March 2020 news releases

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MISSOULA – As emergent pathogens like coronavirus and climate-related health challenges like wildfire smoke plague human populations, the University of Montana has received funding for a center dedicated to understanding and addressing public health challenges to Montana and the region.
The National Institutes of Health awarded the University a five-year $10.75 million grant to establish the Center for Population Health Research (CPHR, pronounced “see-far”). The center will support epidemiological and mathematical modeling approaches to better understand risk and resilience factors for children’s health outcomes. It also will create disease prevention strategies developed for, adapted to and tested in rural communities.

“We are excited about this opportunity to improve the health of children in Montana and the region,” said Curtis Noonan, center director and a professor of epidemiology in UM’s School of Public and Community Health Sciences. “This comes at a challenging time for the public health community.

“We could not have predicted the current coronavirus threat when we started building this center over two and a half years ago,” he said, “but we did recognize the importance of developing the capacity to work with medical and public health data to better understand health risk in our communities and identify disease prevention strategies that are relevant to rural states.”

CPHR research projects establish scientific capacity and a collaborative infrastructure highly relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic. Erin Landguth leads a project to better understand the factors that influence respiratory infection among children.

“In the face of today’s infectious disease complexities, mathematical models offer essential tools for synthesizing information to understand epidemiological patterns and for developing the quantitative evidence base for decision-making in public health,” Landguth said. “Partnering with pediatric health care providers, my project will integrate novel data streams, computational capacity and new modeling tools, allowing for the description of how respiratory infections vary across space and time – particularly in rural communities.
Public health leaders anticipate that a coronavirus vaccine, when developed, will be an essential component of controlling the current pandemic. A CPHR project led by Sophia Newcomer focuses on identifying the barriers to early childhood vaccinations, especially in rural areas where childhood vaccination rates are lower than public health targets.

"Vaccines are the most effective tool we have for infectious disease control and prevention," said Newcomer. "Working with the state health department and local providers, my project seeks to identify why some Montana children fall behind or don't receive recommended vaccines and to develop strategies to increase vaccination rates across the state."

Environmental epidemiologist Erin Semmens leads a third research project investigating the impact of community exposures to smoke from wildfires – an increasingly recognized and now constant public health threat to the region.

"Wildfire events are increasing in frequency, duration and intensity due to climate change," Semmens said. "Through a collaboration with the Montana Department of Health and Human Services, local health systems and UM colleagues across campus, our project aims to quantify how these exposures influence early childhood development, as well as birthweight and risk of preterm birth. Both are linked to long-term susceptibility to disease and infections."

A key feature of CPHR is to provide core resources to support both current and future researchers who explore
important population health questions. The Data and Modeling Core, led by Jon Graham, provides center researchers with tools and infrastructure for working with sensitive electronic data such as medical records and state health tracking systems.

To effectively translate research findings to action, the Intervention Support Core, led by Tony Ward, provides CPHR investigators with the expertise and tools for designing novel disease prevention and health promotion strategies. Such strategies will be further informed by the CPHR Stakeholder Advisory Board, which includes key players in the health care, public health and policy arenas.

Reed Humphrey, dean of the College of Health that includes the School of Public and Community Health Sciences, said the award to establish CPHR at UM demonstrates the college’s capacity and commitment to grow its reach in public health.

“Importantly, it opens the doors to enhanced collaboration across our health professions at UM and our Family Medicine Residency that are consistent with our parallel commitment in interprofessional education and collaborative practice,” Humphrey said.

CPHR resources and research projects also provide fantastic opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students to engage in cutting-edge, NIH-funded research.

“This project provides undergraduate and graduate students from several departments across campus the opportunity to work with our world-class faculty in research areas that have become increasingly relevant in light of the COVID-19 pandemic,” said UM Vice President for Research and Creative Scholarship Scott Whittenburg. “The University of Montana is rapidly becoming a leader in vaccine development and implications for public health.”

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Contact: Curtis W. Noonan, director, UM Center for Population Health Research, 406-243-4957, curtis.noonan@umontana.edu.
UM Dance Students Excel at Regional Conference

March 27, 2020

MISSOULA – The University of Montana School of Theatre and Dance bolstered its standing as one of the nation’s most decorated institutions with another extraordinary showing at the recent American College Dance Association Northwest Regional Conference in Spokane, Washington.

A highlight was second-year Master of Fine Arts acting candidate Elijah Fisher’s stunning solo “TIRED | T1RED,” which was selected to represent the entire region at the esteemed National College Dance Festival in May. (That event has since been canceled due to coronavirus concerns.)

The regional conference, which attracted students, artists and educators from throughout the Northwest, offered dance programs the opportunity to showcase original works and
receive constructive feedback from nationally and internationally renowned adjudicators.

Fisher’s solo received raves from the adjudicators, who wrote “‘TIRED | T1RED’ is an outstanding, fierce, musical and nuanced performance that combines virtuosic physicality, haunting laughter and silent screams to channel the pathologizing of the Black male. The work has a powerful message that needs to be heard.”

UM’s Dance Program is no stranger to performing at ACDA’s national festival. The national conference is a biennial event, and in 2018, “Every^Man (Alright),” an original solo by MFA acting graduating student Tsiambwom Akuchu, was celebrated on the national platform.

