

REQUEST TO PLAN MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 27, 2025

TO: Chief Academic Officers, Montana University System

FROM: Joe Thiel, Deputy Commissioner for Academic, Research, and Student Affairs

RE: November 2025 Request to Plan Proposals

The campuses of the Montana University System have proposed new academic programs or changes under the Request to Plan process authorized by the Montana Board of Regents. The proposals are being sent to you for your review and approval. If you have concerns about a particular proposal, you should share those concerns with your colleagues at that institution and try to come to some understanding. If you cannot resolve your concerns, raise them at the Chief Academic Officer's conference call on Wednesday, October 27th. Issues not resolved at that meeting should be submitted in writing to OCHE by noon on Friday, October 31, 2025. If no concerns are received, OCHE will assume that the proposals have your approval.

Requests to Plan

University of Montana:

- Request to plan the Elouise Cobell Land and Culture Institute
[Item #221-1004-R1125](#)

Montana State University Bozeman:

- Request to approve a plan to transition the Jake Jabs College of Business and Entrepreneurship (Jabs) from a single-department model to a three-department structure consisting of Accounting and Finance, Management and Entrepreneurship, and Marketing and Analytics
[Item #221-2011-R1125](#)

University of Montana Western:

- Request for authorization to plan a Western Lands and Waters (WLW) Center
[Item #221-1601-R1125](#)

Montana University System
REQUEST TO PLAN FORM – ACADEMIC, ADMINISTRATIVE OR RESEARCH UNIT

ITEM 221-1004-R1125

Meeting Date – November 2025

Request to Plan the Elouise Cobell Land and Culture Institute

Center/Institute/Unit Title: **Elouise Cobell Land and Culture Institute**

Campus: **UM-Mountain, Missoula**

Expected Final Submission Date: **May 2025**

Contact Name/Info: **Fernando Sanchez, Cobell Director** | Fernando.sanchez@mso.umt.edu

This form is meant to increase communication, collaboration, and problem-solving opportunities throughout the MUS in the center/institute development process. The completed form should exceed 2-3 pages. For more information regarding the center/institute approval process, please visit <http://mus.edu/che/arsa/academicproposals.asp>.

1) Provide a brief description of the new center/institute (unit).

In 2013, the Board of Regents approved that the basement of UM's Payne Family Native American Center be named the Elouise Cobell Land and Culture Institute (Item 158-1007+R0313, March 7-8, 2013). This space was named in honor of Elouise Pepion Cobell, a Blackfeet entrepreneur, banker, rancher, and tribal leader who tirelessly advocated for Native American rights. With the support of donors and UM, the space for the Elouise Cobell Land and Culture Institute was built and initially equipped in 2014. The Elouise Cobell Land and Culture Institute ("the Institute" hereafter) aims to advance interdisciplinary education and applied research on the many environments, peoples, and values that define Montana landscapes, providing an academic space for the natural sciences, the social sciences, the humanities, and new technologies to converge in an innovative program on land and culture studies. The Institute seeks to develop a research program around such topics as the protection of Montana's native landscapes, the understanding of their joint human and environmental history, and applications of geographical science for environmental and cultural conservation. Honoring the legacy of Elouise Pepion Cobell, special focus is placed on generating opportunities for the protection, revitalization, and promotion of Native American knowledges and Indigenous Science. The Institute also provides UM faculty and external partners with facilities to support teaching and outreach, consisting of several classrooms, a Geographic Information Systems lab, and a planetarium (see Section 5). In addition to this research and educational portfolio, the Institute engages in collaborative work to generate scientific production, attract extramural funding, and strengthen collaborations with state, tribal, federal, and private partners in support of its mission.

As an organization of resources and activities, the Institute already exists. At present, the Cobell Director supervises an ongoing portfolio of applied research at the UM in collaboration with the Department of Native American Studies, the Environmental Studies Program, and the Department of Society and Conservation. Additionally, the Director partners with the Spatial Analysis Lab, the Department of Physics and Astronomy, and the GIS Certificate Program in research or educational projects, led by those units, that leverage Institute's resources (see Section 5). Given the Institute's mission and academic priorities, it also has natural ties with the departments of Anthropology and History that will be further nurtured to support the research needs of their faculty and students, such as facilitating the Institute's equipment for historical mapping and spatial archaeological analysis. By formally recognizing the Elouise Cobell Land and Culture Institute, institutional coverage will be provided for this varied portfolio to grow, strengthen its collaborative array, and become more visible across UM, the Montana University System, and beyond.

