



Ad Hoc Report Recommendation 5

HELENA COLLEGE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

REPORT PREPARED FOR THE NORTHWEST COMMISSION ON COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

SEPTEMBER 1, 2025

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Introduction

In a letter dated July 12, 2024, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) requested that Helena College prepare and submit an Ad Hoc Report without a visit in Fall 2025 in response to Recommendation 5 from the Spring 2024 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (EIE) peer evaluation and site visit. This document serves the college's first response to Recommendation 5.

Progress on Recommendation 5

Recommendation 5

Develop, document, and implement structures for decision making that considers feedback from existing governance groups consisting of faculty, staff, administrators, and students. (2020 Standard(s) 2.A.4)

2020 Standard 2.A.4

The institution's decision-making structures and processes, which are documented and publicly available, must include provisions for the consideration of the views of faculty, staff, administrators, and students on matters in which each has a direct and reasonable interest.

Response to Recommendation 5

Helena College has undertaken two significant efforts to improve and document structures for participatory decision-making. A new organization chart defines the scope of responsibility for each division and department within the college, not only highlighting the functions of the area, but also detailing the shared governance groups and other committees that contribute to decision-making in that area. To complement the inclusion of councils and committees in the organization chart, a new policy was drafted to define each type of group used by Helena College to gather and consider the views of all affected constituents in planning and decision-making. These efforts have resulted in an increased understanding of decision-making structures, as evidenced by an informal survey at a campus-wide meeting in the spring of 2025.

Organization Chart

Division leaders at Helena College have long been empowered to make decisions affecting their own areas, but with various restructuring efforts over the last several years, there has been confusion about where some responsibilities ultimately lie, and how directors come to their decisions. This has sometimes made it difficult for employees to understand how decisions are made outside the scope of their own work, or how to bring forward an idea for improvement. It has also resulted in gaps in the decision-making process where stakeholders should have been involved or informed, and they were not.

The Dean's Cabinet felt it would be useful to clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities for each unit and employee on campus and make this information readily accessible. While a basic organization chart has been consistently maintained, a [new organization chart](#) was developed to communicate the central role of the Dean's Cabinet in carrying out the administration of the college, illustrating how all functions of the college

are represented by the members of the Cabinet, and how each area incorporates feedback from stakeholders in their decision-making. First, the chart goes beyond a simple diagram of reporting structures to include a full scope of responsibility for all positions reporting to the Dean/CEO, and a brief summary of how each position within the area contributes to the broader scope. Additionally, each member of the Dean's Cabinet serves on or leads the shared governance groups that support their work within their scope, all of which are listed on the new organization chart. These groups are essential not only for carrying out tasks, but also as a forum for gathering input and sharing out information and decisions affecting those involved.

Opportunities for input, transparency, and feedback are built into the meetings each Cabinet member has with their department and their councils and committees, which is further elaborated below.

External authorities were also added to the organization chart, as many on the Cabinet felt it was important to highlight the ways our decision-making is informed or impacted by outside agencies, such as the state university system, federal requirements, collective bargaining agreements, or accrediting bodies.

Councils & Committees Policy

Helena College further clarified the role of committees and senates in shared governance by developing [Policy 100.5: College Councils, Committees, Workgroups, and Taskforces](#). This policy defines the various types of groups on campus and clarifies expectations for those groups.

Councils and standing committees must maintain bylaws that clearly define the group's mission, purpose, functions, and decision-making procedures. The bylaws also describe how members are selected and duties or requirements of those members, including the expectation that they are serving as representatives of a group, and are expected to solicit input and share group decisions with those they represent. These two types of groups are also expected to share their work broadly with the campus community by posting meeting minutes and supporting documents on a public web page ([Councils & Committees page on HC website](#)), where appropriate (committees conducting confidential business are exempt), and sharing an annual summary with the college at the end of the academic year (see example in [Appendix A](#)).

Because of their focus on carrying out essential processes that impact a targeted audience, functional/ad hoc committees have the option to maintain bylaws and public records of their work, but they are not required. These groups do provide opportunities for input into these processes by recruiting members from across all stakeholder groups (see the Committee Membership Matrix, [Appendix B](#), discussed in more detail in the Results section, below).

As the Dean's Cabinet works to ensure each of the councils and committees come into compliance with the new policy, the Cabinet identified gaps in shared governance and avenues for gathering input and sharing feedback. It also enabled the Cabinet to review membership of nearly all councils and committees to ensure each contained broad representation according to their focus.