In 2012, “MEAT,” an original work by Icelandic choreographer Steinunn Ketilsdóttir and UM Dance alumnus and Missoula native Brian Gerke, featured 11 dancers who were enthusiastically received at the Kennedy Center that May. In 2010, the National College Dance Festival featured UM’s performance of “Prey,” a piece created by internationally acclaimed choreographer Bebe Miller.

This year’s adjudicators also recognized another UM dance piece, “Void,” which was choreographed by Visiting Assistant Professor Brooklyn Draper. The ensemble of 12 student dancers was described as “striking, captivating, breathtaking … visually compelling. While the choreographer expertly organizes bodies in space, there is a strong use of timing, energy and dynamics to provide a beautiful scaffolding for the epic work.”

“Our dance students are committed to the practice of making meaningful, relevant and empowering works of art,” said Nicole Bradley Browning, a UM dance professor currently on professional leave and the ACDA northwest regional director. “ACDA affords students an unmatched opportunity to discover how their choreography and performance translates to diverse audiences. We stand affirmed, knowing that our dance program continues to cultivate a space for our students to create important and valued work.”

The UM School of Theatre and Dance is one of the few programs in the Northwest, and the only in Montana, to offer Bachelor of Fine Art and Bachelor degrees specializing in choreography, performance and dance education.
The program also offers a dance minor, as well as a diverse array of dance classes open to students of all abilities, backgrounds and levels of curiosity.

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**Contact:** Heidi Jones Eggert, associate professor, UM School of Theatre and Dance, 406-529-5401, heidi.eggert@umontana.edu.
MISSOULA – As schools and districts across Montana suspend classes to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, MontanaPBS and the Montana Office of Public Instruction have announced an ambitious plan to support home learning for students.

Beginning Monday, a new weekday television schedule will debut, including educational programs aligned to state public education standards that complement a suite of free digital learning resources available from home.

“These school closures bring unique challenges for teachers, parents and caregivers in how to keep Montana kids engaged and learning,” MontanaPBS General Manager Aaron Pruitt said. “As our state’s public television service and as a hub for digital learning resources, MontanaPBS can play a critical role in helping create a learning environment with trusted and quality resources outside of the classroom and at home.”
Beginning Monday, March 30, MontanaPBS will dedicate its daytime weekday schedule to Montana state standards-aligned educational programming provided by MontanaPBS and the Office of Public Instruction.

The new 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. weekday schedule includes specific blocks of time for pre-K through eighth grade levels, covering English, language arts, social studies, science and math. MontanaPBS’ regular primetime schedule will not be affected by this change.

“During these unprecedented circumstances, teachers are continuing to teach, and students are continuing to learn through combination of digital and non-digital distance study,” said Superintendent of Public Instruction Elsie Arntzen. “This can present challenges for ensuring equitable delivery of education services. The new daily TV programming will help bridge this divide and provide additional opportunities for equitable access to education.”

As part of this unique collaboration between MontanaPBS and the Office of Public Instruction, MontanaPBS curated corresponding free digital content for at-home learning and support for teachers navigating this new learning landscape. Aligned to the same Montana content standards and topic areas as the broadcast service, MontanaPBS is creating and sharing the following free resources for teachers here:

**How Teachers Can Navigate School Closures Due to the Coronavirus**

- **Educational TV schedule**: MontanaPBS is broadcasting standards-aligned programs like “Nova,” “SciGirls,” “History Detectives,” “American Masters” and MontanaPBS programs that feature Montana History and Indian education content such as “Indian Relay” and “Montana Mosaics” weekdays from 6 a.m. through 6 p.m. [Daily schedule here.]
- **Digital Media Collections**: MontanaPBS is providing resource collections on PBS LearningMedia that correspond with our TV broadcast schedule. Collections include curated media and lessons sorted by grade level and subject area.
- **Support for Teachers**: MontanaPBS offers live webinars for teachers on how to start using these learning platforms. PBS LearningMedia webinars are offered weekly. A schedule can be found on our website.
- **Curated Tips and Tools for Teachers**: MontanaPBS published a webpage for teachers that points to articles and resources created or vetted by the MontanaPBS Education team, other public media organizations and other trusted education partners.
- **Unplugged Learning Activities for Families**: MontanaPBS published a webpage for parents with learning menus for K-12 students to be used for home learning. All of the learning menus feature activities that do not require technology or an internet connection.

For more about MontanaPBS Learn at Home resources, visit [https://www.montanapbs.org/education/distance-learning/](https://www.montanapbs.org/education/distance-learning/). Educators looking for support in implementing distance learning using the Learn at Home programming schedule can contact the MontanaPBS Education staff.

MontanaPBS is available to families via free, over-the-air broadcast, in the state’s larger cities and on translators in smaller communities, as well as on cable TV, Dish, Direct TV and the recently launched livestreaming service, YouTube TV. To watch MontanaPBS in your community, visit our [Broadcast Area page.](http://news.umt.edu/2020/03/032520_mpbs.php)

**About Montana’s Largest Classroom** – MontanaPBS connects the residents of this state to each other, to their country and their world through broadcast television, the internet and community outreach projects. We are an electronic town square that encourages the sharing of ideas, opinions and information. MontanaPBS chooses
programs based on community impact and engages in services that echo the independent spirit and neighborly concern that is the hallmark of our state.

MontanaPBS (KUFM-TV in Missoula, KUSM-TV in Bozeman, KUKL-TV in Kalispell, KBGS-TV in Billings, KUGF-TV in Great Falls and KUHM-TV in Helena) is a service of UM and Montana State University. For more information, visit http://www.montanapbs.org.

