in focus from a compliance-driven model to emphasizing inquiry and evidence. In 2016, the college responded to NWCCU recommendations to rewrite the institutional learning outcomes and separate student learning assessment from strategic planning. A faculty committee reduced [the institutional learning outcomes](#) from eight to five. The new College Learning Outcomes (CLOs) underwent [further revision](#) during the spring of 2016 and were fully [implemented in fall 2017](#). In spring 2017, leadership for student learning assessment became [centralized](#) in the director of assessment, a faculty member who fulfilled this position as part of their workload. To develop a plan, the director conducted [listening sessions](#) with faculty to learn about faculty perceptions of and needs regarding assessment.

As a result of the faculty listening sessions, the General Studies Division piloted [revised course-level assessment](#) in fall 2018. A small group of faculty also volunteered to [pilot a College Learning Outcomes assessment process](#) using the AAC&U VALUE rubrics to assess signature assignments in their courses. Both pilots offered useful findings regarding the assessment process and the need to review and possibly further revise the College Learning Outcomes. Specifically, the existing College Learning Outcomes as written were difficult to align to/assess and assessment using signature assignments was challenging and confusing for some. In March 2019, Dr. Natasha Jankowski, former director of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), visited the college as a [NILOA](#) coach. [Feedback](#) from Dr. Jankowski, from participants in the CLO assessment pilot, and from the piloted course-level assessment process supported further review and revision to Great Falls College’s institutional assessment.

Exemplifying a commitment to ongoing faculty training to support effective student learning assessment, the campus held its first annual [assessment workshop in August 2019](#). Faculty offered [feedback and ideas](#), creating a foundation for faculty-driven programmatic and

institutional assessment. As a result of workshop feedback, faculty representing all academic divisions formed an [ad hoc committee](#) to advise the director of assessment. The committee's charge involved offering feedback and suggesting [revisions to the College Learning Outcomes](#) and assessment process. Between September 2019 and April 2020, the campus made significant improvements. The committee became a permanent standing committee and engaged in [collaborative processes](#) to solicit faculty input on further revising the College Learning Outcomes, reducing them from five to three and ensuring that they were measurable and applicable across programs. Through [one-on-one interviews](#) with department chairs and program directors, a [focus group](#) of five faculty, and a [pilot group](#) of five faculty who tested revised reporting forms and an updated process, faculty played a significant role in guiding the campus toward a sustainable assessment model. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic delayed the planned implementation of the revised program-level assessment model. To maintain some momentum, full-time faculty completed the [revised reflection form](#) for any course taught during AY 2019-2020. The [report results](#) informed [future iterations of the assessment process](#).

### Current Practices and Assessment Model

When the campus returned to in-person operations in fall 2020, a shift in operational priorities postponed progress on the program assessment model in favor of [helping faculty develop skills to teach in multiple modalities](#). Faculty continued using course-level assessment with the intention of maintaining momentum and establishing baseline CLO data.

Although the plan to implement the [program-level assessment model](#) was postponed, important assessment work continued. Most departments and programs developed [curriculum maps](#), aligning course-level learning outcomes to program and college outcomes. Faculty continued to report on student achievement in courses, with the intention of scaling assessment results to the program level in the future. The first [institutional report](#) on student learning outcomes assessment, using results from AY 19-20 reports, was [presented](#) in October 2020 to all campus stakeholder groups. The Student Learning Assessment Committee drafted and presented [policy 216.1](#) Student Learning Outcomes Assessment and its [related procedure](#) to the campus. The policy and procedure became effective May 27, 2021.

The current academic year (AY22) has provided the opportunity to revive postponed plans. At the second annual assessment [workshop](#), faculty discussed how to prioritize program-level outcomes assessment. Departments and programs again reviewed and responded to draft assessment [reports](#), based on individual faculty reflections, which were then used to develop the institutional report of student learning assessment. The results of departmental and program reports led to the further iteration of the assessment process to better support the unique needs of externally accredited programs and General Education areas. These iterations were based on individual meetings between the director of teaching and learning innovation and [program directors](#) to ensure alignment of the campus assessment process and their programmatic accreditation requirements and other needs. These conversations resulted in [flexible reporting mechanisms](#) to drive program and institutional decision-making. [Results of the AY21 assessment report](#) were shared with the campus on January 7, 2022.

The [current student learning assessment process](#) involves program-specific reporting mechanisms and a modified process for General Education assessment that follows a [schedule](#) based on the Gen Ed Core outcomes. Programs and departments review and update [curriculum maps](#) as needed, aligning program and course-level outcomes. In most cases, faculty assess student learning at the course level, tying assessment activities to course, program, and institutional learning outcomes. Programs articulate assessment plans and set goals, measured through identified assessments in courses and metrics set by program directors. Progress reports will be submitted annually to the director of teaching and learning innovation for review and feedback, starting in May 2022. Annually, programs will review the previous year's assessment progress, set and revise goals, and make appropriate changes appropriate. The director of teaching and learning innovation and the [Student Learning Assessment Committee](#) plan to develop a feedback mechanism to support departments, programs, and individual faculty. This component, which will offer feedback and suggestions, as well as targeted training, support, and follow-up, will become effective in fall 2022. More information about the student learning assessment process can be found on the [assessment resources webpage](#).

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.

Student learning outcomes are established and assessed at the course, program, General Education, and institutional levels. The purpose of student learning assessment at all levels is to obtain a perspective of students' demonstrated attainment of the outcomes and then determine where adjustments and improvements are needed in instructional strategies, curricula, and programming.

### Course-Level Outcomes

Many course-level outcomes are determined by the [Montana University System's Common Course Numbering](#) (CCN) initiative. If CCN outcomes are not available for a course, faculty work with their program director or department chair to determine the most suitable outcomes. Faculty articulate course-level learning outcomes, assessment tools, and metrics using the [syllabus template](#). In many cases, course-level assessments are used to document the achievement of program and institutional learning outcomes.

### General Education Outcomes

General Education courses align programmatically to the [Montana University System \(MUS\) Core outcomes](#). The MUS Core includes learning outcomes for written and oral communication, mathematics, humanities, fine arts, natural science, social sciences, history, cultural diversity, and cultural heritage of American Indians. The MUS Core outcomes apply directly to the General Studies Certificate and Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees.

## Program Learning Outcomes

Academic programs outside the AA/AS and MUS Core establish and assess programmatic learning outcomes compliant with program accreditation, industry, and curricular requirements. Program learning outcomes may be found in the [catalog](#). Curriculum maps demonstrating alignment between course, program, and College Learning Outcomes (CLOs) are available on the [curriculum maps and assessment plans webpage](#).

