

AIMA Action Plan from Montana State University
Based on AIMA Recommendations for MUS Institutions
June 2024

- 1. Each campus will establish and share American Indian student retention and completion goals. Consider and list what you are doing to help you reach these goals and describe how you will integrate outside stakeholders.*

MSU's Strategic Plan, Choosing Promise, articulates several goals related to American Indian student retention and completion. Goal 1.1 commits to broadening "access for underrepresented populations and increas[ing] academic success for all students through excellence in education." Metric 1.1.6 states that, "Montana State University will increase retention (from 72% to 85%) and six-year graduation (from 48% to 60%) rates for all incoming Montana State students and will reduce disparities for students who are economically disadvantaged, first generation, veterans, adult learners, individuals with disabilities and from underrepresented races and ethnicities by 2026. Graduate persistence and graduation will also be measured and improved." The University aims to increase the first-to-second year retention rate and 6-year graduation rates for American Indian students.

The university continues to work with students, their families, and community stakeholders to ensure that interested students are supported in enrolling and finding success at MSU. From academic year 2022-2023 to 2023-2024, the number of American Indian students enrolled at MSU increased from 776 to 817 individuals. During the same period, the first year to second year retention rate of American Indian students increased from 58.6% to 73.3% (n=135).

The following programs exist to directly support our university goals around American Indian student retention and completion rates.

- [American Indian/Alaska Native Student Success \(AIANSS\)](#) – offers study space, tutoring, personal, academic, and cultural programming to promote success. They host regular events including basket weaving, Indigenous foods demonstrations, ribbon skirt making, Bead & Feed nights, language classes, and cookouts.
- [Building MSU Families](#) - pilot program that is working towards connecting students with a faculty or staff mentor to develop relationships to build a sense of family and community at MSU
- [Caring for Our Own Program \(CO-OP\)](#) – support for American Indian students who are pursuing a Nursing degree at MSU
- [Empower](#) – a program in the College of Engineering, Empower fosters the inclusion and success of underrepresented minorities and women in engineering and other fields of STEM
- [Good Relations Learning Community](#) – provides cultural learning opportunities, mentorship, and professional success workshops to first-year Native students
- [Indigenous Pathways in Agriculture](#) – provides tutoring, scholarships, and mentoring for Indigenous students in the College of Agriculture

- [Honor Bound](#) – a program in the Honors College to support high-potential American Indian students
- [Hilleman Scholars Program](#)– opportunity for Pell-eligible Montana high school graduates with high potential to be part of a cohort receiving mentoring and support
- [McNair Scholars Program](#)– works to increase doctoral degree attainment of underrepresented students. 18% of McNair Scholars are American Indian.
- Native Pathways to Success Orientation – coordinated by American Indian/Alaska Native Student Support Services, this orientation provides American Indian students the opportunity to get settled on campus early, meet key individuals to support them through their education at MSU, meet other students, and set them up for success
- [PhD in Indigenous and Rural Health](#) - designed to develop scholars, educators and practitioners who can address the health and wellness of Indigenous and rural communities in Montana and beyond
- [TRiO Student Support Services](#) – provides individualized support services to increase the rates of academic achievement, retention, and graduation among historically underrepresented students
- [WINHEC Accreditation](#) – The Department of Native American Studies is currently engaged in the process of accreditation under the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) including development of our own inter-tribal model of Indigenous Student Well-being, Indigenous Research Standards, and advancement of Montana’s signature Indian Education for All act and constitutional provision in higher education. WINHEC Accreditation increases MSU's credibility with Indigenous communities while addressing issues of cultural relevance in Indigenous education & research. NAS received WINHEC accreditation in 2022.
- Find a more comprehensive list of support units at <https://www.montana.edu/native/directory.html>

The following efforts are in place by Student Success and other campus units at MSU:

- All staff in Student Wellness are required to complete the American Indian Education for All training. Additionally, they have created a Student Wellness DEI group that will guide their efforts to provide regular education to all staff related to serving underrepresented groups, such as American Indians.
- The Registrar’s office has implemented several initiatives to support American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students and enhance their educational experience at Montana State University (MSU). These efforts collectively enhance support, communication, and academic planning for Native American students at MSU:
 - Native American Studies Care Unit: A care unit has been established within NavMSU. This unit allows members of the AIANSSS office to track, follow, message, and support AI/AN students effectively.
 - Nursing Co-op Care Unit: Similar to the NAS care unit, a Nursing co-op care unit within NavMSU has been created. This enables the student-success office to provide dedicated support to Native American students pursuing nursing.