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- 2) Describe the need for the center/institute. Specifically, how the center/institute meets current student, state, and industry research or community engagement needs. (Please cite sources in an addendum to this document).**

Contemporary problem solving in academia and the U.S. job market has evolved towards a skillset that rewards interdisciplinary teams and leaders, especially in occupations that couple human and environmental systems [1]. This approach is reflected in present-day training needs, with employers from private and public sectors seeking workers with capacity in a broad set of skills and ways of knowing [2, 3, 4, 5]. The Cobell Institute aspires to expand an interdisciplinary program where the UM will articulate training in the social sciences, the natural sciences, the humanities, and new technologies for advancing its student-centered multidisciplinary vocation. In keeping with its mission, the Institute meets current student and workforce multi-skill demands by providing a multimedia space to teach trainees in the multidisciplinary analysis of interdependencies between human dimensions (social, cultural, legislative, economic) and urban and natural environments of the Western U.S. To that end, the Institute takes a systems-based approach to training, providing opportunities to acquire hands-on experience in the integration of information technologies, data science, community engagement, and diverse ways of knowing (including Western as well as Native) to problem solving. (See *Bibliographical Addendum* for list of references.)

- 3) Describe how the center/institute fits with the institutional mission, strategic plan, and the existing MUS and institutional portfolios (refer to the most recent institutional Academic Priorities and Planning Statement).**

The Institute's scope and priorities, as described in sections 1 and 2, serve UM's vision to "foster inclusive prosperity and democracy while creating new knowledge and ways of learning" by seeking to develop applied knowledge and best practices in partnership with a broad range of communities of practice, colleges, tribal nations, and governments across the North American West. The Institute will support UM's priorities as articulated in its Strategic Vision. Honoring PFA1 (Place student success at the center of all we do), its resources will help to further enhance faculty-student mentoring and the development of opportunities for students to cultivate applied skills and research leadership in science (see section 5). It will exemplify PFA5 (Proudly tell the UM story) by generating and making visible scholarship that benefits Montana and shows the University's commitment to fostering civic engagement and diverse ways of knowing. Via its partnership efforts, the Institute will assist in PFA4 (Partner with Place) to collaborate with local, tribal, statewide, regional, and federal partners to advance the shared goal of promoting Montana's cultures, communities, and science. Finally, the Institute will serve PFA2 (Drive excellence and innovation in teaching, learning, and research) by supporting educational and research opportunities that foster applied science, interdisciplinarity, as well as ethical and informed decision making in a diverse world. By investing in developing pedagogy and scholarship that elevate Native American perspectives, the Institute will also become a mechanism to support UM's broader, long-term strategy to advance Montana's Indian Education for All Act within our institution and across the MUS.

- 4) Describe any opportunities for collaboration you have identified or initiated either within the institution or between MUS institutions (i.e. articulation, course-sharing, research collaboration). Include potential contacts and their institutional affiliation.**

The Institute fits into UM's institutional program array by potentially complementing several existing programs, namely, the American Indian Governance and Policy Institute, the O'Connor Center for the Rocky Mountain West, the Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities, the Fire Center, the Spatial Analysis Lab, the Center for Integrated Research on the Environment, the Bolle Center for People and Forests, the Wilderness Institute, and the Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Policy. The Institute's program complements this program array by creating applied

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science opportunities to incorporate cultural dimensions into policy, historical discourse, health programming, environmental research, and civic engagement.

Within the MUS, the Institute complements MSU's Ivan Doig Center for the Study of the Lands and Peoples of the North American West, by focusing on an applied research agenda that will feed on cultural, social, and scientific knowledges to inform the conservation, preservation, restoration, and revitalization of the values that communities, especially Native American, attach to the landscapes that define the Western U.S. Potentially, the Institute can also strategically collaborate with MSU's Center for American Indian and Rural Health Equity and the Western Transportation Institute to pursue mutual interests understanding the role played by Montana's human and biophysical geographies in the resilience of our rural communities. To foster collaboration with these programs, the Institute's personnel, led by its director, will explore ways of collaboration such as the joint submission of proposals for extramural funding, mutual invitation of speakers, and the joint organization of events to strengthen the educational and academic ties of UM and MSU.