## College Learning Outcomes

The College Learning Outcomes (CLOs) are Critical Thinking, Communication, and Professionalism: statements of the general knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that all students at Great Falls College MSU should be able to demonstrate upon completing their degree programs. The CLOs support the college's mission by encouraging high-quality learning activities within programs, enhancing the professional and personal lives of students.

CLOs are assessed with selected assignments and tools at the course level, although they will not be reflected in every course. Instead, the intent is holistic demonstration of the CLOs throughout a program of study. Individual programs determine the most appropriate points during students' learning experiences to align to and assess the CLOs.

Each [College Learning Outcome](#) is conceptualized through an institutional definition, an outcome statement, and examples of learning experiences that might assess student learning in that area. The learning experiences listed for each CLO are provided to offer context for the definitions and outcome statements. Faculty are encouraged to create learning experiences that are best suited to their program requirements and students' needs.

Faculty report student attainment of CLOs annually, according to their department or program assessment schedule and reporting process. Because CLO assessment tools and methods are not standardized institutionally, faculty are asked to report student CLO attainment by assigning a rating of 1 to 4 to the overall level of proficiency students displayed in CLO assessment. These data are aggregated for the institutional assessment report, identifying common themes across the academic divisions.

The Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee plans to develop a tool to support faculty in assessing the CLOs, with the goal of finding a balance between assessment consistency and programmatic autonomy.

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.

Although full integration of program-level assessment is still a work in progress, the student learning assessment process has informed critical work at Great Falls College MSU.

A significant change has been [centralizing assessment leadership](#) under the director of teaching and learning innovation. This role began as a portion of one faculty member's workload and has evolved into an administrative role that oversees both assessment and the Teaching and Learning Center.

Centralizing assessment leadership demonstrates a campus commitment to building and improving continuous improvement. Another result has been the establishment of a [standing assessment committee](#) of faculty representatives from all academic divisions. [Faculty feedback](#) during the first annual assessment workshop identified the importance of faculty voice and guidance in establishing a functional assessment model.

Further, feedback from the first assessment workshop and through [interviews](#) with department chairs and program directors confirmed the desire for and value of an [annual assessment workshop](#). Faculty identified the need for collaborative time to review data, set goals, and make plans. The director of teaching and learning innovation plans to schedule an annual assessment workshop during fall non-instructional days, prior to the start of the semester.

Iterating the assessment process itself exemplifies continuous improvement. Although past assessment processes provided valuable information to faculty, they have been overly complicated and too narrowly focused on course-level reporting without application to the program and institutional levels. Previous assessment models resulted in a “data rich/information poor” situation that was compliance-oriented and not faculty-driven. Through research, faculty [responses](#) to assessment data, [individual conversations](#), and [collaborative communication](#), we learned that an assessment model emphasizing flexibility while providing necessary data is the best path toward establishing a meaningful culture of evidence.

Faculty [support and professional development](#) have also been influenced by assessment efforts. For example, few faculty outside Health Sciences were aligning their courses with the Professionalism CLO. After reviewing faculty responses to assessment data and participating in conversations and feedback sessions, it was clear that several faculty struggled to apply the concept of professionalism. As a result, the Teaching and Learning Center offered a [workshop](#) and resources on assessing professionalism in General Education courses. The center has also offered professional development on specific assessment topics, such as [creating rubrics](#), [classroom assessment strategies](#), effective [grade book models](#), and [contract grading](#).

Individual faculty note planned changes to instructional practices and curricula on their assessment reporting documents. Departments and programs also note intended changes and improvements on their department/program assessment reports. The director of teaching and learning innovation and assessment committee are planning to create a feedback and follow-up system to support faculty in making these changes and evaluating their impact. Information about program use of assessment can be found on the [assessment reports page](#).

Faculty have also sought out support through the Teaching and Learning Center, working with the instructional designer and director of teaching and learning innovation to revise their courses and improve assessment. One notable example of instructional improvement is a faculty professional learning community for [assignment redesign](#). A small faculty group participated in a professional learning community in spring 2021 to learn more about the TILT model of assignment redesign. From that experience, the Teaching and Learning Center plans to [host](#) monthly “Assignment Redesign Community” drop-in sessions to offer faculty dedicated time to support one another in redesigning assignments for better assessment and improved equity for students. A goal of encouraging assignment redesign is to offer faculty a concrete method of connecting student learning to program-level and institutional assessment.

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.

## Transfer of Credit

Great Falls College follows all Montana University System [policies](#) that impact transfer, such as general education, outdated coursework, minimum course grades, math and writing proficiency, single admissions, undergraduate degree requirements, appeals, system of controls and a plan for assessing assessment itself. The official [transfer policy](#) is on the system website.

Faculty have the primary responsibility for evaluating whether transfer and prior learning credits should be granted – from establishing common course numbering to evaluating credits not covered by the Montana system.

From the Montana Office of the Commissioner [website](#): “In March 2018, the Montana Board of Regents charged the Office of the Commissioner to develop and improve protocols ensuring that the Montana's common course numbering system remains up-to-date and continues to assist students as they transfer. ... this effort led to the development of processes to ensure CCN remains up to date and new tools that leverage CCN to provide MUS students clearer pathways towards successful transfer.” These include regular course audits. The most recent audit can be found at the website link above.

The Montana University System convenes statewide Faculty Councils to establish and review learning outcomes for CCN courses. This effort ensures that students who are taking courses with the same course number are meeting the same learning outcomes. Rubrics and courses are reviewed every four years.

Many courses that are not part of the CCN review have been evaluated by Great Falls College as equivalent to Great Falls courses. Students can find these courses in the [Online Transfer Course Equivalency Guide](#), which allows a student to select a specific school and obtain a list of courses that are equivalent. Students are warned that the guide is a reference only and that official transfer credit evaluations are conducted in the Admissions and Records Office.

Students who seek transfer credit for a course that has not been evaluated submit a request to the Registrar's Office during admissions, with an official transcript from the transferring institution(s) and other materials, including copies of catalog descriptions or course syllabi. The Registrar's Office forwards the request to the appropriate program faculty or program director for review. The final decision rests with the faculty, although a student may appeal the decision following [procedures](#) established by the university system. [Transfer](#) information is provided in the catalog.