###

**Contact:** Paul Heitt-Rennie, MontanaPBS director of content, paul_heitt-rennie@montanapbs.org; Nikki Vradenburg, MontanaPBS director of education, nikki@montanapbs.org.
UM Scientists Play a Direct Role in Identification of Forests for Protection in Borneo

March 23, 2020

MISSOULA – An international team of researchers, including two from the University of Montana, are working to help identify priority forest areas for protection on Borneo.

The government of the state of Sabah in Malaysian Borneo has set an ambitious target of securing 30% of Sabah’s land area under protection by 2025. The study identified important forest areas across the state that are critical for protection. These areas are rich in threatened rainforest animals and plants. The forests also store large amounts of carbon, helping to slow global warming.

In total, the priority forests identified are about the size of Glacier National Park, almost twice the size of the Yorkshire Dales National Park in the United Kingdom.

Lead author, Dr. Sara
Williams from UM said, “What makes our study different is that the research is being used to inform conservation planning decisions about to be taken by government agencies.

“The priority forest areas account for 5% of the land area of the state of Sabah. The approach that we came up with, selecting areas for protection strategically rather than randomly, protects around 12% of most of the statewide conservation features that we were interested in, which includes species ranges, forest carbon and landscape connectivity.”

Creating land corridors that link protected areas together will mean animals can move from the large parks across the Indonesian border into the flagship conservation areas in the center of Sabah.

“Allowing species to move from the hottest lowland areas to the cooler mountains will be especially important for conserving rainforest species in the long term, as they will need to keep up with a warming climate,” said Dr. Sarah Scriven from the University of York.

UM's Dr. Jedediah Brodie said, “Protected areas are generally situated based on scenic beauty or political expediency. But putting new protected areas in the best places for biodiversity, as we’ve done here, more than doubles their conservation benefits.”

The paper, “Incorporating connectivity into conservation planning for optimal representation of multiple species and ecosystem services,” is in press at the journal Conservation Biology.

For more information, email Brodie jedediah.brodie@umontana.edu.

Other partners in the study are:

Eyen Khoo, Alexander Hastie, John Sugau, Dr Reuben Nilus and Dr Joan Pereira (Forest Research Centre, Sabah Forestry Department)
Frederick Kugan (Sabah Forestry Department)
Dr. Agnes Agama and Dr Glen Reynolds (South East Asia Rainforest Research Partnership)
Professor Gregory Asner and Dr Luke Evans (Arizona State University)
Professor David Burslem (University of Aberdeen)
Dr. Jenny Hodgson and Dr Lydia Cole (University of Liverpool)
Dr. Colin Maycock, Sandy Tsen, Leung Lee and Suzika Juiling (Universiti Malaysia Sabah)
Professor Jane Hill (University of York)

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**Contact:** Jedediah Brodie, UM Craighead Endowed Chair of Conservation, 406-880-3854, jifiediah.brodie@msou.umt.edu.
MISSOULA – MontanaPBS seeks to support all Montana citizens affected by the coronavirus outbreak, providing support through our educational programs and resources available on MontanaPBS Supports Home Learning for Families, Educators During School Closures

March 17, 2020
television and online. The MTPBS education department is collaborating with PBS stations across the country to curate digital and printable resources to support home learning for children ages 3-18.

"MontanaPBS is proud to provide quality digital resources that can be accessed across multiple platforms and printable materials to support student learning," MTPBS Director of Education Nikki Vradenburg said.

Parents can find the resources on the MTPBS website at [http://montanapbs.org/distancelearning](http://montanapbs.org/distancelearning).

Teachers and families are invited to join MTPBS closed groups on Facebook, where they are sharing information for supporting student learning. Find these groups by searching for “MTPBS Teachers” and “MTPBS Parents” on Facebook.

"MontanaPBS wants families and educators to know that all of our programs and resources on air and online are created for the purpose of educating adults and children of all ages," Vradenburg said. "Furthermore, all PBS KIDS content for children ages 3 to 8 is aligned to learning goals in literacy, STEAM, social studies and social and emotional learning."

Parents can visit the [MTPBS website](http://montanapbs.org) to find a description of PBS KIDS programs and the content areas and learning goals they support.

As many schools are exploring options for distance learning during school closures, MTPBS recommends using the free website for teachers, PBS LearningMedia at [www.pbslearningmedia.org](http://www.pbslearningmedia.org) as a resource for sharing educational media with students.

The website hosts hundreds of thousands of media resources, including videos, images, interactive games, self-paced interactive lessons and learning activities to support exploration.

MontanaPBS LearningMedia integrates with tools such as Google classroom Remind and Clever to help teachers plan and implement engaging lessons for students. For teachers new to using the platform, free webinars are provided.
MontanaPBS Supports Home Learning for Families, Educators During School Closures - UM News - University Of Montana

offered by PBS and other member stations. Educators can refer to the MTPBS website for this information.

The MontanaPBS Education department is led by two certified teachers who each have over a decade of classroom teaching experience. They are available to support and consult with educators, who are interested in exploring how to support student learning during school closures.

“We know these are uncertain times for Montana families and educators and hope we can continue to be a trusted resource for learning across our great state,” Vradenburg said.

MontanaPBS (KUFM-TV in Missoula, KUSM-TV in Bozeman, KUKL-TV in Kalispell, KBGS-TV in Billings, KUGF-TV in Great Falls and KUHM-TV in Helena) is a service of UM and Montana State University. For more information, visit http://www.montanapbs.org/.

