Minutes
Montana Board of Regents
September 24, 2026

Thursday, September 24, 2026

Meeting convened at 8:46 am

Regents Present: Loren Bough, Chair, Todd Buchanan, Daniel Spoon, Dean Folkvord, Heather Hoyer, and Quindy Gronley. Vice Chair Jeff Southworth was excused. Ex officio members present included Commissioner of Higher Education Clayton Christian and Superintendent of Public Instruction Susie Hedalen represented by Chief of Staff, Dylan Klapmeier. Ex officio member Governor Greg Gianforte was excused.

Comments by Chair Bough | *00:01:00*

Chair Bough thanked Chancellor Hicswa and her staff for hosting and recognized MSU Billings' 100th anniversary and the institution's strong connection to the community. He shared a brief history of Petro Hall, named for former Regent Genevieve Petro, who served on the Board from 1949 to 1963. He acknowledged the importance of the Board's connection to faculty with its regular breakfast meetings. He welcomed MSUB faculty representative Dr. Suzette Nynas and tribal college representative President Eva Flying, Chief Dull Knife College. He concluded with a review of the agenda.

Welcome by Chancellor Hicswa | *00:05:28*

Chancellor Stefani Hicswa welcomed the Board to campus. She highlighted MSUB's upcoming centennial anniversary and said MSUB has grown to five academic colleges across two campuses with over 100 programs. She highlighted recent student and faculty accomplishments and achievements. She reported record grant revenue and the highest retention rate in the university's history. Chancellor Hicswa gave an update on the fundraising campaign for a new ceramics and sculpture studio, noting fundraising has doubled in the last two years. She shared a video showcasing student and faculty success stories and concluded with an overview of MSUB's 2027-2032 Strategic Plan and its four pillars.

Approval of Minutes | *00:25:14*

- July 9, 2026, Meeting Minutes
- July 22, 2026, Meeting Minutes

With no corrections offered, the minutes were approved as distributed.

Commissioner's Report | *00:25:34*

Commissioner Christian welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Chancellor Hicswa and MSUB for hosting. He expressed appreciation for the morning's faculty breakfast and the continued

dedication of faculty across the MUS to student success. He reported that OCHE is actively engaged with Governor Gianforte's office on the biennial budget, infrastructure requests, and the employee pay plan in preparation for the 70th Legislative Session. He said the consistent message to legislators has centered on the transformative power of higher education, workforce development, and the return on investment that an MUS credential provides to students, communities, and the state. He said the Legislature's Joint Education Interim Committee and Education Interim Budget Committee recently heard a preliminary report from the Bureau of Business and Economic Research on the economic contributions of Montana's universities.

Commissioner Christian discussed other ways OCHE staff has been involved with legislative committees and mentioned OCHE's continued engagement with the Rural Health Transformation Program. He highlighted the University of Montana's first cohort of students entering its new Physician Assistant Program. He said that resident student enrollment growth continues to be encouraging and credited collaborative efforts among campus presidents to prioritize getting more Montanans into the MUS.

- Resident Student Access | *00:37:42*

Scott Lemmon, Director of Admissions and Enrollment Strategy, updated the Board on resident student access initiatives, noting a significant increase in applications and new undergraduate FTEs. He discussed the new "Grow Where You Belong" marketing campaign and brand. He discussed 2026-27 marketing initiatives including high school digital ads, statewide print materials, billboards, a partnership with the Montana High School Association, and broadcast TV ads during the Brawl of the Wild. He presented a new MUS logo and color scheme. Discussion followed.

- Federal Landscape | *00:59:47*

Joe Thiel, Interim Deputy Commissioner for Academic, Research and Student Affairs, briefed the board on significant changes in the federal higher education landscape, focusing on accreditation, earnings accountability, and federal financial aid updates. He said changes to accreditation included a new processes for accreditors, expanded scope, and new burdens on institutions, particularly regarding credit transferability. He said initial assessments of the earnings accountability requirements suggest minimal impact on MUS programs. He discussed changes to federal financial aid that are being implemented this fall.