## Prior Learning Assessment

Great Falls College MSU's [prior learning assessment policy](#) stipulates that such credit is awarded only at the undergraduate level to enrolled students; is granted only for admitted students; cannot duplicate other credit awarded; is awarded only for college-level learning; is awarded

only for learning that falls within the regular curricular offerings at Great Falls College; and does not count toward enrollment for evaluating financial aid. Students and the appropriate faculty work through the process together, identifying a method to evaluate the experiential learning (i.e., portfolio, proof of competency, or challenge exam). The form is signed by both faculty and student and submitted to the registrar, who alerts Student Accounts to assess the fees. When the evaluation documents are submitted or testing is complete, the faculty evaluates it and, if approved, submits it to the division director. If all agree to the award of credit, the registrar posts the award on the student transcript and notifies the student. Experiential learning credits are posted on the student's transcript as Experiential Learning with the grade of P for pass. The [PLA checklist](#) describes each step of the process.

#### 1.C.9 Graduate programs.

Great Falls College does not offer graduate 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.

#### Recruitment

The director of Recruitment and Enrollment leads overall recruitment with support from department staff (enrollment, admissions, and dual enrollment coordinator), academic divisions, other student service areas, and communications and marketing. Academic programs are involved in recruitment and marketing at a variety of points. Division and program directors assist with prospective student engagement through email inquiries, campus visits, and outreach to schools and organizations. Capacity for programs is set by directors and executive leadership. Although recruitment efforts are ongoing, a formal recruitment plan will be finalized in fall 2022, after the 2022 institutional strategic plan is in place.

The campus operates within a recruitment cycle that has identified target populations and events, programs, and information that attracts, engages, and enrolls those target audiences.

Since summer 2019, there has been a concerted effort to work closely with the office of communication and marketing to develop brand differentiation and strategy.

Admissions/Recruitment and Enrollment and the [Strategic Enrollment Management \(SEM\) Program Communication Team](#) develop specific program marketing plans, tracked in a shared database. Progress is checked and reported at Joint Directors Committee (includes representatives of all campus divisions and departments) meetings. Admissions/Recruitment and Enrollment develops print and digital marketing materials and uses the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software system to communicate to prospects and applicants.

Examples include targeted promotion of Health Information Technology, Industrial Technology, Welding, and Cybersecurity, as well as transfer programs such as Education and Social Work.

The campus uses an expanded admissions funnel that has targeted messaging, programs, and events from the prospective student stage through the inquiry, applicant, admitted, and enrolled stages.

Target audiences include:

- High school students prior to graduation (14-18 years), including dual enrollment students and their influencers (parents, peers, counselors, teachers, coaches)
- Traditional students post high school graduation (18-25 years) and their influencers (parents, spouses, peers, work colleagues)
- Adult students (25+ years old) and their influencers (family and work colleagues)
- Additional subpopulations within each of these target audiences: military, American Indians, and international students).

To attract and respond to these targets, the campus developed customized communication plans using Client Relationship Management software. The communication plans use conditional logic, graphics, and responsive text to tailor the tone, language, and content to each student category. The campus highlights practical benefits of the college and its programs and includes student profiles that allow prospective students and applicants to identify themselves as Great Falls College students. Additionally, the college supports outreach by other student services areas, such as Financial Aid and Advising—supplementing their communication needs.

All communications (email, text, direct mail pieces) provide clear options for initiating the next step and contain a call to action so professionals can assist students in moving along the recruitment/enrollment pathway.

Programming and events are tailored to various target audiences and include annual group visits, such as College in a Day, Career Fairs, and Information Nights (both virtual and in-person for areas such as Financial Aid, Dual Enrollment, and Student Engagement). Some events are targeted for specific populations, such as “Homeschool Night at the College” for families of homeschooled students and “Engineering Day” for high school students interested in the 1+3 engineering articulation through which students can complete their first year of an engineering degree at Great Falls College and then transfer to Montana State University for the remaining three years.

Individual visits and tours are offered through an easily accessible [on-line scheduler](#) from the main college (and admissions) website. Prospective students, applicants, and admitted students may also call, email, text, and walk in for service. For example, a small rural high school in Power, Montana, located approximately 45 minutes north of the college has begun bringing its senior students to the college campus each year for a hands-on tour and series of workshops, including “How to Read a Textbook.” Tours and events are tailored for the group’s needs.

In-person college fairs and virtual college fairs and information sessions provide direct student outreach. Admissions has a regular presence in local and regional high schools with office hours

and classroom visits. Admissions staff also respond to requests for specific classroom, high school, and community visits and events. The enrollment specialist coordinates with local job service, employers, and community agencies (United Way, Pre-Release Center, etc.) to provide information and responses to inquiries.

College faculty and program directors also visit high schools to establish relationships and recruit students. A few examples:

- Computer technology faculty serve as liaisons between the college's Cybersecurity programs and the high schools' Cyber Patriot clubs. Such partnerships have benefited both the college and the high schools. As a result of this partnership, a Cybersecurity Academy within the high schools is set to start fall 2022 enabling students to complete the first year of their AAS in Cybersecurity through dual credit their junior and senior years — including potential industry credentials offered by Microsoft and Cisco — then complete the second year at the college after high school graduation.
- The college's Accounting and Business program director visited outlying school districts within a one-hour radius of the college, resulting in several new concurrent dual enrollment courses being offered.
- The Welding program director has used the college's mobile welding trailer to provide training at statewide Future Farmers of America (FFA) meetings and competitions. Following the training, instructors have approached the college about expanding access to its students, including a concurrent dual enrollment option in a nearby city.

During the pandemic, such visits shifted to remote contact, such as a [video](#) for dual enrollment computer technology students created by a faculty member.

In addition to these regular types of visits, the college has formal programs to increase access to some underserved populations. Great Falls College has established a strong partnership with the Career and College Readiness Center (CCRC) — the school district's adult education program. The relationship began with visits to students in the program to talk about what it means to be a college student and programs at the college in which they might be interested. The collaboration evolved into a nationally recognized Connections 101 program. The CCRC tracked and shared data on how many of its students transitioned to college. Seeing an opportunity to increase the number of students entering college and helping them be more successful in that transition, the college and the CCRC developed a holistic non-credit semester-long program of career exploration; workforce readiness; basic computer, math and writing skill development; and a college course or job experience related to their career of interest. Through the college's Prior Learning Assessment, students can earn up to seven college credits at the end of the program and be prepared to either enter the workforce or enroll in college. Based on student success data, Connections 101 is being revamped to include a track for students who are ready to enroll in credit-bearing college courses the second 8-week block of the semester ([Connections 101 revision plan](#)).

Admissions staff work with faculty and program directors to promote the college's offerings. For example, Admissions staff have asked program directors to create a program-specific

activity for students to do during a tour. Program directors are also available to answer potential student questions directly.

Marketing is coordinated with recruitment so the college can develop materials, advertising, news releases, and social media campaigns that address needs related to planned events, new or changing academic programs, or application and other deadlines.

## Orientation

Degree-seeking students move from acceptance to orientation after they have completed pre-registration tasks: 1) furnish immunization records and 2) submit placement tests results or college transfer work in math and writing.