5) Describe any significant new financial resources (staff and/or facilities) needed to launch and sustain the center/institute. How do you anticipate supporting this new center/institute/unit

Since 2022, the UM College of Humanities and Sciences has allocated human resources to support the administration of an ongoing portfolio of activities that already shapes the research agenda of the Institute; primarily, a budget analyst, a grants specialist, and a business administrative associate who are shared with other College units. Additionally, the Office of Sponsored Programs has provided pre-award and post-award specialists who assist in the preparation and management of the grants that comprise this research portfolio.

The physical facilities that house the Institute were built in 2014 within the Payne Family Native American Center and comprise a Star Gazing Round Room (NAC 013-015), a Geographic Information Systems teaching lab (NAC 014), a multimedia classroom (NAC 009), a multi-screen classroom (NAC 011), and an office for the Institute's research assistants (NAC 209). These spaces are regularly used to support UM's teaching needs and have been a source of revenue for UM over the last decade. The Star Gazing Round Room (NAC 013-15) houses the UM Planetarium, a collaboration between the Department of Native American Studies and the Department of Physics and Astronomy to offer an outreach program on Western and Native astronomies for schools, campus visitors, and UM's curriculum. Given the Institute's equipment for Geographic Information Science, it also collaborates with FCFC's GIS Certificate to provide a teaching space as well as research opportunities to GIS students. Equipment in all these spaces has been maintained and upgraded periodically by UM since the inauguration of the building. A facilities manager, contributed by the Office of the President, is shared with the rest of units and programs that are housed in the Payne Family Native American Center.

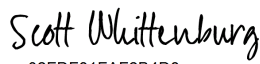
The proposer, Dr. Fernando Sanchez, has a joint faculty appointment with the College of Humanities and Sciences and the Franke College of Forestry and Conservation, and is serving as the Cobell Director for the aforementioned research portfolio (see Section 1). In collaboration with other UM faculty and staff, the Director has attracted funding from the federal government (importantly, the U.S. Forest Service) as well as private sponsors (e.g., Mellon Foundation) that support research for the elevation of Montana's landscapes and cultures, providing opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to start their research careers while they assist in these projects. Extramural funding in the form of grants and contracts is expected to be the main supporting source of the Institute's research agenda, an effort that will come from the Cobell Director as well as its supporting personnel and program affiliates.

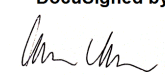
List of References

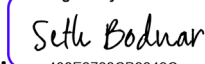
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1. Lindsey Ice (2023). *A Look at Projected Employment in Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services, 2021–31*. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Publications. [\[URL\]](#)
2. Matthew Hora, Ross J. Benbow, Amanda K. Oleson (2016). *Beyond the Skills Gap: Preparing College Students for Life and Work*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
3. Matthew Hora (2025). *Teaching transferable skills using a sociocultural perspective: A guide for faculty and institutions for creating college courses that highlight disciplinary knowledge, professional norms, and habits of mind*. Center for Research on College-Workforce Transitions, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
4. Irwin Kirsch, Anita M. Sands, Steven B. Robbins, Madeline J. Goodman, and Richard J. Tannenbaum (2021). *Buttressing the Middle: A Case for Reskilling and Upskilling America's Middle-Skill Workers in the 21st Century*. Educational Testing Service: Princeton, NJ.
5. Wen Zhang, Kee-Hung Lai, Qiguo Gong (2024). The future of the labor force: higher cognition and more skills. *Nature - Humanities & Social Sciences Communications* **11**, 479.

Signature/Date

Chief Research Officer: DocuSigned by:

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Flagship Provost*: DocuSigned by:

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Flagship President*: Signed by:

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*Not applicable to the Community Colleges.

