



AGBIS Consulting Report  
January 15, 2018



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# **AGBIS REPORT FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA**

## **About the Project**

This report, prepared by AGB Institutional Strategies, summarizes a review and set of recommendations to support revenue growth and diversification for the University of Montana.

The initial scope of work for this project was finalized and approved by incoming President Seth Bodnar in December 2017. The following Project Overview and Scope of Work is excerpted from the agreement established prior to beginning this project.

## **Project Overview and Scope of Work**

The University of Montana (UM) seeks a consultant(s) to assess the current state of the enrollment management functions at the University of Montana with a focus toward increasing the effectiveness and efficiencies related to undergraduate enrollment.

The assessment will provide a summary AGBIS report which includes observations, analysis of current state, and recommendations for action aimed at increasing enrollment or enhancing enrollment functions, systems, or processes to attract and enroll more undergraduate first-year and transfer students.

AGBIS will use a collaborative approach for this analysis working with the admissions, admissions operations, IT, financial aid, marketing and communications, and other key offices focusing on:

- **Assessment of current enrollment activities,**
- **Ways to increase top of the funnel engagement,**
- **Speed, service, and statistics,**
- **Financial aid leveraging strategies, and**
- **Confirmation to attendance strategies.**

AGBIS will deliver to the incoming President and other key staff recommended strategies to further enhance a sustainable and more efficient enrollment model that aligns with the State of Montana, the city of Missoula, and University goals.

This report fulfils the documentation requirement promised in the above scope of work.

## Summary of Findings

The University of Montana (UM) contracted with AGB Institutional Strategies (AGBIS) to assess the current state of its enrollment management functions with a focus on increasing the effectiveness and efficiencies related to undergraduate enrollment. AGBIS visited UM on December 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and conducted information gathering sessions. Key functional areas involved in the data gathering process included admissions, financial aid, student affairs, technology professionals, and the executive and other key members of the administrative team.

UM has a wealth of highly skilled staff that are extremely vested in the success of the University. Participating staff were very candid in sharing the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis in supporting the achievement of University enrollment goals. The VP of Enrollment and Student Affairs shared a clear set of goals and measures established for 2017 & 2018. In the fall of 2017, the team achieved success in halting a declining enrollment trend that had persisted for several years. The 2017 incoming class was larger than preceding years and overall net tuition revenue increased.

Enrollment Management strategies at UM are aligned with common Higher Education practices and methods. Staff are trying to stay up with emerging best practices, but reported numerous systems lacking that would enable them to be responsive within this highly competitive environment. There are key practice areas that require attention, such as the manual processing of transcripts and the lack of automated imaging and indexing systems to reduce application processing times. The staff know competitors, such as Montana State University (MSU), are responding faster and have stronger technology systems in place to give students more self-service tools or personalized attention from staff.

UM has a fundamental communications plan with prospective students. Staff reported current systems are slower to respond to inquiries, or applications, when compared with top-ranked cross applicant institutions because of inadequate marketing and collateral print materials to send. Numerous external stakeholders report that UM is often the last school to respond to inquiries and some report UM has not responded to an inquiry by a prospective student. Emails are being sent and admissions counselors are quickly following up with potential recruits, but not at the speed or depth of several competitors. To combat this challenge, UM has hired two firms and launched a Customer Relationship Management tool (CRM). While all staff see the potential in the efforts launched this year, numerous challenges, including the late arrival of print materials from the marketing area, limited fiscal resources to purchase and send multiple print materials, and lack of well-designed internal communications materials have limited UM's ability to respond at the speed, or provide visually engaging materials, that align with market expectations.

Leadership and staff in the admissions area appear to be suffering from implementation exhaustion regarding the CRM. A refresh of project leadership on this initiative and a timely decision on which CRM platform will be used is critical to achieve stated recruitment goals for 2019. AGBIS recommends that the ONE IT committee determines a step-by-step action plan and to gain approval for an action plan that is implemented by July 1, 2018, and that this plan be

determined in consultation with the Vice President for Enrollment Management, the Director of Admissions, and the Associate Director of Admissions Information Technology,

The ability to prioritize and align resources to key initiatives was identified by many staff members as a common constraint in executing key initiatives successfully. Nearly all staff participating in the information gathering sessions mentioned a perceived lack of resources, projects not completed by other departments, and lower funding support for enrollment management. These perceptions have led to a reactionary culture of firefighting versus a culture of execution and continuous innovation. Implementation delays and lack of execution by multiple departments are preventing the Enrollment Management team from functioning at a higher level.

The lack of a brand identity that all staff, from Executive Leadership to campus tour guides, can articulate when asked is a constraint that needs to be addressed immediately. UM has strong outcomes and numerous success stories from all majors. Somehow the campus has perceived these enrollment decreases as a reinforcement that the institution is decreasing in quality. The consultants affirmed this is not the case. UM is not telling its story in a way that is resonating with a more sophisticated audience of prospective students and families. Several meeting participants reinforced numerous, excellent, high impact, high engagement strategies that are being implemented to produce graduates who are well prepared to meet their goals. To support changing the narrative, the leadership team (including dean's and key assistant or associate vice presidents) needs to meet in January to shift the campus narrative. UM has many strengths. The leaders need to be able to define these strengths and reinforce the University's value in all external and internal conversations.