All degree-seeking students complete a brief online orientation prior to scheduling an advising appointment and registering for classes. The online orientation consists of five brief (7-10 minutes each) [modules](#) accessible via a personal computer or mobile device. A link to the videos is provided by email (through an established orientation communication plan). The online orientation modules cover the following:

- Logging-in to the student records system and claiming a student ID
- Advising, catalog, and class schedule
- Online learning management system
- Student services such as disability services, academic success center, tutoring, library, and food pantry
- Finding textbooks and general bookstore information
- Required Prevention Education (Alcohol Education and Sexual Assault Prevention)
- Title IX and mandatory reporting
- On-campus Opening Day event

A more robust orientation product is in development and will be released for new student use prior to fall 2022.

Admissions calls each student who has completed the online orientation to schedule an appointment with a professional academic advisor for course planning and registration.

All new students complete orientation to the college's technology and learning management system through the "[Tech Essentials](#)" online or in-person workshop. New students can also attend Opening Day, usually on the Saturday before the first day of the term. Several changes have been made to Opening Day over the past several years in response to student feedback. Currently, Opening Day consists of a brief welcome, an inspirational message from a faculty member, and a student and faculty panel who relate their experiences and answer questions. Following the panel, students can complete any remaining preparatory tasks, such as printing schedules, buying books, getting an ID card, finding classrooms, visiting Student Central for Financial Aid or Student Accounts tasks, completing Tech Essentials, downloading the college app, and taking a student-guided campus tour.

Opening Day attendance trends reveal that about 100 students usually attend in fall and 25 students in spring and that most of them will be attending face-to-face or hybrid classes. At the start of second 8-week block of courses each semester, the college offers the option (through

social media posts, CRM communication (emails, text messages and call lists) to create a personal Opening Day, i.e., accessing campus resources during a regular business day. Admissions staff members guide students through the same processes offered on Opening Day. Sessions are available online and through recordings. In general, Opening Day serves those on-campus students who want a final orientation to campus to feel comfortable before classes begin the following week.

Welding and some competitive entry healthcare programs also hold special orientation sessions during which they share program-specific information.

Tutors from the Academic Success Center visit classes during the first week to introduce themselves and their services. Tutoring is free to students and includes in-person and online options.

### Advising

Advising is a vital part of informing students about specific graduation or transfer requirements. Once students have identified their purpose (educational goal), advisors work with them to help them understand requirements of their specific goals and establish a plan to achieve those goals. Advisors continue to check in with students to determine if they are still on their path and, if not, to meet with them to revise that plan. Program requirements also are listed on each program's web site. (Sample for [Physical Therapist Assistant](#)). The online catalog contains extensive information about various [transfer opportunities](#).

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 post-graduation 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).

### Great Falls College MSU

The college publishes student achievement data in the [federal disclosure/reporting document](#) on its [consumer information web page](#) under the Student Outcomes heading, along with showing the diversity of the student body as far as gender, racial and ethnic background, and socioeconomic status (determined by percentage of Pell Grant recipients). Graduation data are disaggregated by gender, Pell Grant recipients and subsidized Stafford Loan recipients. Males had a higher graduation rate (22%) than females (15%). Graduation rates were lowest for recipients of Pell Grants (13%) and for recipients of subsidized Stafford Loans (16.7%), compared with students who received neither (17.6%). Graduation data by race and ethnic background are suppressed in this report to protect privacy because of the small numbers.

Great Falls College has three main indicators that drive much of its planning and decision-making: enrollment, retention, and completion/transfer. Attention also is given to remedial success, credit accumulation, job placement, median wages, and cost/student, which drive various initiatives. The college has two main sources of peer data -- the Montana University

System and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The Montana University System provides student achievement data for comparing all system campuses. IPEDS provides comparison data from 34 peer institutions nationwide.

These indicators are shared with standing campus committees, such as Executive Team, Academic Affairs Leadership Team, College Planning, Budget and Analysis Committee, Joint Directors, Faculty Senate, Staff Senate and Associated Students of Great Falls College MSU. Some examples include [IPEDS report](#) to the College Planning, Budget and Analysis Committee and progress reports ([Sample – 8-Week Advantage update](#)) on the 8-Week Advantage initiative. Reports on post-graduation success, retention, completion, and persistence data are also incorporated into the Internal Academic Program Review process.

One major initiative at the college and system level has been to increase the success of developmental education students. The success of these students is calculated as part of the state’s performance-based funding model. Under the direction of the chief academic officer, the directors of General Studies and the Academic Success Center researched national best practices in student success and created a pilot program that incorporated many of the practices, including 8-week block scheduling to accelerate developmental education, paired classes, required tutoring, and academic skills workshops. The 8-Week Advantage pilot launched fall 2016.

Promising preliminary pilot results were shared after the first block with the Executive Team and at a One MSU convening of five Montana campuses that fall. Based on feedback from students, faculty, and staff, the program was revamped and certain components, such as paired courses, were kept. Further pilot results were shared in 2017 with the Executive Team, Montana State University Council, and Joint Directors. Because of the favorable results, the Executive Team decided in spring 2017 to implement 8-week block schedules fall 2018, particularly for general education students – which included the developmental education students – who had lower retention rates than health science program students.

To implement the change, a group of faculty department chairs, the registrar’s office, financial aid office, advising, division directors, and admissions created an implementation plan. Based on the recommendation of faculty and division directors, the group developed three roll-out phases:

- Fall 2018 – All general education courses except math and sciences
- Fall 2019 – All general education courses except biology, adding Business & Technology and Trades
- Fall 2020 – All general education courses, Business & Technology, and Trades

Health Science programs were not included because they had higher retention rates, most had outside accreditation concerns, and the required number of clinical hours in courses could not be completed in an 8-week block.

Data on the effect of 8-week block scheduling have been regularly shared with campus groups, including the Executive Team, Faculty Senate, student government, and Joint Directors. The information has been made public through the Bridging Opportunities group, which includes educational, organizational, and business partners in Great Falls; at the Montana State

University Council; and at the Montana Board of Regents. The college created a plan to assess and communicate the initiative's impacts (See Appendix 5 - Student Achievement Data & Communication Plan).

### Internal Academic Program Review

A regular evaluation of institutional effectiveness occurs annually during Internal Academic Program Review. The Office of Institutional Research prepares snapshots of all programs: projected and/or actual job openings or transfer rate, median wages, degree/certificate production, retention, and annual FTE ([Sample snapshot](#)).

### 2016-2022 Strategic plan

The 2019 revision of the Great Falls College strategic plan contains one goal regarding student achievement:

Strategic Goal 2 Increase enrollment and retention of General Education and General Studies students to ensure sustainability.