Results

In completing the new organization chart and drafting the new policy, gaps in participatory decision-making became readily apparent. In the 2024-25 academic year, the following changes were made to address those gaps:

- **New Committees:**

- **Technology Steering Committee:** Formed to support information technology planning and acquisition at Helena College. Membership is partially determined by position, while some slots are open for representatives of different stakeholder groups, including students, faculty, and classified staff.
- **Space Planning & Optimization Committee:** Formed to support Operations leaders in ensuring efficient use of campus spaces in alignment with the college's strategic priorities, compliance requirements, and community needs.
- **Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee:** Plans for this group were mentioned in the Spring 2024 EIE Report and the group began meeting in the fall of 2024. The committee brings together various faculty representatives, an academic director, and the eLearning/LMS team to expand assessment of student learning from the course level to the program and institutional level.
- **Changes**
 - The Academic Leaders group was formalized into the **Academic Planning and Support Committee** to clarify their role in supporting and steer the direction of academics at Helena College.
 - The Budget Management Team was restructured and re-named to **Budget Council** to better reflect its role in overseeing budget planning and resource allocation. Membership has shifted from primarily Cabinet members and directors to representatives from the Cabinet, other directors, faculty, and classified staff.
 - The Dean's Campus Advisory Council worked collaboratively to re-establish themselves as the **Campus Coordinating Committee**, with a clearly defined purpose of increasing campus transparency through collaboration and knowledge sharing. The group now focuses on professional development, leadership training, and communications.
 - The Quality of Worklife Committee, along with the Wellness Champions subgroup, has struggled to find a purpose in the last few years. The group has been reinvigorated as the **Employee Wellbeing and Engagement** committee, with broad campus representation dedicated to celebrating employees, promoting opportunities for social connection and community building, and providing intentional support for new employees.
 - IDEA Committee has been re-named to **IDEA Council** and refreshed its focus on institution-level assessment and effectiveness. As part of a new Institutional Assessment Plan, the group will review key components of institutional effectiveness, such as annual plans, key performance indicators, and progress on strategic goals. They will recommend priorities of focus for the Dean's Cabinet and Budget Council.

Progress updates about these efforts were presented to employees at the end of the fall and spring semesters as part of regular State of the College meetings. Following the spring meeting, attendees were asked to share their initial thoughts about the new efforts in an informal survey, and the feedback was positive. Approximately half of our full-time permanent employees responded, and the majority felt that their understanding of decision-making structures at Helena College increased, and communication about decision-making improved. Two-thirds to three-quarters of employees feel that faculty, staff, and directors/administrators have just the right level of involvement, while only a third of employees said the same for students. This is an area to prioritize going forward. The full report from the survey is available in [Appendix C](#).

At the start of the 2025-26 academic year, a matrix of all councils and committees with consistent membership throughout the year (some ad hoc committees have different members every time they meet, such as hiring committees and scholarship award committees) was created ([Appendix B](#)). This has allowed the Dean's Cabinet and all employees to easily see diversity of membership across these groups, and was especially useful in recruiting faculty to fill vacant seats reserved for them. Of the 20 most active councils and committees, a third of the membership slots are reserved for faculty, about a quarter for Cabinet members, and approximately 20% each for directors and staff. Students currently only have a seat on two of these committees, though the Associated Students of Helena College (ASHC) is entirely student-run, and two fee committees are comprised entirely of students, chaired by a budget manager. Student participation has been challenging to achieve at our two-year college, as students are typically more interested in leadership roles in their second and final year of attendance, leaving them with a short time to contribute to the college in this way. The college will continue exploring options to incorporate the student voice in decision-making.

Conclusion & Next Steps

Helena College has made substantial progress in addressing Recommendation 5 to increase transparency and opportunities for input into decision-making. Through the creation of a comprehensive organization chart and the adoption of Policy 100.5, the college has clarified roles, responsibilities, and expectations for all employees in support of transparency and shared governance. This information was shared in two all-campus meetings and has been discussed in the weekly employee newsletters. A review of group member composition clearly demonstrates broad campus participation in the governance process.

Transparency efforts include:

- A new organization chart
- A new policy to define councils and committees
- Standardization and publication of group bylaws on the web
- Expectation for group members to share information with and bring ideas from their stakeholders
- Distribution of an annual summary of activity by groups
- Consistent communication about new efforts

Increased opportunities for input include:

- Reviewing and revising membership of existing groups to ensure broad representation
- Adding new groups to address areas without shared decision-making
- Clarifying expectations for council and committee members to serve as information liaisons with their constituents

The college anticipates that the formation of new committees and restructuring of existing ones will bring some much-needed clarity to the important work these groups do at the college. Dean's Cabinet will spend the next academic year implementing and observing the effects of these new efforts in each of their councils, committees, and departments, and will discuss their experiences in an end-of-the-year planning meeting, when any changes to the new structures will be considered, such as the need to explore additional opportunities for student involvement.

Helena College remains committed to fostering an open and collaborative environment where shared governance is not only valued but actively practiced. These efforts have allowed the college to further align institutional practices with NWCCU standards to promote a culture of engagement and accountability where the perspectives of all stakeholders contribute to the fulfillment of our mission.