- Indian Country Relationships Working Group: The registrar's office plays a leading role in this working group, which focuses on building relationships and coordinating efforts aimed at recruiting and retaining AI/AN students.
- Course Articulation Initiative: The office has launched an initiative to address direct articulation of every course from all Montana tribal colleges, ensuring that students are fully informed about how their tribal college coursework will transfer to MSU. This effort aims to streamline the transfer process and support academic continuity for AI/AN students.
- Admissions strives to build relationships and opportunities for American Indian students, families, tribal college staff/faculty and all invested stakeholders to understand the opportunities available at Montana State University. Admissions strives to communicate and incorporate as many people as possible to ensure that students are being delivered information that will provide the best possible circumstances to move forward with enrollment, persistence and ultimately graduation from Montana State University.
- In partnership with AIANSSS, Counseling and Psychological Services facilitates a weekly event called Talking Circle: A Time for Healing. Lunch is provided and students can meet to discuss topics in culturally relevant ways.
- [Indigenous Mentoring Program](#) – the result of a research study funded by the NSF AGEP-T that aimed to investigate the factors that contribute to the effective mentoring of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) graduate students in STEM disciplines. This collaborative project involving researchers at Montana State University, University of Montana, and Salish Kootenai College produced a model to train and support STEM faculty at their institutions through a sequence of modules with information related to mentoring, student resources, student socialization, cultural humility, and culturally attuned practices for research conducted by American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students.
- [Promoting Indigenous Research Leadership](#) - Presented by the [Center for American Indian and Rural Health Equity](#) (CAIRHE), Montana State University, and Arizona State University, in partnership with the National Institutes of Health, Promoting Indigenous Research Leadership (PIRL) is a three-day workshop designed to promote the public health research careers of Indigenous and other early-career faculty working with Indigenous communities across the country.
- [Montana IDeA Community Engagement Core](#) – goal is to foster and enhance tribal and rural community partnerships to mitigate health disparities. The Community Engagement Core offers CBPR trainings, project planning using CBPR principles, mentoring for research associates, connections to partners, and suggestions for gaining broader tribal and rural community support.
- [Buffalo Nations Food System Initiative](#) - Working in Indigenous-led partnerships with the Native Nations and Colleges of this biocultural region, the Buffalo Nations Food System Initiative is established to:
 - educate and train the coming generations of Indigenous food system professionals
 - create more opportunities for Indigenous food producers and businesses
 - strengthen communities through Indigenous food knowledge and access

2. ***Identify an individual at each campus who is at a more senior level who will serve point of contact for American Indian student success efforts. This person will work with college/university leadership to advise retention and completion strategies for American Indian students. The individual will also be available as a first point of contact to guide American Indian students to the appropriate college personnel as needed to address problems or specific needs.***

The point of contact for American Indian students will be the Director of American Indian /Alaska Native Student Success (AIANSS). This person has strong trusting relationships with American Indian students, making it a natural fit for this role.

MSU's Senior Diversity and Inclusion Officer (SDIO) will be the primary administrative contact for departments, institutions, or others wishing to discuss issues regarding American Indian student success at MSU. The Senior Diversity and Inclusion Officer works to promote an institutional culture that values inclusion and to guide MSU's progress towards diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.

3. ***Assign departmental points of contact who have the unique cultural perspective to serve American Indian students most effectively in the areas below (these efforts will be coordinated by the individual identified in recommendation #2). Please consider how your departments engage with each other to serve students effectively.***

Departmental points of contact have been appointed by their units and have interest or existing working relationships with American Indian students. Many of the departmental points of contact and these units are already members of the Council of American Indian Programs (CAIP), know each other personally, and work together on a regular basis to serve AI/AN students. We will disseminate the list of departmental points of contact among the group and key student success units. This group has also discussed coming together throughout the year to exchange insights, explore best practices, and deepen their understandings.

- a. Financial Aid: Julie Watson
- b. Residence Life and Housing: Korrin Fagenstrom
- c. Admissions: Anders Groseth (Undergraduate) and Melis Edwards (Graduate)
- d. Student Health and Counseling: Whitney Milhoan and Betsy Asserson
- e. Registrar: Kandi Gresswell
- f. Human Resources: Stacy Nation-Knapper
 1. Advising: Emily Edwards (Undergraduate) and Donna Negaard (Graduate)
- g. Employment and Career Services: Jennifer Shore

4. *Collect/Share/Analyze quantitative and qualitative data to guide and improve American Indian enrollment and student success.*