Strategic Goal 2.a. Implement an integrated educational model (8-Week Advantage) to help reduce the time to graduation and increase satisfaction.

### Metric

Within five years (2024), increase by 10% the proportion of General Education and General Studies students who graduate within 150% time. The plan focused on General Education and General Studies students because that cohort represented the “cleanest” data set to measure the potential impact of the 8-Week Advantage as those students had been taking courses exclusively in the 8-week format the longest. Also, other programs, such as health care programs with a clinical component remained in a full-semester format, so those students were taking a mix of 8-week (general education) and 16-week courses (healthcare). Finally, the cohort was chosen because it was experiencing the lowest retention rate at the time.

### Montana University System Peer Indicators

The Montana University System has identified and tracks indicators of student achievement for two-year colleges: undergraduate completion data, retention rates, remedial success rates, credit accumulation, and job placement. The indicators are included in the [performance funding dashboards](#) and [student data dashboards](#) and are published on a public website, which allows the college to compare itself with the five other two-year campuses in the Montana University System.

Of these available indicators, transfer, completion, retention, remedial success, and credit accumulation have driven several initiatives at Great Falls College in the past several years: implementation of the 8-Week Advantage, creation of just-in-time college success modules, implementation of co-requisite coursework in several areas to assist students who place below college-level readiness in math and writing, and intensive advising for new students.

## Montana University System Disaggregated Data

Completion data and retention rates for Montana University System campuses are disaggregated by socio-economic status (Pell eligibility), American Indian or Alaska Native, non-traditional aged students, and Veterans.

The state has [disaggregated data by race](#) for all campuses on retention, graduation from an associate's degree program, and completion, allowing Great Falls College to compare itself to the system as a whole or to other two-year campuses.

## IPEDS

The college participates in the National Center for Educational Statistics [IPEDS report](#), which allows it to compare data with 34 peer institutions across the nation. Indicators of student achievement from this report include retention, graduation, and transfer rates. Graduation rates are disaggregated by race and Pell status.

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.

Great Falls College has access to disaggregated data on meaningful indicators from several publicly available sources that allow it to compare itself to state and national peers – the most useful are published by the Montana University System and in the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The college will be working to identify other peer institutions with which it can compare meaningful indicators, as well as identifying the most meaningful indicators to publish on its own website.

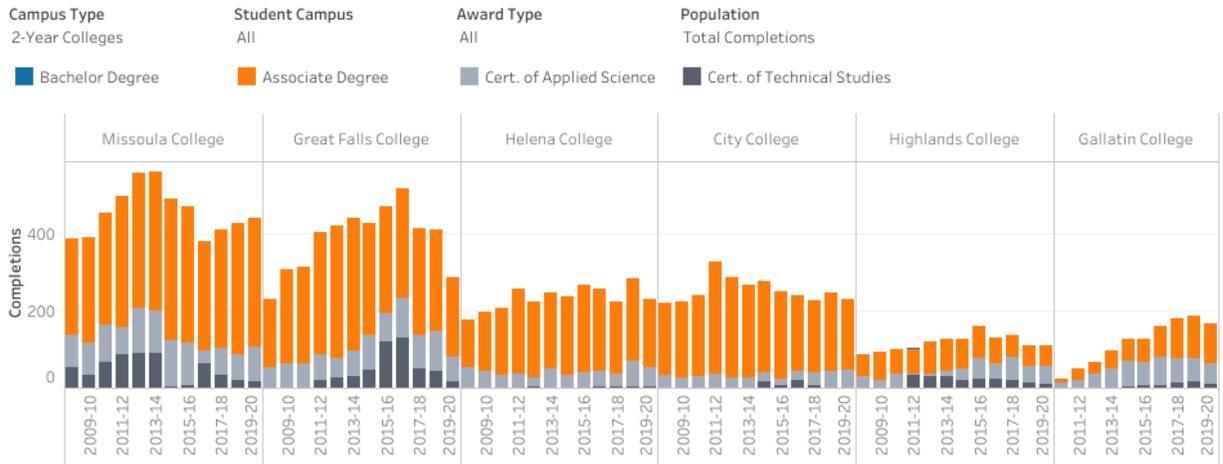
## Completion — Montana University System

In general, Great Falls College completion numbers (not rates) have been higher than the other two-year campuses, except Missoula College, over the past ten years. This is expected as Missoula College and Great Falls also had the highest enrollments from 2013 to 2021.

The 2019-20 academic year represented the lowest completion numbers for Great Falls College in ten years. The completion numbers had shown an increase from 213 in 2010-2011 to 517 in 2016-17, then began declining in 2017-18 (414), 2018-19 (410) and 2019-20 (286).

## MUS Undergraduate Completions

Annual number of undergraduate degrees and certificates awarded. Includes two and four degrees, as well as one-year certificates (CAS) and less than one-year certificates (16 to 29 credits, Cert of Technical Studies - CTS\*) awarded at 2-year colleges. Veterans are not listed in this dashboard prior to the 2016-17 Academic Year due to changes in the methods used to gather this information.



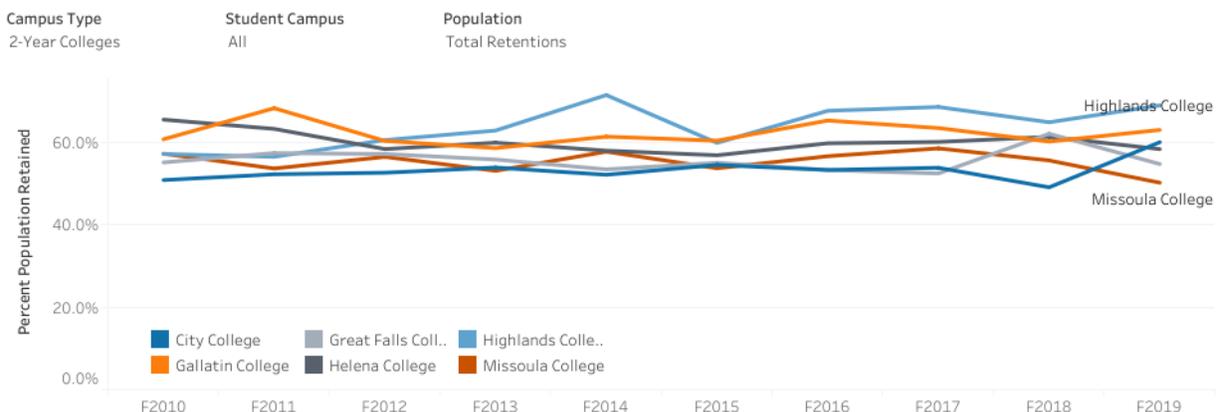
Great Falls College enrollment declined from 1,256 in 2014 to 709 in 2021, so a decline in completion numbers was expected.