The relationship with Missoula College presents tremendous opportunities for creating new and innovative programs and a strategy should be developed to leverage that resource. While Missoula College works within defined UM governance, numerous partnerships could be formed through this College that align with Missoula's work force needs or growth plans.

Lastly, the APASP project has been a well-executed activity to identify potential areas for growth and consolidation. The issue of staffing to support the implementation phase of the APASP project requires a solution. AGBIS believes that dedicated resources are required to manage the execution of the APASP recommendations and that resources report into the President's or the Provost's office.

## **Top Recommendations for Action**

The primary focus of this consulting project was on ways to increase and enhance the University of Montana's (UM) enrollment. Numerous efforts are being made to recruit and retain more students. UM is fortunate to have a well-intended faculty and staff committed to helping UM, Missoula, the state, and the region meet its goals that support increased degree completion, economic development, and graduates with jobs that align with market needs.

From a new student perspective, the staff continues to increase the potential number of inquiries and applicants through an aggressive travel recruitment schedule where admissions recruiters have visited every high school in the state of Montana and also visit hundreds of out-of-state high schools in targeted markets. Recruiters seek to maximize their travel, adding in personal interviews and hosting receptions, to increase the yield of these prospective students. From a retention and graduation perspective, the Provost and her team have put into place several support programs and services to help more students achieve their goals.

As UM considers its next steps to increase enrollment for fall 2018, top priorities for action include additional funding to support the following:

1. **Aggressive marketing and communication plan** – UM needs to expand current efforts in this area to include a series of print and electronic materials that are sent quickly to a student who inquires on their own, or to a student who has been identified by name purchasing criteria. In addition, the University needs to merge communication plans and engagement strategies so that the prospective student receives a consistent and concrete message and set of activities that supports how UM will meet the student's goals.
2. **Advertising campaign** – To support personalized targeted messaging, UM needs to refine and further its efforts to advertise the University. Numerous activities are being tested and some with strong response rates. To enhance yield of prospective students, these efforts need to be expanded and be messaged consistently throughout the year.
3. **Target market the University's niche programs** - As marketing tools continue to be refined and abilities to market to sub-populations becomes easier, UM needs to expand its targeted marketing efforts. Programs such as Creative Writing, Organismal Biology, Ecology and Evolution, and Wildlife Biology are a few of UM's hallmark programs. The marketing, admissions, and academic affairs teams need to determine which programs will yield more qualified students through additional targeted efforts. These majors/programs must align with national or regional market demand to ensure the strongest Return on Investment (ROI) from this effort.
4. **Degree completion activities** – UM has put into place several excellent retention and student success initiatives all of which are demonstrating increased persistence and/or on-time graduation. Efforts created need to be expanded to engage more students and more offices need to work together to add other high impact, high engagement activities.
5. **Focus on revenue growth** – As UM continues its prioritization process, attention must be made to focus efforts that will positively impact revenue. APAPT reports have identified places where investments need to be made and possible areas for consolidation. Like all universities nation-wide, UM must focus its efforts and resources into programs that will grow or diversify its revenue. As UM invests in new or enhanced efforts, Return-On-Investment (ROI) analysis must be conducted to accompany the decisions on where to invest and predict realistic expectation of net revenue return.

6. **Technology enhancements to increase response time** – Numerous efforts within the admissions office are manually being done to ensure accuracy. Manual operations are time consuming and slows down processes that can be automated. The admissions, financial aid, and technology teams must create a prioritized plan to maximize the use of Banner and its supporting tools that will increase how fast a student’s application is processed and/or how easy it is for a student to access his/her information. Banner has all the tools and services needed, but a plan that will maximize this resource needs to be implemented that focuses on speed and service to students.
7. **Organizational infrastructure that facilitates stronger collaboration of resources** – As UM grew over the past 20 years, the organization responded by adding positions and resources to a variety of areas creating disparate operations all with similar goals or outcomes. As UM focuses on the future student that seeks a contemporary outcome based education supplemented with infrastructure that allows for self-service and resources on demand, a shared services organizational structure where resources are maximized and focused on student needs should be created so that administrative units work in concert with one another. Additionally, UM needs to build upon the foundational efforts being made related to student success. Where possible, efforts need to be integrated to maximize results.
8. **Appoint implementation leaders** – UM has numerous activities occurring to further realize its mission and vision. As the leadership team considers the recommendations included in this report, it needs to identify one person who will be charged with ensuring action items are implemented. This person will be responsible for identifying a timeline for each action item, funding needed, a source for funding, and ensure the activities are implemented. This person should report to the president bi-weekly on the progress towards, and hurdles to, completing the identified priorities.