Contact: Nikki Vradenburg, MontanaPBS director of education, nikki@montanapbs.org; Deanna Mydland, MontanaPBS early learning specialist, deanna@montanapbs.org.
MISSOULA – Francisco Leyva, a 2007 toxicology Ph.D. graduate of the University of Montana, is on the forefront of researching possible therapeutics for the novel coronavirus. As the medical officer for the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, he oversees clinical trials of the Division of Microbiology and Infectious Diseases with the National Institutes of Health.
Leyva, who is a native of Peru, shared how his work contributes to coronavirus research.

What does your role as a medical officer within the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases entail?

I am part of the team that manages clinical trials funded by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. My responsibility as physician-scientist in the Respiratory Diseases Branch is to ensure individual safety and compliance according to our Code of Federal Regulations for human protection. Some of these projects could be Phase 1 or Phase 2 clinical trials testing products in the pipeline for future FDA approval.

The first step in vaccine development is safety. Once its safe use is known and described, dose optimization and time intervals for administration aimed to efficacy can be determined.

How has your research involved coronavirus?

As a medical officer, I work for NIAID’s Division of Microbiology and Infectious Diseases, which does not have a laboratory or clinic. However, we are continuously working collaboratively with various other government agencies (FDA, CDC, BARDA, etc.) in helping facilitate the development of new resources such as diagnostic tools, vaccines for prevention or treatment, and the development of antivirals for emerging pathogens, including the current SARS-CoV-2 public health emergency.

How is your work challenged by coronavirus?

As a scientist, I know it is difficult to predict the future, moreover in the global context. In the U.S., we are working diligently to facilitate the development of vaccines and antivirals to prevent COVID-19 disease and stop its
transmission.

This is a new disease and, as part of the international scientific community, we are learning more about the virus and the disease (COVID-19) each day, which is helping us develop strategies to combat the outbreak and treat the disease.

Three months ago, my expertise in coronavirus was very limited. However, as a medical officer of the Respiratory Diseases Branch, I have been part of a multidisciplinary team evaluating novel flu vaccines and antibiotics to treat drug-resistant tuberculosis.

This expertise, together with my previous experience working with cell cultures and different disease models at UM’s Center for Environmental Health Sciences, have been very helpful when planning the development of new clinical trials to assess novel and safe therapeutics for any infectious disease, including coronavirus.

While at UM, I became an expert at using molecular techniques aimed to make cells express foreign proteins and to detect those induced cellular responses. All this knowledge had been very useful to understand the design and action of the 2019-nCoV Vaccine currently in Phase 1 of clinical development and already announced by our director, Dr. Anthony Fauci.

**How did you fall into your current line of research?**

I don’t remember when in my life I decided to become a physician. By the time I was in elementary school, I already knew that I wanted to go to medical school. My father also was a physician, and I loved visiting his workplace (the hospital) and his former medical school just across the street from the hospital. I consider myself extremely curious and a problem-solver, so being a physician-scientist is the perfect combination to explore humanity’s oldest challenge – disease – and to find a solution through research and drug development.

My passion for the respiratory system began while I was at medical school in Lima, Peru, so I have followed this path for my entire career. I did research in mechanical ventilation, acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), asthma, pneumoconiosis (due to dust inhalation), and other infections (bacterial, viral and mycobacteria). In 2009, while at Johns Hopkins, I was assigned a first-in-human clinical trial, and soon after that I decided I wanted to continue working in the drug development pipeline to bring to the public innovative products aimed to cure or reduce illness and improve quality of life.

The public should stay informed and updated on COVID-19 by checking the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov) site. UM also has created a [Coronavirus Information webpage](https://www.umnews.umt.edu/coronavirus) to provide updates.

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**Contact:** Francisco J. Leyva, Respiratory Diseases Branch medical officer, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, francisco.leyva@nih.gov.
UM Cancels Study Abroad Programs Due to COVID-19 Pandemic

March 12, 2020

MISSOULA – Effective March 12, the University of Montana is canceling all spring 2020 and academic year 2019-20 education abroad programs worldwide. This is in response to the Department of State, Level 3 Global Health Advisory, which advises U.S. citizens to reconsider travel abroad due to the global impact of COVID-19.

Donna Anderson, executive director of UM's Global Engagement Office, said UM students currently on programs abroad will be asked to return to the U.S. as soon as possible and no later than March 22. This move will impact about 60 UM students. Students will be asked to share their revised travel plans with the UM Global Engagement Office.

Anderson said her office will work with its partner institutions on the continuation of academic credit. Some programs may be able to offer courses via distance learning or other remote delivery.

“We will share additional information as soon as it becomes available,” she said. “UM will work with every student to make sure their needs are met.”
Anderson said students with academic, financial or housing concerns should reach out to the Global Engagement Office for support. Students who believe they need an exception to the notice or have special circumstances that have not been considered also are encouraged to reach out to the Global Engagement Office.

For more about UM’s response to COVID-19, visit https://www.umt.edu/coronavirus/.

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**Contact:** Donna Anderson, senior international officer and executive director, UM Global Engagement Office, 406-243-2212, donna.anderson@umontana.edu.
UM News

UM Moves to Remote Learning March 23 Due to COVID-19 Outbreak

March 12, 2020

MISSOULA – At the direction of the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, the University of Montana will switch to online and remote learning methods March 23. This move is in response to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.

