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 **University of Montana Rural Institute**

**Senate Recommendation, 2019**

**Summary of Center Review Report:**

The University of Montana Rural Institute describes itself as an organization that conducts research, provides education and interdisciplinary training, and develops services for people with disabilities, their families, and others supporting them in rural communities. The Rural institutes employs 30-40 graduate and undergraduate research assistants from a wide variety of academic disciplines. Through partnerships with local hospitals, schools and various other local, state, and national organizations, the Rural Institute's programs help reduce or eliminate the barriers which may prevent or limit the integration in rural communities of people with disabilities. Thus, it helps promote independence, productivity and community inclusion in rural and frontier communities. Averaging 10 publications per year and yielding $24.6 mil in contracts and grants over the past 5 years, the Institute advances their direct service and training opportunities with research.

**Objectives:**

1. The Rural Institute provides interdisciplinary training, continuing education opportunities for those working in fields of psychology, education, public health, social work, PT, OT, SLP, and other health professions.
2. They develop and provide community services that are based on research and best practices.
3. The Rural Institute's work contributes to the discovery and development of methods to promote full community participation of people with developmental disabilities.
4. Through its work, the Rural Institute provides information on issues and practices designed to improve the quality of life for people with I/DD, thus increasing the knowledge and awareness of consumers, service providers, professionals, and the general public.

**Review in terms of the University's mission:**

The work of the Rural Institute aligns with the University of Montana's [Priorities for Action](http://www.umt.edu/president/strategicinitiatives/priorities-for-action.php). In particular, the Institute promotes "excellence and innovation in teaching, learning, and research" by providing research and training opportunities for 30-40 Graduate and Undergraduate students per year. The institute reaches students in psychology, law, geography, social work, public health, economics, communication science, etc. The Institute's chief mission fully embraces the concept of "Partner[ing] with Place" through its network of partners across the state, in communities and at other MUS institutions. The Institute's objectives are focused on the ensuring that barriers to full community inclusion are reduced or eliminated. And, through the RI Leadership Team, the institute promotes leadership development opportunities among its staff. Thus, it fosters the notion of "mission first, people always." The Institute's report also describes its work in terms of the UM Strategic Vision: Creating Change Together.

**Does ECOS/Faculty Senate Consider this center controversial?**

No.

**Is the relationship with academic units beneficial?**

Yes. The Rural Institute Collaborators (Appendix B) includes the Alexander Blewitt III Law School, College of Humanities and Sciences, PJ Washington College of Education and Human Sciences, and College of Health Professions and Biomedical Sciences. Additionally, the RI staff teach upper division and graduate courses in sociology and the core courses for the UM Human and Family Development minor.

**Is the program revenue neutral or does it consume more resources than it generates? If so, is the use of the University resources justified?**

The faculty and staff are supported 100% by external contracts, grants, and service fees. There are no general funds allotted to the Rural Institute for faculty and staff support. Although the director is a tenured Associate Professor in the PJW College of Education and Human Sciences, this role is currently unfunded by UM.

**Is the entity making progress toward objectives?**

Yes. In addition to acting as a resource for local and state-wide agencies, the Institute is expanding its work with partners in Kansas, Utah, Texas, North Carolina, Maine, California. As Dr. MacLean's external review of the Institute points out, the RI's publication record is exceptionally strong and it has be very productive in generating funding proposals over the past three years. It should also be noted that the Rural Institute recently changed its name (Passed Faculty Senate 12/6/18) to better reflect the work that the institute does. Rather than focusing on developmental disabilities, the Institute will be able to work with people whose disabilities aries throughout the lifespan (e.g. brain injury, mobility impairment due to accident, vision/hearing loss due to age). This will allow the Institute to better serve the state of Montana and become more competitive for broader funding opportunities.

**Recommendation:**

Continue.

**Justification:**

The Rural Institute provides essential research, education, and training fora wide array of partnerships across the state that provide services for people with disabilities. In his external review, Dr. MacLean notes that the Rural Institute continues to gain recognition for its work and has become more visible within the network of University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. It is well-aligned with the University mission, provides important opportunities for faculty and students alike, and provides an important service to the state.