Bozeman student takes health career program at UM

University of Montana--Missoula. Office of University Relations

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MISSOULA --

Marylou Bahr of Bozeman is one of a select group of minority students from high schools and colleges in Montana, Wyoming and Idaho who are boning up on academics this summer at The University of Montana-Missoula.

She is taking part in the six-week Health Careers Opportunity Program, offered June 14-July 25 by UM's School of Pharmacy and Allied Health Sciences. The program provides academic enrichment courses in math, science, English and pharmacy as a way to encourage minority students to pursue health-related careers.

Bahr is a member of the Northern Cheyenne tribe and a 1973 graduate of St. Labre Indian High School. In 1991 she completed a bachelor's degree in education and physical education at Montana State University-Bozeman, where she participated in the Minority Biomedical Research Support Program. She's now pursuing a master's degree in physical therapy at UM.

With her in the HCOP program at UM are nine other American Indian students from Montana and three minority students from Idaho and Wyoming. Working with the 13 students is an 80-member team that includes 22 teachers, 17 advisers, six teaching assistants, and six guest speakers discussing topics such as treating the American Indian physical therapy patient...
and Hispanic views of wellness.

"I like to stress that this is an academic program, and we really focus on academic issues," program director Rene LoParco said. "But one of our responsibilities is to adequately serve the students holistically. We try to make sure they are well-connected to all student support services on campus. For example, we provide them with academic advising and review their living situations and child-care needs. And we don’t ignore having fun."

A highlight this summer was a field trip on horseback up the back side of Missoula’s Mount Sentinel, where the students learned about medicinal plants that have sprung up in the Pattee Canyon burn area, LoParco said. The students also visit job sites and spend time with professional practitioners.

Although the UM program admits minority students from anywhere in the nation, it is geared primarily for prospective American Indian pharmacists and physical therapists who will practice in Montana. Currently, 6 to 7 percent of Montana’s population is Indian, but only 0.6 percent of the pharmacists and 0.4 percent of the physical therapists are Indian.

HCOP is in its fourth summer at UM. It is funded by a three-year $421,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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