“The health and safety of the campus community and broader Missoula community are paramount,” UM President Seth Bodnar said. “We are working collaboratively to minimize disruptions while keeping the health of our community the top priority.”
In a statement from his office, Commissioner of Higher Education Clayton Christian said the health of Montana’s campus communities remain the top priority. In partnership with the state Board of Regents and Montana University System, he directed MUS campuses to implement the following decisions as soon as possible:

- As of March 23, all MUS campuses will, in every instance possible, transition all in-class instruction to online or other remote teaching modalities that do not require in-class presence. Individual departments, colleges and universities should provide all material assistance and accommodation possible to faculty and students throughout this transition.

- MUS campuses will remain open and operational for students. This includes residence halls, dining services, computer labs and most other campus services. Employees will continue reporting to work unless instructed otherwise. Work-from-home accommodations may be developed in individual cases.

- To protect public health, MUS campuses will implement appropriate social distancing measures in line with federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines and recommendations. This should include restrictions on large lectures, theater performances, academic conferences and other large gatherings.

- All MUS students and employees need to monitor their official email addresses for more communications and planning details between now and March 23.

Christian said these decisions are in effect until further notice.

“Our COVID-19 challenge remains fluid, however, and as our campus communities prepare for spring break, it is our responsibility to establish the current course of action while also preparing for new circumstances as they emerge,” he said. “If and when we consider a return to face-to-face instruction, we will provide as much advance notice as possible and clear instructions for an orderly return to normal operations.”
Christian said his office will continue to consult with Gov. Steve Bullock, the Montana Board of Regents, health authorities and other statewide partners to assess current policies.

"I ask that every campus leader be ready to answer questions and provide relevant information in a timely manner to students, faculty and staff," Christian said. "I do not take these decisions lightly. I am committed to supporting the educational progress of our students and minimizing disruption to campus life whenever possible.

"I believe that the course of action outlined above is the best way to balance our commitment to protect the public health and safety of our students, employees and communities."

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**Contact:** Paula Short, UM Strategic Communications spokesperson, 406-243-4023, paula.short@umontana.edu.
UM to Award Three Honorary Doctorates at May 9 Commencement

March 06, 2020

MISSOULA – The University of Montana will confer three honorary doctorates during its May 9 Commencement exercises.

UM benefactor and respected businessman William “Bill” Franke will receive an Honorary Doctorate of Business. The late Bonnie “Sim-Sin” Heavy Runner, a tribal court judge and staunch advocate for Native American causes, will receive a posthumous Honorary Doctorate of Law. William S. Yellow Robe Jr., a noted playwright and educator, will receive an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts.
“It is our great privilege to present these honorary doctorates to three outstanding individuals,” UM President Seth Bodnar said. “All three have led lives of tremendous impact and service, and we are honored to count them among the UM Family.”

Franke will be the featured speaker at the 9 a.m. Commencement ceremony. Yellow Robe will speak at the 2 p.m. ceremony. HeavyRunner will be honored during both ceremonies, which will take place in the Adams Center. For more about spring Commencement, visit https://www.umt.edu/registrar/Commencement.

Franke is a renowned corporate leader and business pioneer with a legacy of achievements in forest products, banking, retail and financial companies, and, most notably, the airline industry. He now serves as managing partner of Indigo Partners LLC, a private investment company that invests in air transportation.

Franke also is respected as a dedicated mentor to young business people, as well as a teacher and generous philanthropist who has made a substantial impact at several institutions, including UM.

Despite his roots in Texas and South America and his undergraduate and graduate degrees from Stanford University, Franke has a deep appreciation for Big Sky Country and UM, where both the W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation and the Franke Global Leadership Initiative bear his name.

HeavyRunner was raised as one of 13 children in Browning on the Blackfeet Reservation. A two-time UM graduate, HeavyRunner received an undergraduate degree in social work and a juris doctorate from the Alexander Blewett III School of Law, where she was the only American Indian law student in her class.

Beyond her numerous and impressive accomplishments as a lawyer, educator and civil rights advocate, HeavyRunner was the founding director of UM’s Native American Studies Department. She worked as a tribal court judge, administrator and consultant. Before her death in 1997 at age 46, she received many awards recognizing her unrelenting efforts to support American Indian communities, victims of domestic violence and other disadvantaged groups. The main entrance and lobby of UM’s Payne Family Native American Center was named in her honor in 2010.

Born in Poplar, Yellow Robe teaches as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Maine. He cultivated his writing and performing art skills at UM before launching a career as a skilled playwright, author, poet, educator and actor.

He is the recipient of numerous awards, and his creative works have brought an American Indian perspective and experience to many new audiences. His mentorship of young Native students and playwrights has boosted the prominence of American Indian theater in the United States. His plays include “The Star Quilter,” “Rez Politics,” “Sneaky,” “A Stray Dog” and “Mix Blood Seeds,” among many others.

Yellow Robe is a member of the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes.

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Contact: Paula Short, UM Strategic Communications spokesperson, 406-243-4023, paula.short@umontana.edu.
March 05, 2020

MISSOULA – Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Nicholas Kristof will visit the University of Montana this month as the University’s annual Mansfield Lecture. Free and open to the public, Kristof will present “Rebuilding America” at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 10, at UM’s Dennison Theatre. Doors open at 6:30 p.m.