- Campus Reports | *01:05:33*
- Introductions | *01:07:33*

President Brock Tessman, MSU, introduced Michael Becker, Vice President of Communications; Matt Lovern, Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School; Scott Williams, Interim Executive Director of the Museum of the Rockies; Dr. Leanne Frost, the new CEO/Dean of Great Falls College MSU; and Dr. Jennifer Brown, the new Chancellor at MSU Northern.

President Jeremiah Shinn, UM, introduced Dr. Michael Lynn, Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and Dr. Leslie Rissler, Dean of the College of Science.

Chancellor Hicswa introduced Tia Brown, Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance, and Ted Purinton, Dean of the College of Education.

Chancellor Johnny MacLean, Montana Tech, introduced Dr. Matthew Muterspaugh, Dean of the College of Letters, Sciences and Professional Studies.

Chancellor Jennifer Brown, MSUN, introduced Dr. Valerie Martin Conley, Interim Provost.

Commissioner Christian recognized Tammy Harris of MFPE for her longstanding partnership with the Board.

Remarks by Superintendent Hedalen (Designee) | 01:19:58

Dylan Klapmeier, Chief of Staff for the Office of Public Instruction, presented on behalf of Superintendent Hedalen. He shared his excitement about MUS's marketing plan and enrollment numbers, offering K-12 support for outreach to Montana high school students and families. He highlighted the strong partnerships between K-12 and postsecondary education, citing successful initiatives like the Future Ready program and joint promotion of FAFSA and Apply Montana. He noted that a significant achievement was the elimination of the dual credit teaching license, aiming to expand dual credit access for students. He noted preliminary data showed strong student growth in reading and math and improvements in youth mental health and behavior. Mr. Klapmeier said OPI and the Board of Public Education have aligned strategic initiatives with the board's priorities, focusing on student health and safety, improved academic outcomes, and college readiness. He discussed OPI's securing competitive federal grants and said it was pursuing waivers for more flexible use of federal funds. Discussion followed.

Budget, Administration and Audit Committee | *01:28:25*

CONSENT | *01:28:44*

Facility Items:

a. Request for Authorization to Grant a Utility Easement to NorthWestern Energy; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2012-R0926 | Attachment #1
b. Request for Authorization to Construct Parking Garage Safety Improvements – Phase 1; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2014-R0926 | Attachment #1

Other Items:

c. Request for Approval of University System/Employee Intellectual Property Joint Participation under MUSP 407-Johnson; MSU Bozeman | ITEM 226-2010-R0926 | Attachment #1

ACTION | *01:29:00*

a. Request for Approval of Montana University System Operating Budgets – FY2027; OCHE/MUS ITEM 226-101-R0926 | Attachment #1 | MUS Operating Budgets

Tyler Trevor, Deputy Commissioner for Budget and Planning, presented the FY27 all-funds operating budget of approximately $2.3 billion. He reviewed the budget's five major fund categories, a system level view of state appropriations since 1992, and the shift in cost share

between state appropriations and tuition. He reported the current unrestricted budget is projected to increase by $36 million, driven by an increase in state appropriations tied to the pay plan and increase in tuition revenue. He presented comparative national metrics on state appropriations per student, net tuition revenue per student, retention, six-year graduation rate, waivers and discounting per student.

b. Request for Authorization to Plan and Design the Phase 2 Remodel of Jesse Hall; UM Missoula ITEM 226-1006-R0926 | Attachment #1

Dan Stevenson, MUS Director of Facilities, presented the request for $2 million in authorization to plan and design Phase 2 improvements to Jesse Hall, a 1968 residence hall, following a 2025 Phase 1 project addressing fire and life safety issues. The project will be funded with auxiliary revenues.

c. Request for Authorization to Plan and Design Bobcat Stadium Improvements; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2011-R0926 | Attachment #1

Director Stevenson presented the request for up to $5 million to plan and design improvements to Bobcat Stadium, noting the request does not authorize a lease but would inform consideration of a potential lease. Discussion followed.

d. Request for Authorization to Enter into Off-Campus Lease with Hamilton Public Schools; UM-Bitterroot College; ITEM 226-1003-R0926 | Attachment #1.