### Retention – Montana University System

Retention data from the Montana University System can be found in the [Montana University System Performance Funding dashboard](#). Fall-to-fall retention rates in the other two-year Montana University System colleges fluctuated between a high of 58% and a low of 56% beginning with the fall 2010 cohort. Those same cohorts at Great Falls College ranged from 52.4% to a high of 62% for the 2016 cohort. The fall 2019 cohort had a retention rate of 55%.

### MUS Retention Rates

Fall to Fall retention rates. The cohort includes *all incoming undergraduates*: new full- and part-time first-year students as well as new full- and part-time transfer students; students will be considered retained if they return to any campus system-wide or earn a degree or certificate within the first year. Veterans are not listed in this dashboard prior to the 2016-17 Academic Year due to changes in the methods used to gather this information.



Great Falls College had a slightly larger proportion of students in the disaggregated categories than the two-year campuses as a whole: 8% (5% campus totals) were American Indian, 62% (56% campus totals) of completers were eligible for Pell, 60% (53% campus totals) were non-traditional students and 13% (10% campus) were Veterans.

For all two-year campuses, the retention rate for American Indian students in the past decade ranged from 38% to 51%. The lowest rate was in the fall 2010 cohort and the highest was in the fall 2019 cohort. The rate has fluctuated over the years but has increased overall. At Great Falls College, the retention rates for American Indian students show mostly improvement from 47% in the fall 2010 cohort to 63% in the fall 2019 cohort.

Socio-economic status is analyzed by comparing students who qualify for Pell grants to the rest of the population. Retention rates for this population at Montana two-year colleges was the same for the fall 2010 cohort (56.6%) and the fall 2019 cohort (56.9%), although the highest rates in that time period was 58.8% for the fall 2017 cohort and lowest was 52% for the fall 2015 cohort. At Great Falls College, retention for Pell students was 59.5% for the fall 2010 cohort and 55.7% for the fall 2019 cohort. The lowest rate was 50.8% for the fall 2014 cohort; highest rate was 64% for the fall 2018 cohort.

Veteran retention began to be reported in the Montana University System with the fall 2016 cohort. For Montana’s two-year colleges these rates were 57%, 59.6%, 52% and 60.4% for fall 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, respectively. At Great Falls College, the retention rates beginning with the fall 2016 cohort were 51.5%, 45.8%, 57% and 52.2%.

### Retention – IPEDS

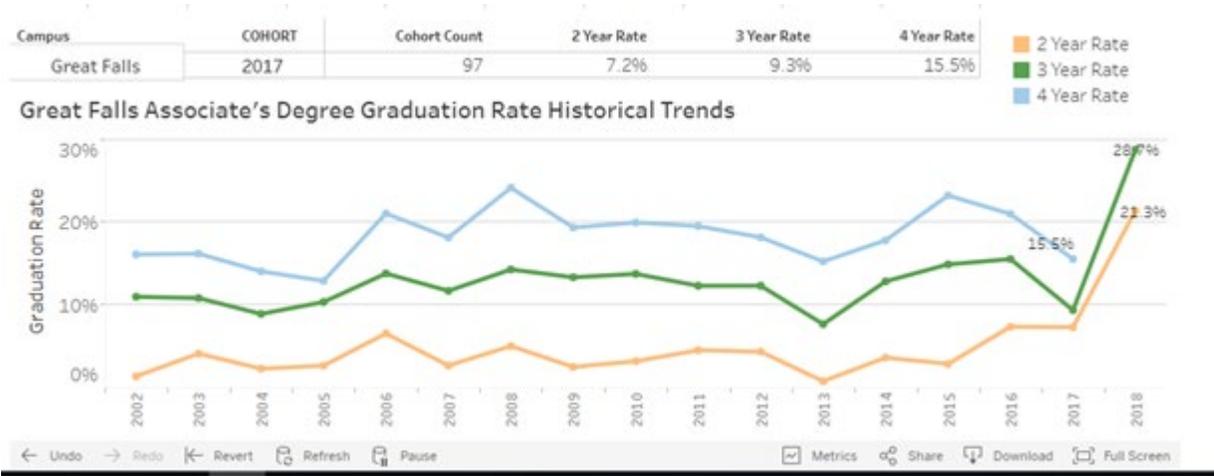
Data from IPEDS provide another source of comparison with 34 peer institutions nationwide. IPEDS reports on the retention status of first-time, degree-seeking students. Great Falls College outperformed its peer group for both full-time (59% vs. 57%) but had lower retention for part-time students (38% vs. 43%) for the fall 2019 cohort. The IPEDS report does not provide disaggregated retention data. (See Appendix 6, Figure 10).

### Graduation Rates - Montana University System

Graduation rates for the Montana University System can be found on its [dashboard](#).



The graph above shows that the two-year, three-year, and four-year associate degree graduation rates in Montana declined starting with the 2002 cohort until showing a slight improvement starting with the 2011 cohort.



In the graph above, associate degree graduation rates at Great Falls College showed more volatility. Two-year and three-year rates showed a sharp uptick with the 2018 cohort. Overall, the graduation rates were lower than the system rates. The Montana data are not disaggregated.

### Graduation and Transfer – IPEDS

IPEDS reports provide peer comparison data on graduation and transfer rates. The 2021 Data Feedback report shows Great Falls College behind its peers on graduation rates and ahead of its peers on transfer rates of full-time, first-time degree-seeking students within 150% of normal time for the 2017 cohort (See Appendix 6, Figure 11).

Disaggregated data (See Appendix 6, Figure 12) show Great Falls College ahead of its peers for American Indian students on this measure.

Award rates were similar for full-time Pell students and non-Pell students. At the peer institutions, award rates for non-Pell students were higher than Pell students. Award rates for part-time Pell recipients were higher than for non-Pell recipients at both Great Falls College and its peer institutions. (See Appendix 6, Figures 15 and 16).

### 2016-2022 Strategic plan

The 2019 revision of the Great Falls College strategic plan contained one goal addressing student achievement: retention of General Education and General Studies students.

