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NEWS RELEASE

Nov. 20, 1997

Contact: Andrea Vernon, director, Volunteer Action Services, (406) 243-2586.

"AMERICA READS" PROGRAM UP AND RUNNING AT UM

MISSOULA--

Twenty-six students from The University of Montana are taking President Clinton's "America Reads" Challenge seriously by tutoring elementary and middle school children in the Missoula community.

The UM students are members of AmeriCorps, a national program that provides community service in exchange for educational grants.

The "America Reads" Challenge, announced in August 1996, is designed to address the fact that 40 percent of American children are not reading well enough by the third grade. To combat the problem, Clinton called for 30,000 reading specialists and tutor coordinators to help mobilize an army of reading tutors.

UM President George Dennison was appointed to President Clinton's steering committee of "America Reads" Challenge, and this semester the program is beginning to benefit the local community.

"Teachers are excited about the concept of college students getting involved in the classroom outside the realm of student teaching," said Andrea Vernon, director of Volunteer Action Services at UM.

In 15 schools around Missoula the UM students are each tutoring an average of 10 hours a week. After 300 hours of tutoring, the student will receive an educational grant of \$750.

Aubrey Hancock, a French major, is a reading tutor who works with two students in first grade.

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One student is hyperactive and the other didn't attend kindergarten.

"I'm basically working one on one to help them catch up to the other kids," Hancock said.

"They're both really bright kids. For the most part they just get distracted."

Several studies have shown that sustained individualized attention and tutoring combined with parental attention can raise reading levels substantially.

Vernon said the program has benefited UM student tutors as well, by making them feel more connected to their community.

"I have been very impressed with the amount of student interest in the program," Vernon said.

"There seems to be a growing commitment to student involvement in the community."

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