Montana University System

REQUEST TO PLAN FORM

ITEM 221-2011-R-1125**Meeting Date: November, 2025**

Item Name: Request approval to plan transitioning the Jake Jabs College of Business & Entrepreneurship (Jabs) from a single-department model to a three-department structure consisting of Accounting and Finance, Management and Entrepreneurship, and Marketing and Analytics

Program/Center/Institute Title: **Jabs Departmentalization Plan**

Planned 6-digit CIP code:

Campus, School/Department: **MSU Jabs College of Business and Entrepreneurship**

Expected Final Submission Date:

Contact Name/Info: **Brian Gillespie, Dean**
brian.gillespie@montana.edu

This form is meant to increase communication, collaboration, and problem-solving opportunities throughout the MUS in the program/center/institute development process. The completed form should not be more than 2-3 pages. For more information regarding the program/center/institute approval process, please visit

<http://mus.edu/che/arsa/academicproposals.asp>.

1) Provide a description of the program/center/institute.

This Request to Plan proposes transitioning the Jake Jabs College of Business & Entrepreneurship (Jabs) from a single-department model to a three-department structure consisting of Accounting and Finance, Management and Entrepreneurship, and Marketing and Analytics. This reorganization is administrative in nature and does not entail the creation of new academic programs. The proposed structure is designed to improve academic governance, student and faculty support, and alignment with peer and aspirant AACSB-accredited institutions. The process for developing this model took place over the entirety of the 2024–2025 academic year. It was guided by benchmarking analyses, best practice reviews, and collaborative design led by the dean, associate dean, assistant dean, and option coordinators. Feedback and contributions from faculty and staff was gathered through one-on-one meetings, a listening tour across all four academic options, and iterative refinements. In April 2025, Jabs faculty and staff voted overwhelmingly in support of this reorganization by a margin of 25–3, reflecting strong college-wide endorsement.

2) Describe the need for the program/center/institute. Specifically, how the program/center/institute meets current student, state, and workforce demands. (Please cite sources).

The proposed departmental structure responds to a clear and compelling internal need for improved organizational efficiency, academic leadership, and faculty and student support—while also aligning with broader state and workforce trends.

The Jake Jabs College of Business & Entrepreneurship has experienced significant and sustained growth over the past two decades. Undergraduate and graduate enrollment has increased approximately 50% in the past five years and 110% over the past twenty years. This growth has stretched the current single-department model beyond its capacity, creating administrative inefficiencies and limiting the college's ability to offer discipline-specific academic leadership, mentorship, and support. As the scale and complexity of Jabs has increased, the limitations of the single-department model have become increasingly apparent. These include:

- Slower response times for course scheduling, advising, and student support, due to centralized decision-making and overextended academic leadership.
- Challenges in faculty mentorship and professional development, particularly for junior and non-tenure-track faculty, who benefit from guidance within clearly defined disciplinary homes.

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- Inequities in workload distribution and RTP processes.
- Reduced ability to respond to external opportunities, such as partnerships with industry or targeted philanthropic giving, because of the lack of distinct departmental identities.

By establishing three departments the college will create a more responsive and accountable structure that better serves both faculty and students. Each department will have a dedicated head responsible for academic operations, faculty development, and student engagement within their discipline, enabling faster decision-making, more tailored mentoring, and clearer communication channels.

The transition also aligns Jabs with best practices among peer and aspirant AACSB-accredited business schools, including the University of Montana, University of North Dakota, Colorado State University, Utah State University, Oregon State University, and others. These institutions have long operated with multi-department structures, and they report benefits including stronger faculty-student engagement, enhanced recruitment of top-tier faculty, and improved academic governance. Directly stated, Jabs is the outlier among peer and aspirant business schools. In summary, the departmental model addresses a critical need for improved academic structure and support while enhancing Jabs' ability to serve its students, faculty, and the state of Montana. It reflects the college's maturation, aligns with institutional growth, and positions Jabs to meet future challenges with clarity, agility, and strength.

3) Describe any significant new resources (financial, staff, facility, new curricula) needed to launch and sustain the program/center/institute.

This transition is resource-neutral. Faculty will be reassigned to departments based on disciplinary alignment, and no additional faculty lines are being requested as part of the structural change. Additional administrative resources are also not required for department chair stipends or reassigned time. The college anticipates reallocating internal funds to support these adjustments. Existing offices and support staff structures will remain unchanged. The transition is expected to improve efficiency, not increase staffing costs.