- The MSU Registrar's Office has put in place several initiatives that are guided by data and/or that provide additional data to better support American Indian students. These efforts collectively enhance support, communication, and academic planning for AI/AN students at MSU. The Registrar's Office also has a dedicated staff member working on creating more transparent processes for transfer, organizing articulation agreements, and supporting transfer students. They have also made sure that, going forward, Associate's degrees earned from Montana Tribal Colleges will fulfill the core requirements at MSU. This will ease the process for students who wish to transfer to MSU from tribal or community colleges.
- MSU University Data and Analytics makes available student data to help understand student needs and guide student support efforts. They have created user-friendly dashboards and extensive data that are used by many campus partners. Campus units analyze data pertaining to American Indian students - including what Colleges have the largest number and greatest proportion of American Indian students, age, full- or part-time enrollment - to inform their student success strategies. Examples of these dashboard can be found here <https://www.montana.edu/data/students/aian/>.
- American Indian/Alaska Native Student Success (AIANSSS) will be launching an assessment in fall of 2024, supported by a grant from the Arthur M. Blank Foundation, that will provide data about student experiences, resources available, student engagement. This assessment will provide data about what is going well and where there are opportunities for improvement. These results will inform the team's efforts in AIANSSS.
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) gathers data through our electronic health record. Data includes basic numbers of self-identified American Indian students who seek clinical services each academic year as well as how many students access outreach programs targeted to American Indian students including Let's Talk and the Talking Circle. CPS uses this data to inform clinical services, accessibility of services, and outreach programming.
 - CPS data and outcomes are shared in the CPS Annual Report and discussed in relevant CPS committees including Clinical Services Committee and Outreach Committee. CPS administrative staff meet with staff in the American Indian/Alaska Native Student Success Center each summer and winter break to review data, outreach efforts, and to listen to feedback and hear ideas about services needed from CPS.
- Admissions collects data on all incoming undergraduate students, both for those that enroll and those that do not. Admissions analyzes current data throughout the entire academic year and in a cumulative fashion at the end of each enrollment cycle. This information is shared with campus partners in a variety of ways, both formal such as Strategic Enrollment Management or the Council of American Indian Programs (CAIP), and informally at the departmental level. As we move into our new CRM, our hope is that our data collection and analyzing will be

more impactful and help us understand more of what we can do to best serve our incoming American Indian students.

5. ***Request campuses consider how to include American Indian voice in the search process when hiring campus leaders and assess leadership candidate's knowledge and experience working with American Indians.***

Since this is a new recommendation as of spring 2024, our campus community will be committing time to developing a thoughtful plan for addressing this recommendation. We will work with CAIP, Diversity Council, and potentially the WINHEC Cultural Oversight Board to gather ideas about how to consider American Indian voices in the hiring of campus leaders. In preliminary conversations, suggestions offered have included embedding Indian Education for All lessons or takeaways in materials offered to campus leader finalists, sharing pre-approved interview questions with search committees that address knowledge of American Indian peoples as it relates to the job description, and including information about the university's commitment to serving American Indian students, faculty, staff, and communities in vacancy announcements.

6. ***Provide annual professional development opportunities for all faculty and staff in the areas of Indian Education for All, American Indian culture and cultural sensitivity and the history of Montana's First Peoples.***

The online Indian Education for All (IEFA) course provided by the MUS has been rebuilt in the Vector platform to increase course visibility, encourage employee participation, and simplify reporting. It is now accessible for all faculty and staff at <http://www.montana.edu/iefa/index.html>. We will continue to include regular, university-wide notifications that all faculty and staff are to complete this training. The SDIO will regularly track and report on the number of faculty and staff who have completed the training and will work on ways to provide more in-depth professional development opportunities to the MSU community.

7. ***Request campuses incorporate American Indian professional development referenced in recommendation #6 in all new employee orientation including faculty.***

Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) will ensure that the IEFA training is included in the monthly New Employee Orientation for all incoming staff members. The Director of the Center for Faculty Excellence (CFE) will ensure that information about this professional development training is shared with new faculty at the annual New Faculty Orientation. It will also be regularly communicated to faculty and staff via emails, newsletters, and other communications.

8. ***Develop a plan to use Apply Montana and FAFSA completion efforts to support American Indian students access to the MUS. (Campuses will submit the plan.)***

Admissions will ensure that Apply Montana and FAFSA opportunities are communicated to American Indian students, families, counselors, and other stakeholders during campus visit programs, recruitment travel events (college fairs, high school visits, etc.) and any

new ways that will help continue to provide access to opportunities. These plans will be ongoing and evolving. Financial Aid at MSU Bozeman will identify students who have identified as American Indian/Alaska Native to MSU and who have not completed a FAFSA for an upcoming year and communicate with them in the summer preceding an aid year.