



MONTANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
OFFICE OF COMMISSIONER OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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To: Montana Board of Regents; Montana University System Chief Executive Officers;
Montana Community College Presidents; Governor Steve Bullock

From: Clayton T. Christian, Commissioner of Higher Education

Date: May 14, 2020

Subject: **COVID-19 UPDATE | Fall Academic Calendar**

In partnership with the MUS Board of Regents, campus leadership, and in ongoing communication and collaboration with statewide authorities, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education continues to monitor current and projected public health threats presented by the COVID-19 virus. Summer classes are underway across the Montana University System, and our focus now is on planning for a healthy return to on-campus academic and student life for the Fall 2020 semester.

I write today with guidance for MUS campuses regarding the Fall 2020 academic calendar. **Specifically, I am encouraging campuses to design a fall academic calendar that allows for the completion of the fall term, including any required on-campus final exams, by Wednesday, November 25th.** This is the day before Thanksgiving. There are two factors driving this suggestion:

1. The return to campus of thousands of students and employees from Thanksgiving travel (especially out-of-state travel) may pose significant health and safety challenges to our campus communities.
2. A calendar adjustment that shifts the fall term earlier into August allows us to complete the term before late fall, when projections suggest greater prevalence of general illness and perhaps an increased threat from COVID-19.

While OCHE is not mandating any specific schedule, we do expect campus leadership to work through appropriate shared governance channels to establish adjustments and strategies that best match campus needs. As you do finalize your calendar for the Fall 2020 semester, please announce adjustments to the fall academic calendar as widely and as soon as possible.

Thank you again for your leadership as we navigate this challenging time together. I am continually impressed with how campuses have adjusted to serve students, employees, and communities throughout the spring, and I ask for your continued adaptability and partnership as we look ahead to a Healthy Fall 2020.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Clayton T. Christian".

Clayton T. Christian
Commissioner of Higher Education