4) Describe any efforts or opportunities you have identified for collaboration either within the institution or between MUS institutions (i.e. articulation, course-sharing, research collaboration).

While the primary intent of this reorganization is to improve internal operational efficiency and effectiveness, the transition to a three-department structure also creates new and enhanced opportunities for collaboration both within Montana State University and across the Montana University System.

Internal to MSU, the proposed departmental model will:

- Clarify academic leadership and disciplinary boundaries, which in turn will streamline cross-college collaborations. For example, the proposed Department of Marketing & Analytics is well-positioned to partner with the Gianforte School of Computing on interdisciplinary programming in data analytics and decision science.
- Enable more targeted contributions to interdisciplinary minors and certificate programs (e.g., Innovation & Entrepreneurship, Sustainability, Global Studies), by allowing departments to formally assign liaisons and faculty to cross-unit curriculum committees.
- Facilitate more efficient resource sharing and course scheduling in common areas such as statistics, analytics, and business communication, through clearer academic ownership and coordination points.
- Enhance integration with university-wide student success initiatives, as each department can coordinate directly with MSU's advising, career development, and student engagement offices to support student transitions and career readiness in a discipline-specific manner.

Across the Montana University System, the transition will:

- Support curriculum alignment and articulation agreements with MUS campuses by making disciplinary homes more visible and accessible. For example, Gallatin College's business-related associate degrees can articulate more cleanly into Jabs programs when receiving departments are clearly defined.

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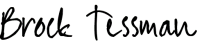
- Enable more effective department-level collaborations across campuses, particularly in areas like accounting, marketing, entrepreneurship, and analytics, which are also housed in discrete departments at other MUS institutions.
- Faculty research collaboration can also benefit from this structure. As faculty develop stronger academic identities and departmental homes, it becomes easier to initiate joint research projects, share research infrastructure, and pursue multi-institutional grants—both within MSU and across the MUS network.

In short, while this proposal is focused on strengthening internal governance and academic support, by aligning more closely with MSU and MUS peers, it also creates a more structured and scalable platform for collaboration, communication, and partnership across the university and system-wide.

5) Describe how the program/center/institute fits with the institutional mission, strategic plan, existing institutional program array, and academic priorities as described in the most recent Academic Priorities and Planning Statement.

This proposal supports the MSU mission and Jobs strategic plan through:

- Excellence in teaching and learning: Departments will enable more tailored student advising, clearer academic pathways, and stronger disciplinary identities.
- Faculty support and development: Tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty will benefit from discipline-specific mentoring, more equitable RTP processes, and defined departmental homes for adjuncts and lecturers.
- Strategic alignment: As noted in MSU's Academic Priorities and Planning Statement, organizational structures should evolve to support institutional growth, interdisciplinary collaboration, and student success. This proposal does exactly that.
- External engagement and fundraising: Departments allow for more focused engagement with donors and alumni, enhancing the college's ability to raise funds and build lasting relationships.

<u>Signature/Date</u>	
Chief Academic Officer:	DocuSigned by:  212A28411AC04BD... 10/3/2025 11:25 AM MDT
Chief Research Officer*:	
Chief Executive Officer:	Signed by:  3B91DBF4C8B1461... 10/3/2025 3:31 PM MDT
Flagship Provost**:	DocuSigned by:  212A28411AC04BD... 10/3/2025 11:25 AM MDT
Flagship President**:	Signed by:  3B91DBF4C8B1461... 10/3/2025 3:31 PM MDT
*Center/Institute Proposal only **Not applicable to the Community Colleges.	