Director Stevenson presented the request to renew the Bitterroot College lease in Hamilton, a 12,700-square-foot space, for $110,000 for one year. UM Provost Adrea Lawrence and Missoula College Interim Dean Lauren Fern joined the discussion regarding the long-term future of Bitterroot College given that anticipated community bond-levy support has not materialized. Provost Lawrence and Dean Fern reported that the college is actively seeking a smaller, better-fitting space and evaluating opportunities for greater in-person dual enrollment, early college, and workforce partnerships in the Bitterroot Valley. The Board asked staff to bring forward a longer-range plan for UM's presence in the Bitterroot Valley.

Academic, Research and Student Affairs Committee and Action | *02:42:35*

CONSENT | *02:43:03*

Emeriti Faculty:

a. Else; UM Western ITEM 226-1601-R0926
b. Caton; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2001-R0926
c. Zale; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2002-R0926
d. Dyer; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2003-R0926
e. Poole; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2004-R0926
f. Weaver; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2005-R0926
g. Shaw; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2006-R0926
h. Kaiser; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2007-R0926

i. Fiege; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2008-R0926
j. Luebeck; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2009-R0926
k. Manuel; UM Missoula ITEM 226-1004-R0926
l. Gallagher; UM Missoula College ITEM 226-1005-R0926

Tenure Faculty:

m. UM Missoula ITEM 226-1000-R0926
n. MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2000-R0926

ACTION | *01:51:10*

a. Request Authorization to Revise Board of Regents Policy | MUS/OCHE ITEM 226-103-R0926 | Attachment #1 | Attachment #2 | Attachment #3

Interim Deputy Commissioner Thiel discussed the state's role in authorizing post-secondary institutions to offer degrees and programs to Montana residents. He said that the goal of the policy changes was not to limit private institutions but to align Montana's authorization process with national norms, ensuring student protection and clear processes for new institutions. He assured the Board that the transition to the new process would minimize impact on current institutions.

Associate Legal Counsel Hannah Tokerud detailed the revisions to Board Policy 221 and the new policy governing participation in the state authorization reciprocity agreement. She highlighted three changes made to Board Policy 221 based on stakeholder feedback since the proposed revisions were introduced in July: automatically authorizing institutions that have offered degrees in Montana for 20 years with continuous accreditation; clarifying that only institutions domiciled outside Montana must show authorization in their home state; and adding a clear pathway for new institutions seeking authorization. Institutions currently operating in Montana would have until March 2027 to come into compliance with the new process. Discussion followed.

b. Request to Plan Items | OCHE Executive Summary | Supporting Documentation

Provost Lawrence presented the request to plan Studio Art and Media Arts Concentrations in the Baccalaureate and Graduate Art Degrees and the Request to plan the Center for Transformative Health, Resilience, Innovation, Vitality and Engagement. Discussion followed.

c. University of Montana Western ITEM 226-1602-R0926 | Attachment #1

Chancellor Estee Aiken presented UM Western’s new mission, vision, and strategic plan, "Montana Ready," developed over nearly three years through listening sessions, work groups, and a Strategic Planning Steering Committee. She said the plan was commended during UM Western's recent accreditation visit. Discussion followed.

INFORMATION | *03:04:08*

a. ARSA Workplan

Interim Deputy Commissioner Thiel reviewed the ARSA FY2027 workplan.