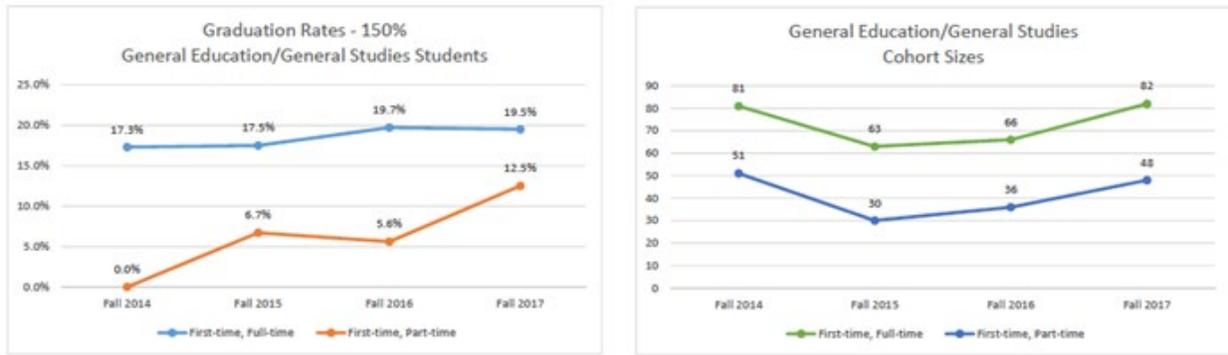
Strategic Goal 2 Increase enrollment and retention of General Education and General Studies students to ensure sustainability

Strategic Goal 2.a. Implement an integrated educational model (8-Week Advantage) to help reduce the time to graduation and increase satisfaction.

### Metric

Within five years (2024), increase by 10% the proportion of General Education and General Studies students who graduate within 150% time.

Graduation rates (below) improved for both groups, but more dramatically for part-time students.



This measurement focused on General Education/General Studies students as the 8-Week Advantage was implemented in stages starting with General Education/General Studies. Some of the healthcare program students have mixed 8-week and 16-week courses so were excluded to attempt to better measure the impact of the 8-week. The General Studies/General Education students also experienced the lowest retention rates. There are no peer comparisons with this measure.

### Job Placement - Montana University System

The Montana University System (MUS) provides [dashboard](#) data on job placement for MUS graduates. These data show that Great Falls College is placing most graduates at or above the statewide levels for two-year campuses in most programs. For example, for the 2018-19 cohort, only three of 12 programs had lower placement rates than two-year colleges statewide. (NOTE: Great Falls College had five programs that were not offered on any other campus, so comparisons were not available for those programs). Placement rates for Great Falls College programs ranged from 64% to 100%. Statewide placement ranged from 56% to 100%.

### Remedial Math and Writing - Montana University System

The Montana University System does not provide system remedial success data but does provide data for each campus. The metric is the number of students who enroll in remedial math or writing and then the percentage of those who complete a college-level math or writing course within two years.

Math: All Montana campuses showed improvements between the 2009 cohort and the 2018 cohort. At Great Falls College, the percentages for developmental students completing college-

level math within two years were 26% for the 2009 cohort and 40% for the 2018 cohort. At other two-year Montana campuses, the changes were 32% to 42%, 33% to 59%, 38% to 55%, 16% to 45% and 25% to 31%.

Writing: At Great Falls College, the writing success rate went from 35% (2009 cohort) to 79% (2018 cohort), but those numbers do not reflect a couple of dramatic increases and decreases throughout the period. Other campuses showed changes as follows: 40%-67%, 51%-65%, 38%-59% and 28%-54%.

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

Great Falls College uses a variety of vehicles to provide information and encourage participation in its shared governance model. Chief in this effort is the **College Planning, Budget and Analysis Committee** (CPBAC) which reports directly to the Executive Team and includes representatives of all campus divisions and departments. Representatives are expected to convey information to their divisions or departments. Meetings are held monthly during the academic year and are open to the public. [Minutes](#) are posted on the committee's website. Information discussed at these meetings includes financial/budgeting, enrollment, strategic planning, accreditation, academic planning, IPEDS reporting, long-range building planning, and student learning assessment. On some items, the committee provides input; on other issues, it makes formal recommendations (such as budgeting, strategic planning) to the Executive Team.

#### Faculty Senate/Staff Senate

Faculty and Staff Senates receive many of the same reports as CPBAC and are asked to provide input and make recommendations to the Executive Team. Meetings of both groups are open to everyone; meeting minutes are posted on the appropriate web sites: [Faculty Senate](#), [Staff Senate](#). These groups report to the Executive Team, which meets weekly. Meeting minutes are posted to the Executive Team [webpage](#).

#### Convocation

Convocation ([Sample spring 2021 presentation](#)) is an opportunity to disseminate information campus-wide and encourage discussion of campus issues and initiatives.

#### Transparency in Data

Montana University System data are available in the [Performance funding dashboards](#) and on the university system [data web pages](#). Great Falls data reports are posted in the Tableau system. The college office of institutional research provides on-demand training on using this site, which is available to faculty and staff using their institutional credentials.

## Equity Gaps

### American Indians

Several equity issues have attracted the campus's attention over the past several years. The one-year retention rate for American Indians is between 5.5% and 22%. The college has implemented and continues to explore various initiatives to close this gap.

The Montana University System, also recognizing this equity gap, has a tuition waiver [policy](#) for American Indian students. Typically, Great Falls College provides \$99,000 in tuition waivers to 50-60 students a year. The college website also provides links to [scholarships](#) available for American Indians students.

American Indian students are an important segment of the college's student population. As well as serving students from several reservations in the region, Great Falls serves members of the Little Shell Tribe, headquartered in Great Falls.

Approximately 9.4% of the student body in fall 2020 were American Indian or Alaska Native. Opportunities to engage students in leadership, mentoring, and community service at Great Falls College (Note: Great Falls College uses the term Native American) include cultural activities such as a tipi set-up, beading group, Native American Eagle Feather Ceremony for graduates, a Native American Student Group, Native American Heritage Day, Indigenous Day, and Native American Heritage Month. Great Falls College promotes a Native American cultural presence throughout the campus in creating an environment that is welcoming and inclusive, including a [Native American Enrichment Center](#) where students can gather, socialize, and study. The college's institutional researcher provides annual reports ([fall 2020 report](#)) to the Executive Team and the Native American Enrichment Center director, documenting the number of center visits, as well as student achievement data for students who use the center.

American Indian art is exhibited on campus, including a large student-made dreamcatcher displayed near the entrance of the bookstore. Tribal flags are hung over the entrance to Student Central in the main atrium.

The college's commencement exercises include an American Indian prayer and/or song. In 2021, the event added a land acknowledgement statement.

American Indian high school students and their families can explore the transition to higher education through expanded partnerships with Great Falls Public Schools, area schools, Talent Search, Gear Up, and outreach to surrounding tribal nations and communities.