## Conclusion

The University of Montana is at a time of great opportunity and great challenge.

Today’s competitive higher education environment, rapidly changing work force needs, Missoula’s expensive cost of living, and rigidly structural internal processes have all led to a moment where UM will need to make tough decisions to become a stronger University.

The enrollment management operations are nascent and reminiscent of an era that worked well in the 1990’s and early 2000’, but have changed dramatically in the last 10 years. Technology has been the primary driver of these changes to current practices. Well intended and hardworking staff are navigating a weak technology infrastructure to support its admissions efforts. Tools and services are within Banner, but systems thinking has not been applied, or tools within Banner have not been implemented. IT and Admissions have not unified efforts or set technology tool integration plans or priorities. Many academic units have created silo efforts to support admissions efforts. These well intended efforts now confuse some prospective students because of a lack of admission department awareness, which leads to additional work and frustration by



the staff and, sometimes, the student. Efforts are often redundant because of past efforts made by departments rather than building accountability structures in place for inefficiencies or errors.

While there are challenges, there are also significant opportunities. UM is a dynamic, comprehensive institution and an integral part of what makes Missoula and Montana great. Recommendations made in this report range from small operational items to large scale initiatives that will require significant change in thinking and practice. The consulting team left with no doubt that the University can make the necessary changes and leverage the University's strengths to increase enrollment. There are also significant opportunities to build new or diversified revenue streams that will not only strengthen the University, but also better serve the citizens of Montana. The opportunities within Missoula College alone could lead to real levels of new distinction as certificates, badges, and micro-credentials are needed to serve a rapidly changing workforce. The tasks at hand are an exciting opportunity for the University of Montana.

## **Appendix A: About AGB and AGBIS**

The Association of Governing Boards of Universities (AGB) is a private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization located at 1133 20th Street NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20036. It is a membership organization serving over 1,900 public and private higher education institutions and 36,000 individual board members, presidents, and senior administrators. Founded over ninety years ago, AGB advances the practice of citizen trusteeship that distinguishes American higher education.

AGB Institutional Strategies (AGBIS) is an auxiliary of AGB and works with higher education institutions to align mission-driven strategies effectively to ensure long-term prosperity and financial health. A significant portion of AGBIS' strategic goals is helping institutions with revenue growth and diversification. AGB also works to identify emerging issues of concern to higher education and to promote their visibility by conducting research, developing publications, holding forums for discussion, and encouraging appropriate member initiatives, whether on individual campuses, in state systems, or across higher education. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that higher education remains a strong and vital national asset.

AGB has conducted a significant number of consulting projects and board development efforts for private and public institutions, as well as for College systems and affiliated College foundations. As part of its work on institutional operations, AGBIS uses a combination of seasoned higher education staff, senior fellows, and special consultants who represent the best thinking and practices on challenges facing institutions of higher education, including institutional operational effectiveness, revenue growth, academic programming, support services, technology, new delivery models, and financial modeling.

## **Appendix B: Consulting Team**

### **Dr. Jim Hundrieser, PhD**

*Associate Managing Principal, AGB Institutional Strategies*

Dr. Hundrieser was the lead consultant for this project. Before his role with AGBIS, Jim served as Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs at Plymouth State College, where he reengineered marketing, communications, and recruitment efforts, leading to two straight years of record enrollment. As Vice President with Noel-Levitz, the leading enrollment management firm, Jim worked with more than 50 colleges and universities implementing strategies for small private institutions as well as large research I institutions. Using data-informed tools to shape strategy, Jim has focused on the creation of enrollment plans to drive revenue growth. His expertise covers strategic enrollment planning, student recruitment, retention, academic advising, assessment, co-curricular programming, athletics, and campus organization.

### **Mr. Dennis Moloney**

*Supporting Consultant, AGB Institutional Strategies*

Dennis Moloney has over 30 years of experience establishing systems and processes in the corporate and higher education sectors. Most recently, Dennis worked with Target X to revise and increase the functionality and support of its user interfaces to maximize its technology platforms. Prior to joining Target X, Dennis worked at Plymouth State University and the University System of New Hampshire. At Plymouth State University, Dennis led a cross functional team to collaboratively revise and reengineer the processes related to new student inquiries, application review, admitted student development, and confirmation. In addition, he led the technical implementation for the Salesforce CRM platform for both graduate and undergraduate admissions. The results of this focused work led to the first cross departmental electronic communications plan and deeper levels of engagement with prospective and admitted students. These process enhancements, in addition to other efforts, resulted in the University achieving its highest number of applicants and enrolled freshmen. Dennis then shifted to support the University System of New Hampshire, supporting the design of and implementation of its enrollment center, leveraging CRM technology, and integrating private sector knowledge into call center work practices. These efforts resulted in creating a seamless 2+2-degree completion program with the state community colleges. Prior to joining the higher education sector, Mr. Moloney spent 25 years in Fortune 500 companies leading transformative technology based projects at companies including American Express and General Electric.