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ITEM 221-1601-R1125

Meeting Date November 2025

Item Name: Request for authorization to plan a Western Lands & Waters (WLW) Center

Program/Center/Institute Title: **Western Lands & Waters (WLW) Center**

Planned 6-digit CIP code:

Campus, School/Department: **University of Montana Western (UMW),
Departments of Biology and Environmental
Sciences**

Expected Final Submission Date: **February 2026**

Contact Name/Info: **Dr. Michelle Anderson, Professor of Biology, Michelle.Anderson@umwestern.edu,
406-683-7076 and Dr. Arica Crootof, Associate Professor of Environmental Sustainability,
Arica.Crootof@umwestern.edu, 406-683-7075**

This form is meant to increase communication, collaboration, and problem-solving opportunities throughout the MUS in the program/center/institute development process. The completed form should not be more than 2-3 pages. For more information regarding the program/center/institute approval process, please visit <http://mus.edu/che/arsa/academicproposals.asp>.

1) Provide a description of the program/center/institute.

We propose creating the Western Land and Water (WLW) Center at The University of Montana Western (UMW). The WLW Center will serve as a learning hub rooted in UMW's *Experience One* (X1) educational model, scaffolding natural resource science education through community-driven projects with regional partners (see Appendix, letters of support to follow). The WLW Center's mission is to immerse undergraduate students, faculty members, and community partners in science-based collaborations that enhance experiential education at UMW (X1) and stewardship of Southwest Montana natural resources.

2) Describe the need for the program/center/institute. Specifically, how the program/center/institute meets current student, state, and workforce demands. (Please cite sources).

Problem #1: In rural areas of the West, it can be difficult to hire highly qualified employees in the natural resources, despite being the highest paying industry in Montana¹. Rising cost-of-living and housing prices¹ are exacerbating staffing shortages. At a 2024 campus job fair with federal and state agencies and non-profit organizations, hiring challenges were paramount and representatives stated the need for a natural resources-trained workforce with place-based knowledge and commitment to rural communities. In 2025, unprecedented workforce changes in the natural resources industry occurred nationwide, increasing competition in the job market. Recent college graduates highly trained in diverse skillsets and new technologies with extensive work experience are most competitive.

Problem #2: Conservation projects and organizations are growing in Southwest Montana given the importance of working landscapes and ecologically intact systems, yet resources to do this work are increasingly limited. At the same time, the water and working lands conservation challenges in Southwest Montana are becoming more complex and urgent as land use, economic, and climate change reshape the landscape. There exists a need to better plan and prepare our lands and waters – as well as our scientists, managers, and communities – in Southwest Montana for future scenarios of change. Many of our partners have told us they would benefit in addressing these challenges by working with faculty and students more often and in new ways. A more structured and collaborative approach is

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needed to create tangible connections, successful project outcomes, networking and job opportunities for students, and sustained relationships among partner organizations across the landscape.

Problem #3: UMW needs to continue innovating in experiential education delivery, so students continue to choose us for our unique character in the higher education landscape. Experiential education (X1) programming at UMW is now over 20 years old. Learning from our history, opportunities exist for continued innovation through longer-term, larger-scale service-learning projects in the natural resources integrated vertical across different classes and disciplines.

Meeting these demands: We propose to use the WLW Center as a platform to create a conservation-trained workforce with place-based knowledge by improving our existing educational model through greater integration and immersion of undergraduate students in local collaborative conservation. Our vision is to coordinate a collaborative Center to integrate conservation efforts and address scalar differences across Southwest Montana while meeting the need for (1) a conservation-trained workforce with place-based knowledge, and (2) a collaborative hub to integrate conservation efforts across Southwest Montana and magnify impacts. We will organize and host semi-annual meetings where project partners will share current and upcoming conservation projects as well as discuss goals, resources, and timelines to coordinate efforts across the region. We aim to offer both short and long-term value by helping multiple groups in the Southwest Montana region improve their relationships and networks with UMW and one another. In our curriculum we will integrate learning objectives with local conservation projects so that students are working on real-world research and management, contributing data, analysis, and outreach that enhances existing conservation projects and creates fertile ground for instigating new projects. This integration would allow for long-term research, monitoring, and application that can magnify the conservation impacts. By building this bridge between academia and working lands and water conservation, we will enhance collaborative capacity across landscapes. In the short-term, we will have UMW classes complete needed projects and in the long-term, “grow” the next generation of practitioners.

3) Describe any significant new resources (financial, staff, facility, new curricula) needed to launch and sustain the program/center/institute.

