



MONTANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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**DENNIS & PHYLLIS
WASHINGTON
FOUNDATION**

iGraduate Montana

An initiative sponsored by

Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education

Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation

Office of Public Instruction

Montana Department of Labor and Industry

Purpose:

The Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) and the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation announce the creation of *iGraduate Montana* in partnership with the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) and the Montana Department of Labor and Industry (MTDLI).

The Foundation has awarded a \$650,000 grant over four years to the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education. This four-year initiative will build on the work of Graduation Matters Montana, which resulted in the state's highest high school graduation rate. *iGraduate Montana* will continue a focus on raising graduation rates from 80% in 2010 to 86% in 2017.

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY ~ Campuses at Billings, Bozeman, Great Falls, and Havre

THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA ~ Campuses at Butte, Dillon, Helena, and Missoula

Dawson Community College (Glendive) ~ Flathead Valley Community College (Kalispell) ~ Miles Community College (Miles City)

This initiative has three areas of focus: high school graduation; linking students with high demand career pathways in Montana; and connecting students with post-high school education opportunities at Montana’s colleges or apprenticeship programs.

“Montana is facing some serious challenges over the next ten years to address anticipated workforce shortages due to our aging population and strong economy. This grant will play a vital role in helping students understand the importance of graduating from high school and continuing on to either a college or an apprenticeship program,” said Clayton Christian, Commissioner of Higher Education.

“The focus on graduation is important to the Foundation. However, we believe it is important that we address longer-term workforce development issues. The *iGraduate Montana* partnership takes advantage of the deep relationships that already exist between OCHE, OPI, the MTDLI and employers across the state. These partnerships will allow OCHE to hit the ground running with programs that can be implemented in the schools beginning this school year,” said Mike Halligan, Executive Director of the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation.

For students, the *iGraduate Montana* initiative will help to match each individual’s career interests with courses they should take during their four high school years, including dual enrollment opportunities. The importance of graduation from high school will be underscored for all students. For high schools, the initiative will leverage existing OCHE and OPI collaborative efforts such as the Montana Career Pathways, College Application Week, and free ACT exam for high school juniors to create a more seamless pathway for students to continue beyond high school to either a two-year or four-year college.

Students will also learn about new apprenticeship opportunities available to them after college including the traditional trades programs (plumbing, electrical, pipefitting, etc.) and new opportunities in healthcare, nursing, information technology, and business. Apprenticeship programs provide students with the opportunity to earn a wage while learning a new skill and in many cases, earning college credit.

“I am excited to expand the OPI’s collaboration with higher education and Montana’s business community through the *iGraduate* program. This new partnership honors Montana’s investment in our K-12 school system and builds for the next step in a student’s life,” said Elsie Arntzen, State Superintendent.

The *iGraduate Montana* initiative is designed to impact frontier, rural, and Montana’s larger communities. The goals of the *iGraduate Montana* are to:

- (1) Invigorate a network of communities to participate in the *iGraduate Montana* initiative, through communications and outreach; the development of a *iGraduate Montana*

statewide advisory council; an annual Summit; and Innovation Funds to communities for local *iGraduate Montana* initiatives.

- (2) Increase the number of Montana high school graduates who pursue college in Montana; and increase the number of high school graduates participating in apprenticeships.
- (3) Increase the number of American Indian students who graduate from high school and participate in the tribal college apprenticeship programs that OCHE is helping to establish in 7 tribal colleges.

John Cech, Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs said, “iGraduate Montana will also be able to leverage the new \$24.5 million grant from US Department of Education to OCHE to increase the number of Montana low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.”

The grant will be coordinated through the Academic, Student Affairs, and Research Division at OCHE. Deputy Commissioner John Cech will lead a steering committee which will include representation from higher education, OPI, MTDLI, private sector, and other key stakeholders. These collaborations will be leveraged to advance the goals of *iGraduate Montana*. The Office of the Commissioner of higher education has established a web page <http://www.mus.edu/iGraduateMontana/> to provide more information about the grant.

For press information on the iGraduate Montana initiative, contact:

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