Two representatives from Great Falls College serve on the state American Indian Minority Achievement (AIMA) Council to identify ways to strengthen college services and to identify best practices for recruitment, orientation, and retention of American Indian students. One representative oversees the [American Indian Scholars Program](#), which includes academic and professional development, service to the college, and mentors. Workshops for American Indian students were offered face-to-face until the pandemic necessitated a move to online, which has affected participation. Scholars receive a stipend each semester for their participation. [Great Falls American Indian Scholars Program](#).

## Veterans

As Great Falls is home to Malmstrom Air Force Base and the Montana Air National Guard, the college feels a special obligation to serve this population. The retention rate for veterans at Great Falls College is slightly lower than the general population. (Data for Veterans is not available prior to FY2016.)

Retention rates	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019
Undergraduate	53.2%	52.4%	62.0%	54.7%
Veterans	51.1%	45.8%	57.1%	52.2%

From: <https://mus.edu/data/performancefunding/dashboards/index.html>

For years, the college has supported veterans through the [Veterans Center](#), staffed by a part-time director. In addition to a common meeting area for veterans to gather, meet each other and network, the campus provides several smaller study rooms for groups of veterans to use. The Office of Institutional Research reported that spring to fall 2020 retention was higher for veterans who used the center (85%) than for veterans who did not (68%) and for non-veteran students (75%). Term and cumulative grade point averages also were higher, according to the [report](#).

Great Falls College is also a General Education Mobile (GEM) school, meaning U.S. Air Force and National Air Guard members can pursue their associate's degrees through the Community College of the Air Force by taking some of their general education classes through Great Falls College.

The Montana University System offers [tuition waivers](#) for honorably discharged veterans and for Montana National Guard members. Great Falls College is regularly named a Military-Friendly institution.

## LGBTQ Population

Several initiatives have been undertaken based on qualitative feedback from faculty and staff about the perception of equity gaps for the LGBTQ population. Pronoun training was conducted for faculty, staff and students in January 2020 and remains available through [video recording](#). This fall, Great Falls College began offering “chosen name” service to students and employees who wish to use a name different than their legal name on ID cards, campus directories, student and employee information systems, learning management system, degree planning system, class lists, grade rosters, campus emails, campus communications, Banner/Web, and student and employee profiles.

“In moving the chosen name process forward, our campus now has a process for promoting equity and inclusion for students, staff, and faculty who wish to use a chosen name over a legal name in their academic or professional work,” said Faculty Senate Chair Jana Parsons, who represented the college on the initiative planning committee.

In addition, the college has previously provided Safe Space training and currently works with a volunteer from the local LGBTQ community center.

## CONCLUSION

### Mission and Improving Institutional Effectiveness

*Great Falls College MSU provides high quality educational experiences supporting student success and meeting the needs of our community.*

Great Falls College Montana State University remains committed to its mission as a two-year institution serving its students and community. It scans its internal and external environment, assesses results, and bases decisions on its commitment to continually improving effectiveness.

The college has institutionalized ongoing assessment to evaluate effectiveness in several ways: through strategic planning assessment, student learning outcomes assessment, internal academic program review, external accreditation, administrative program review, and regular budgeting decisions. These assessment processes require setting goals and evaluating performance against those goals. In strategic planning and budgeting, the work is in the hands of the campus-wide representatives on the College Planning, Budget and Analysis Committee (CPBAC), which makes recommendations to the Executive Team. The committee also reviews the results of internal academic program review and administrative program review, giving the campus a chance to view and discuss the results. Some specific academic programs conduct their own self-evaluation for external accreditation.

Assessment results and data from internal and external sources form the backbone of campus planning. The CPBAC represents the campus in creating and monitoring the strategic plan, which is published – along with progress reports -- on the college website. A draft of a new plan (to be implemented in July 2022) has been distributed campus-wide with requests for departments to contribute goals relating to the three intentional focus areas: Opportunities, Inclusivity, and Excellence. Academic planning relies partly on data collected annually for internal academic program review of existing programs, such as projected demand, job placement, and cost. Proposed programs are vetted by CPBAC, the Curriculum Committee, and Faculty Senate. Long-range building plans are reviewed by the CPBAC and various campus bodies before being forwarded for consideration by the Montana University System and the Montana Legislature.

Budget planning is ongoing throughout the year with regular spending and revenue reports delivered to the Executive Team and the CPBAC. Individual departments create three-year budget plans that are compiled by the executive director of operations and again reviewed by the CPBAC before the Executive Team makes the final decision.

### Student Learning Assessment

Program content and rigor are assured by qualified faculty who rely on professional standards, consultation with peers and advisory committees, and external program accreditation in developing curricula. Courses that are common throughout the state are reviewed by statewide committees to ensure they meet common course objectives. Programs are formally reviewed every five years through internal academic program review. Course objectives are mapped to

program and College Learning Outcomes (Critical Thinking, Communication, and Professionalism). Course outcomes are published in each course syllabus and mapped to program and College Learning Outcomes. College and program admissions requirements, program and College Learning Outcomes, and graduation requirements are listed in the online catalog and are covered carefully during required advising sessions.

Faculty assess course learning outcomes as part of their teaching. Results of program and institutional assessment are compiled by the director of teaching and learning innovation and reported back to the programs/departments and to college leadership. It is important to note that flexible program assessments allow for differences in programs and accommodate the need for some programs to meet external accreditation requirements.

Annual meetings give faculty members the chance to review assessment results, challenges, and best practices. The director of teaching and learning innovation and a standing faculty assessment committee continue to refine procedures.

The college awards transfer credit and prior learning credit according to Montana University System policies and its own procedures. Transfer within the Montana system is simplified by common course numbering. For transfer work that has not been evaluated, the college evaluates transcripts and other materials, such as the course syllabus and/or catalog description. Prior learning credit is awarded based on faculty evaluation of a student's demonstrated knowledge or skill. Transfer and prior learning policies are published in the college's online catalog and on its web site.

### Student Achievement

As an open enrollment institution, Great Falls College accepts all students who meet the basic admissions requirements. It is committed to meeting students where they are to provide the support they need to succeed in college. Students who do not appear to be college-ready are steered to a nationally recognized bridge program, Connections 101, to prepare them for college or a career; others are enrolled in co-requisite courses that support their college-level classes. Students must complete online orientation and meet with an advisor to help them determine their college goal, devise a path to achieve that goal, and understand the requirements of their chosen degree.

To assess its own performance in serving students, the college gathers student achievement data, which can be compared with other units of the Montana University System and the college's IPEDS peers. Initiatives, such as the 8-week block scheduling, are monitored closely by the CPBAC and the Executive Team to ensure they are improving student achievement.

Great Falls College is using these approaches to evaluate and continuously improve institutional effectiveness. Through shared governance, the campus involves constituents in setting goals, implementing initiatives, reviewing data, and making decisions based on those data.