No additional office, classroom, workshop, meeting, or equipment space is needed to establish the Western Land and Water Center at Montana Western. The WLW Center activities will be housed in the newly remodeled Block Hall starting Fall 2026 and utilize existing department and campus spaces and technology resources.

No new funding is needed in Year 1, and we seek minimal additional support in Years 2 and 3 as described below:

Year 1 (2025-2026): Both Drs. Michelle Anderson and Arica Crotoft are working on developing the Western Land and Water Center as part of their planned sabbatical activities. So, this first year, no additional funds or resources are needed. During Year 1, we will seek external funding to reduce internal costs in years 2 and 3 and beyond.

Years 2 & 3 (2026-2028): The WLW Center will request a total of \$5,000 for start-up funds from the UMW Provost’s office across years 2 and 3. Funds will support WLW Center activities in the form of an annual partners meeting (\$2000), travel to regional partner site locations and external networking meetings (\$1000), cost-share match or stipend for a work-study student (\$1500), and miscellaneous supplies associated with Center activities (\$500).

We will also request one course release each semester for the co-chairs. This entails a 1-block adjunct position per semester (\$3,600 max) for years 2 and 3 (one course buyout for Dr. Anderson and one for Dr. Crotoft each year). During years 2 and 3 we will work to secure external funds to cover future WLW Center operations. We will evaluate AmeriCorps or Federal and State Work Study options for additional personnel support. By year 4 we aim to hire a part-time liaison to coordinate between the University and community partners. Regardless, by year 4 faculty co-Directors will move back to their full-time courseloads.

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4) Describe any efforts or opportunities you have identified for collaboration either within the institution or between MUS institutions (i.e. articulation, course-sharing, research collaboration).

The WLW Center will formalize partnerships across UMW departments including Mathematics (i.e. Night Skis Program), Fine Arts (i.e. TEDx on Climate Resilience), and History, Philosophy, and Social Sciences (i.e. team teaching Natural and Human History of Montana Landscapes) and we hope it will be a catalyst for new interdisciplinary collaborations. Similarly, at the state-level we look forward to strengthening existing relationships (i.e. The Clark Fork Watershed Education Program, Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education, and Flathead Biological Station) and developing new research and teaching collaborations with MUS faculty and entities including University of Montana's Conservation Genetics Lab, Human Dimensions Lab, The River Center, and Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Montana State University's Institute on Ecosystems, Spatial Sciences Center, The Montana Water Center, and People-Places-Waters Lab among others. Our re-designed curriculum will continue to support MUS course-sharing agreements.

5) Describe how the program/center/institute fits with the institutional mission, strategic plan, existing institutional program array, and academic priorities as described in the most recent Academic Priorities and Planning Statement.

The WLW Center directly supports UMW's [Mission](#). The WLW Center will help our ecology and environmental sciences programs be a leader and innovator in experiential education by offering immersive practices to students in their field of study. Through our annual evaluations and assessments, we will ensure ongoing improvement to obtain evidence-supported student learning and achievement outcomes. In alignment with The University of Montana Western's [Academic Priorities and Planning Statement \(2024-2025\)](#), the WLW Center directly supports UMW's two main objectives: *Objective 1: Strengthening Experiential Learning* and *Objective 2: Enhancing the Whole Student Experience*. Our faculty have a proven track record of engaging undergraduates in authentic learning experiences that prepare students to excel in environmental careers. We are dedicated to empowering students through our *Experience One (X1)* that supports field-based learning where students are studying stream dynamics to improve restoration efforts, interviewing stakeholders to understand different interests that shape natural resources conflicts, and researching the dynamics of non-native species in aquatic food webs. We will build upon this foundation to strengthen experiential learning through collaborative conservation and in turn, enhance the student experience by integrating student learning into meaningful projects that benefit our local lands and waters.

¹ Watson, A. et al. [2025 Montana Labor Day Report](#). Montana Department of Labor and Industry, September 2025.

Signature/Date	
Chief Academic Officer:	 10/1/2025
Chief Research Officer*:	
Chief Executive Officer:	 10/2/2025
Flagship Provost**:	
Flagship President**:	

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*Center/Institute Proposal only **Not applicable to the Community Colleges.
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Appendix: Developing network of WLW partner organizations