His lecture will provide an in-depth look at how economic and social upheaval has prevented millions from achieving the American dream, as well as how people are working together to rebuild upward mobility.

A journalist for The New York Times, Kristof has covered presidential politics and interviewed leaders like President Obama and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In 1990, Kristof and his wife, Sheryl WuDunn, won a Pulitzer Prize for their coverage of China’s Tiananmen Square democracy movement. Kristof won his second Pulitzer for his work documenting the genocide in Darfur.

Ahead of his lecture, Kristof shared his thoughts with the UM News Service about the value of a liberal arts education in the modern
world, how journalism is changing and how interviewing warlords influence his world view.

UM News: You speak several languages fluently, including Arabic and Chinese, in addition to possessing an Oxford law degree. How has your training in the liberal arts prepared you for the world stage? Why should UM students consider a liberal arts discipline?

Kristof: People sometimes think that the useful disciplines are computer science or business, while those who study the liberal arts end up as dog-walkers. I don't think that's true. The liberal arts offer a toolbox – especially in communication and critical thinking – that is useful whatever you end up doing. So, we definitely need computer science majors, but we also need philosophy and English majors. And some of the most successful job-seekers will be those who have both quantitative and verbal skills, both hard and soft toolboxes.

UM News: You’ve covered some of the world’s most pressing problems, from human rights violations to foreign governments collapsing. Are there any particular experiences that have stuck with you over the years?

Kristof: My most unforgettable trip was covering the Congo civil war in 1997. It started when the plane I was in crashed, destroying the plane and killing one person. After that, I thought I’d drive out, so I hired a four-wheel drive vehicle and set off for Uganda. But I promptly ran into a warlord who was massacring people, and his troops ended up chasing my vehicle through the jungle for the next week. And in the course of that I caught the most lethal kind of malaria. Definitely not just a day in the office.

But if that trip was scary, I should say that there are so many other times I've been utterly inspired in Congo. A Polish nun awed me with her lifesaving work in eastern Congo. And a doctor named Denis Mukwege has won a Nobel Peace Prize for his heroic work fighting sexual violence. Such people give me faith in humanity.

UM News: You were one of the first bloggers for The New York Times, and you’ve thrived as a journalist in a rapidly changing field. As technology changes and new media platforms emerge, what are the founding principles of journalism that will remain the same?

Kristof: In some ways, journalism is rapidly changing. The New York Times has changed more in the last six years
than in the previous 30 years. In another sense, though, storytelling is largely the same as it was in the time of Homer. Humans love stories, and the kinds of stories we enjoy are pretty much the same in the Iliad and on Facebook. I would only add that journalism should have somewhat higher standards for accuracy than either the Iliad or Facebook!

**UM News:** Your most recent book “Tightrope: Americans Reaching for Hope,” co-written with your wife, Sheryl WuDunn, details the systems and societal infrastructure that have kept people from upward mobility. What were some of the opportunities presented to you as a kid who grew up on a farm on Oregon that allowed you to achieve your own American Dream?

**Kristof:** I won the lottery with my family. I was surrounded by books, my parents read to me, they loved me, they believed in me. The next house down the road had parents who were alcoholics and probably didn't have a single children's book in the house. The two boys in that house were my closest neighbors and daily companions, and one is homeless and the other is serving a life sentence in prison. I think all the time about the greater opportunities I had that set me apart, and, frankly, I sometimes feel a measure of survivor's guilt.

**UM News:** In all of your diverse contributions to our global conversation, what have you found to be the common denominators that make us human?

We all have loved ones who bring out the best in us. We all have dreams for our children. We all have a sense of humor. And almost all of us have a sense of empathy and right and wrong. I've sat down with terrorists, extremists and warlords, and I've usually found it is possible to talk to them and find some common ground even when they have committed horrendous crimes. We humans are capable of extraordinary greatness and extraordinary evil.

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Feast or Famine: UM Bio Station Director Helps Shed Light on Microbe Evolution

March 04, 2020

MISSOULA – The director of the University of Montana’s Flathead Lake Biological Station recently joined a team of international scientists uncovering the evolutionary secrets of microorganisms existing in otherworldly environments.

Jim Elser and scientists from the J. Craig Venter Institute, Arizona State University, the United States Department of Agriculture and Universidad...
Nacional Autónoma de México wanted to determine how organisms evolve on Earth to cope with “feast or famine” scenarios. The results could help in understanding the possibilities for life on other worlds.

The researchers looked at how fundamental features of an organism’s genome drive trade-offs in its ability to persist in a nutrient-poor environment versus its ability to take advantage of nutrient pulses.

Elser, a senior author on the study, said it may be the first to identify and confirm that a microbe’s responses to the amount of nutrients in an ecosystem are due to its fundamental genome-wide traits, regardless of the species.

“This study is unique and powerful,” Elser said. “It takes ideas from the ecological study of large organisms and applies them to microbial communities in a whole-ecosystem experiment.”

Researchers conducted the study in a shallow pond in the Cuatro Ciénegas Basin of Mexico – an area so poor in nutrients that many of its ecosystems are dominated by microorganisms descended from ancient marine ancestry.

This absence of nutrients combined with the microorganisms at play made the Cuatro Ciénegas Basin an ideal choice for the researchers, who are working to understand how life may have existed on other planets in our solar system. The ecosystems in the region are believed to be similar to ecosystems from early Earth and, potentially, the past environments of Mars as the planet lost its surface water.