Academic Review Items:

b. 2026-27 Academic Planning
- Accreditation Report
- Academic Priorities and Planning OCHE Executive Summary | Campus Priorities and Planning Statements | Forthcoming Academic Proposal Report
- Program Review

Interim Deputy Commissioner Thiel reviewed the academic planning process. He discussed the various inputs that inform this process, emphasizing the importance of accreditation reports and the annual academic priorities and planning submissions from institutions. He highlighted the successful completion of final-year Institutional Effectiveness reviews by two institutions, which offered valuable external perspectives and insights into the strengths and areas for improvement across the institutions.

He shared emerging themes from the institutions' submissions, noting significant developments in health care and allied health fields, as well as the integration of artificial intelligence, noting the value of these insights in understanding the ground-level needs and interests of faculty across the state.

Interim Deputy Commissioner Thiel discussed the dashboard developed by Eric Meredith that serves as a resource for campuses and drives processes for ongoing program review. He said that this data-driven approach will improve efficiency and emphasized the potential for this dashboard to guide institutions and faculty in assessing the need for new academic programs, drawing on the experiences of others in the field.

c. Academic Approval Memo

Interim Deputy Commissioner Thiel shared the list of academic proposals that are ready for final approval.

Two Year and Community College Committee | *03:14:40*

ACTION | *03:15:38*

a. Request for Authorization to Revise Board of Regents Policy | MUS/OCHE ITEM 226-102-R0926 | Attachment #1

Interim Deputy Commissioner Thiel presented a policy revision aligning Board policy with a Title IV requirement barring institutions from withholding student transcripts for unpaid debts.

INFORMATION | *03:16:24*

a. Policy 301, Admission Requirements | Attachment #1

Interim Deputy Commissioner Thiel said this proposed revision clarifies how dual enrollment courses count toward the Regents' rigorous core, which determines eligibility for honors and other scholarships.

b. Two-Year and Community College Workplan

Interim Deputy Commissioner Thiel reviewed the Two-Year and Community College workplan.

c. K12/Counselor Engagement Overview

Ange DeWolf King, Director of Transfer and Special Projects, presented an update on K-12 counselor engagement efforts, including regional outreach through the School Administrators of Montana fall meetings, Perkins regional needs-assessment meetings, college fair attendance, and continued work with Dr. Angela McLean on Future Ready funding partnerships with rural school districts. Discussion followed.

d. Prison Education Update and Panel

Director DeWolf King introduced a panel on prison education, which included Dr. Nicole Bogunovich from MSUB, Highlands College Dean Tammy Burke, Department of Corrections Director Eric Strauss, and Deputy Director Scott Eichner. Dr. Bogunovich reported that MSUB offers an Associate of Applied Science in Business and a Bachelor of Science in Liberal Studies at the Montana State Prison and Montana Women's Prison under the federal Prison Education Program designation obtained in January, along with noncredit welding cohorts delivered with Great Falls College and Helena College. Dean Burke described a new pilot at Montana Tech's Highlands College, launching in spring with an initial cohort of up to 24 pre-release students who will live at the pre-release center for up to a year while completing a certificate program. Director Strauss and Deputy Director Eichner described the department's broader reentry and workforce investments, including the "Last Mile" computer programming certificate, the planned conversion of the Pine Hills and Riverside facilities to expand women's secure-facility capacity, and the flexible prerelease arrangements developed to support the Highlands College pilot. Discussion followed.

e. Workforce Pell

Interim Deputy Commissioner Thiel updated the Board on Workforce Pell, noting Montana's Department of Labor and Industry adopted a state-level eligibility policy in July and the state expects to process its first program applications by spring.

f. Workforce Partnerships Panel

Jacque Treaster, Director of Dual Enrollment and Career & Technical Education, introduced a health care workforce partnership panel featuring Christina McComas, Director of the Office of Medical Education at Billings Clinic and Molly Collins, Director of City College's Rural Eastern Montana Nursing Expansion program. Panelists discussed the statewide need for more clinical

training capacity and preceptors, City College's grant-funded outreach and student support services across eastern Montana, and programs bridging students from the classroom into clinical practice. Regent Spoon and other Board members discussed the complexity of expanding clinical capacity given competing health systems and workforce constraints. Additional discussion followed.