From a physiological standpoint, microorganisms are incredibly diverse. Elser said they possess vastly different genomic features and mechanisms they use to persist and reproduce. These features form their life strategies and help determine the microorganisms’ population dynamics and distributions in the environment.

Going into the basin, the researchers hypothesized that microorganisms found in low-nutrient environments would, out of necessity, rely on low-resource strategies for the replication of their DNA, transcription of RNA and translation of protein. The successful microorganisms of high-nutrient environments, on the other hand, are those that use resource-intensive strategies.
Elser and his fellow researchers began by installing mesocosms, or miniature ecosystems, to create a control group. They then added a solution rich in nitrogen and phosphorus – the main ingredients of fertilizers – to the pond itself and observed how the nutrient-rich feast affected the pond's microbial community.

For the next 32 days, the researchers conducted field monitoring, collected samples and analyzed water chemistry. Whole mixed microbial communities from both fertilized and unfertilized conditions were collected and examined for changes in response to the additional nutrients, based on the microorganisms' ability to process biochemical information within their cells.

In a paper published in the journal eLIFE, the scientists reported that their hypothesis had been correct: A suite of genomic traits affecting the rates and costs of biochemical information processing were responsible for which species did best under the experimental “feast” they applied.

This means, no matter where they are located or which particular taxa are involved, microorganisms have information-processing machinery that is fine-tuned to the key resources provided to them from their surrounding environment.

To put it another way: There are rules of life for “feast and famine” that should be generally applicable to life on Earth and, just maybe, beyond.

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UM’s New Student Orientation, Advocates Win Awards

March 04, 2020

UM News Service

MISSOULA – Two students and one employee from the University of Montana recently won top awards at the regional conference of NODA – Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education.

UM’s New Student Orientation, led by Director of New Student Success Devin Carpenter, won the Innovative Program Award for Region I at the NODA conference, which took place last month in Las Vegas. The award recognizes innovative and effective approaches in orientation, transition and retention that help meet the changing needs of students on college and university campuses.

Carpenter was tasked with reworking UM’s New Student Orientation in late 2018 and built an entirely new program.
new seven-day experience for incoming first-year students. The changes were implemented based on the success of UM’s Freshman Wilderness Experience, a program held before classes begin that allows students to form a strong cohort of new friends while enjoying the Montana outdoors.

The resulting new, two-part orientation program includes a three-day Big Sky Experience that provides a team-based immersion experience, just like the Freshman Wilderness Experience. The second part of UM’s orientation, Getting Your Bearings, provides more traditional on-campus programming focused on the academic and social transition to college.

“Based on the experience of the students who participated in the Freshman Wilderness Experience and their outcomes – strong friendships, higher retention and student success rates over time – we knew we had to completely reimagine our New Student Orientation experience for students,” said Cathy Cole, UM vice president for enrollment and strategic communication. “The program had to not only welcome students into an inclusive, engaging community from the moment they arrive on campus, but also allow students to participate in service-learning opportunities with a small cohort of other incoming students.

“It then switches to an academic focus within their own major area of interest to further embed our students in our campus family. The program that was built was intentional, focused and purposeful in nature.”

Though the program was started in Enrollment Management, it soon transitioned to Academic Affairs under Vice Provost for Student Success Sarah Swager. She and her staff, along with Enrollment Management and the rest of campus, brought the program to life.

“After its very first year, Devin’s program has won a major award and UM saw an increase in the retention of first-year students from fall to spring semesters,” Swager said. “We are so incredibly proud of Devin and the New Student Orientation program he created. When we put student success at the center of everything we do, we all win.”

UM’s orientation format helps students build new connections and friendships to enhance belonging and retention
while also preparing them for academic success. And it is working. Freshmen retention from fall 2019 to spring semester 2020 was up 1.7%.

Also at the NODA conference, UM Advocate Coordinators Kamm Mangun and Bridger Liston won Best Undergraduate Student Presentation in Region I for their session “Redefining Our Legacy.” Mangun and Liston led members of student groups from other universities in a session to examine their organization’s history, purpose and mission. The UM duo shared the Advocates’ own process for defining themselves this past fall.

During their presentation, Liston and Mangun learned that other student groups in attendance either did not have a mission statement or did not know it.

“No other group could remember their statement,” Mangun said. “I think this speaks to the strength of individuals within UM Advocates, and it’s also a direct result of great leadership from our advisers, Devin and Liz Stotts.

“Seeing how our group works together, while all coming from different backgrounds and majors, all working toward the same goals and ideals for incoming and prospective students is hard to bring into words,” Mangun said. “Walking away from our presentation, I realized how lucky I am to be a part of such an amazing organization with great leaders and how grateful I am for all those before me who built this 50-year legacy we now get to extend for another 50-plus years.”

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MISSOULA – The University of Montana School of Theatre and Dance, in co-production with the School of Music, will perform the popular rock musical “Spring Awakening” this month.

“Spring Awakening” is directed by UM Professor and interim Dean of the College of the Arts and Media John Kenneth DeBoer. It runs at 7:30 p.m. March 4-6, as well as 2 p.m. March 7-8 and 15. All performances take place in the Masquer Theatre in UM’s Performing Arts and Radio/Television Center.

General admission tickets cost $20, while senior and student tickets cost $16. Admission for children 12 and under is $10. Call the
UMArts Box Office at 406-243-4581 from noon to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday for tickets or order online at
http://www.umt.edu/umarts/theatredance/.