Public Comment | *04:29:12*

No public comment was offered

Committee Reports & Action | *04:30:04*

- Budget, Administration and Audit Committee

CONSENT | *04:30:20*

Facility Items:

a. Request for Authorization to Grant a Utility Easement to NorthWestern Energy; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2012-R0926 | Attachment #1
b. Request for Authorization to Construct Parking Garage Safety Improvements – Phase 1; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2014-R0926 | Attachment #1

Other Items:

c. Request for Approval of University System/Employee Intellectual Property Joint Participation under MUSP 407-Johnson; MSU Bozeman | ITEM 226-2010-R0926 | Attachment #1

A motion for approval of consent items a.- c. was made by Regent Hoyer; motion passed (6-0).

ACTION | *04:31:47*

a. Request for Approval of Montana University System Operating Budgets – FY2027; OCHE/MUS ITEM 226-101-R0926 | Attachment #1 | MUS Operating Budgets

A motion for approval of action item a. ITEM 226-101-R0926 was made by Regent Buchanan; motion passed (6-0).

b. Request for Authorization to Plan and Design the Phase 2 Remodel of Jesse Hall; UM Missoula ITEM 226-1006-R0926 | Attachment #1

A motion for approval of action item b. ITEM 226-1006-R0926 was made by Regent Folkvord; motion passed (6-0).

c. Request for Authorization to Plan and Design Bobcat Stadium Improvements; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2011-R0926 | Attachment #1

A motion for approval of action item c. ITEM 226-2011-R0926 was made by Regent Buchanan; motion passed (6-0).

d. Request for Authorization to Enter into Off-Campus Lease with Hamilton Public Schools; UM-Bitterroot College; ITEM 226-1003-R0926 | Attachment #1

A motion for approval of action item d. ITEM 226-1003-R0926 was made by Regent Spoon; motion passed (6-0).

Academic, Research and Student Affairs | *04:33:48*

CONSENT | *04:33:55*

Emeriti Faculty:

a. Else; UM Western ITEM 226-1601-R0926
b. Caton; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2001-R0926
c. Zale; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2002-R0926
d. Dyer; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2003-R0926
e. Poole; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2004-R0926
f. Weaver; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2005-R0926
g. Shaw; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2006-R0926
h. Kaiser; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2007-R0926
i. Fiege; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2008-R0926
j. Luebeck; MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2009-R0926
k. Manuel; UM Missoula ITEM 226-1004-R0926
l. Gallagher; UM Missoula College ITEM 226-1005-R0926

Tenure Faculty:

m. UM Missoula ITEM 226-1000-R0926
n. MSU Bozeman ITEM 226-2000-R0926

A motion for approval of consent items a.- n. was made by Regent Gronley; motion passed (6-0).

ACTION | *04:34:55*

a. Request Authorization to Revise Board of Regents Policy | MUS/OCHE ITEM 226-103-R0926 | Attachment #1 | Attachment #2 | Attachment #3

A motion for approval of action item a. ITEM 226-103-R0926 was made by Regent Buchanan; motion passed (6-0).

b. Request to Plan Items | OCHE Executive Summary | Supporting Documentation

A motion for approval of action item b. Request to Plan Items was made by Regent Folkvord; motion passed (6-0).

c. University of Montana Western ITEM 226-1602-R0926 | Attachment #1

A motion for approval of action item c. ITEM 226-1602-R0926 was made by Regent Hoyer; motion passed (6-0).

Two-Year and Community College Committee | *04:36:09*

ACTION | *04:36:12*

a. Request for Authorization to Revise Board of Regents Policy | MUS/OCHE ITEM 226-102-R0926 | Attachment #1

A motion for approval of action item a. ITEM 226-102-R0926 was made by Regent Folkvord; motion passed (6-0).

Appeal | *04:36:40*

Chair Bough explained the process related to appeals. He called for a motion to hear the appeal. No motion was made to hear the appeal, and therefore the Commissioner's decision was upheld.

The meeting adjourned at 2:50 p.m.

Executive Session

The Board convened an executive session at 3:00 pm. Chair Bough determined the discussion related to matters of individual privacy and the demands of individual privacy outweigh the merits of public disclosure.

Executive Session adjourned at 3:45 pm.

Approved by the Board of Regents on

November 19, 2026
Date

Clayton T. Christian
Commissioner of Higher Education
and Secretary to the Board of Regents

November 19, 2026
Date

Loren Bough
Chair, Board of Regents

APPENDIX

MONTANA
STATE UNIVERSITY
NORM ASBJORNSON
College of
ENGINEERING

**Department of
Civil Engineering**

September 18, 2026

Dear MUS Regents,

I am writing to express my support for Montana State University's request to spend $1.75 million to complete construction of safety improvements at the MSU parking garage (Item #226-2014-R0926). I write both as a tenured faculty member in MSU's Department of Civil Engineering and also as a mother. My 18-year-old son, Fergus Rooney, died by suicide at the MSU parking garage in February of this year. Fergus struggled with his mental health for much of his life and recently had spent over a year in Utah at a wilderness therapy program and in a residential treatment center. Our family and his support network succeeded many, many times in keeping him safe, until we didn't. I know that Fergus is not alone in the ways he struggled with depression and substance abuse. In addition to my grief following Fergus's death, I was terrified that an MSU student in a similarly dark place would find themselves on the upper deck of our parking garage.

Days after his death, when I expressed my concerns about the safety of the parking garage to President Tessman, he put me in touch with John How, Associate Vice President for University Facilities Management. I learned from John that MSU had already begun taking steps to protect students by seeking designs for safety upgrades of the parking garage infrastructure. These improvements are the driver behind this current spending request. I also approached the former Dean of the College of Engineering, Brett Gunnink, about installing a camera that could be monitored by MSU Police to observe the parking garage upper deck in the short term, before the safety improvements could be implemented. I was informed that MSU PD was already working on it and MSU PD Chief Stanley had the camera installed within a week of Fergus's death.

Combined with the absolutely overwhelming love and support I have received from my colleagues and students in the CE Department and Center for Biofilm Engineering, this level of institutional support from MSU – and the speed with which it has been executed – has been instrumental in helping me along my path toward healing from this terrible tragedy. Without exception, the people of MSU have shown up for me and my family with compassion and with resolve to protect the most vulnerable in our community. I am so, so proud to be part of this MSU family.

In closing, I want you, as the Regents of our university system, to know how grateful I am to Montana State University's leadership, faculty, and staff for the nature of their response to Fergus's death and the long-lasting impact it will have for protecting MSU students and our wider community. I urge you

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to please approve the current spending request for $1.75 million to complete construction of the safety improvements to the MSU parking garage so no other families experience the kind of loss we did.

Sincerely,

Catherine M Kirkland, PhD
Associate Professor, Environmental Engineering
Department of Civil Engineering
Center for Biofilm Engineering
Montana State University
406-994-4116
catherine.kirkland@montana.edu

cc: President Brock Tessman, president@montana.edu
John How, john.how@montana.edu
Dean Matt Caires, mcaires@montana.edu



Fergus and Catherine, August 2025.

From: Curtis Ethington <curtisethington1@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, 24 September 2026 14:03:06
To: MUSinfo <MUSinfo@montana.edu>
Subject:

****External Sender****

Who in there rite mind would spend that kinda money to design an upgrade for a stadium . Oh wait it's not about the education, no it must be about the money that can be made. Times are hard out here, that money could be used to make education at your school more affordable.