Lush melodies, incisive lyrics and the tribulations of coming-of-age intertwine in this Tony Award-winning musical by Duncan Sheik and Steven Sater. Based on a famously provocative 1891 German drama, the plot follows a group of small-town teenagers as they struggle with the urges hormones have thrust upon them in the midst of a repressive society.

Much more than just an exploration of sex, violence and rock ’n roll, “Spring Awakening” is a landmark production that harnesses all the passion and tragedy of adolescence using a powerful alt-rock aesthetic.

For more information call DeBoer at 406-243-4970 or email john.deboer@umontana.edu.

A complete schedule of UM School of Theatre & Dance productions for the academic year is online at

AUDIENCE ADVISORY: “Spring Awakening” is recommended for mature audiences due to violence and sexually explicit themes and content.

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MISSOULA – Ryan Hansen, a University of Montana College of Business alumnus, founded advertising management company LumenAd in his Missoula basement in 2014. It wasn’t long before LumenAd was recognized as one of the fastest-growing companies in the country.
Now after many discussions and planning the curriculum, LumenAd has helped the UM business college design and launch a digital media planning and reporting course to mimic the structure, individual performance and professionalism demanded by a creative agency.

The course provides students with a solid understanding of the digital marketing landscape and can help them differentiate themselves as digital marketers.

“Digital advertising is a complex and dynamic industry with a need for more experts that have a passion for the space,” said Hansen, the LumenAd CEO. “In partnering with UM to teach our first-hand knowledge of the field, we hope to give students relevant knowledge and vocabulary that can help launch meaningful careers in digital advertising.”

The course is taught in the marketing department by the College of Business. LumenAd designed the course curriculum, and subject-matter experts present material weekly. At the end of the 15-week course, students will be able to leverage digital advertising channels and the necessary components to run an effective ad campaign. Students gain a comprehensive understanding of the entire digital advertising landscape through presentations by key contributors in the digital advertising realm.

They also will be able to explain real-time bidding and understand why it exists, know how to leverage multiple web technologies to deliver on desired campaign outcomes, knowledgeably discuss the digital media supply chain, use digital media buying platforms, respond to the request for proposal process and analyze key components of digital campaign reporting. They will know how to track and report on performance metrics, make channel recommendations and present about the performance of a digital campaign.

LumenAd was named the nation’s fourth fastest-growing software company by Inc. Magazine in 2019. With a three-year revenue growth of 7,212.5%, LumenAd’s workforce needs also increased.
With about 60 of the company’s more than 90 employees stationed in Missoula, LumenAd’s desire to hire local individuals with a digital advertising background led to an opportunity for collaboration with the UM College of Business. LumenAd is projected to hire 20 new employees within the upcoming year, and it already employs 30 UM grads.

“The UM College of Business is rooted in tradition but focused on the future,” said Suzanne Tilleman, the interim College of Business dean. “The growth trend in digital advertising is expected to continue, and we want to provide our students with learning experiences that help prepare them for successful careers.”

The collaboration with LumenAd is one of a few different initiatives by the College of Business in recent months to help address the future of business. UM also partners with Advanced Technology Group (ATG) to offer specialized courses for students in the College of Business and at Missoula College.

For more information on the UM College of Business, visit www.business.umt.edu. For more about Hansen and LumenAd, visit http://bit.ly/2SHHvSo.

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MISSOULA – University of Montana students will present curated European and American prints ranging from the 17th to early 20th centuries with “Art Under Pressure: Function and Form in Prints from the MMAC.” The exhibition opens with a reception from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. Friday, March 27, in UM’s Global Leadership Initiative Lounge on the second floor of the University Center.

The exhibition features multiple types of prints from the Montana Museum of Art and Culture, from ephemeral visual culture – such as cartoons, playing cards and fashion plates – to fine arts prints from old masters and avant-garde artists.

The student curators were part of art Adjunct Assistant Professor Reilly Shwab’s Development of Prints and Graphic Design class. The 32 art history students researched and wrote wall labels for all the prints, including a portrait by Dutch baroque artist Rembrandt van Rijn, a newspaper cartoon by
19th century French artist Honoré Daumier and prints by French avant-garde artists Berthe Morisot and Edgar Degas.

Shwab said his course focuses on the different techniques used to create the prints, as well as their diverse historical functions.

“We are seeking to bridge the gap between popular visual culture and fine arts, and to better understand how prints, due to their unique nature and rapid spread as multiples, impacted how people live and think about the world," Shwab said.

This was the first time most of the students have handled prints pulled from the MMAC's Permanent Collection in class. There is little information about the artists or the prints themselves for many of these works because they were typically made in multiples or used in books rather than as stand-alone artworks. The students came up with their own research strategies based on carefully examining the prints.

Traci Bosshardt-Patino, a student and UM employee taking the class, helped research a French print featuring two women in a Middle Eastern courtyard. She hypothesized the image took place in colonial North Africa, and the text on the bottom read “Les Femmes d’Alger.”

She noted that some more text on the bottom – the name of the original publisher – had been cut off to fit into a frame. A Google search of the image, both in prints and paintings, confirmed that it was the work of famed 19th-century French artist Eugène Delacroix and that versions exist in museums in New York and Cleveland.

“It’s really amazing to make a find like that,” Bosshardt-Patino said.

Delacroix is best known for painting “Liberty Leading the People” (one of the first iterations of what would later become Lady Liberty). It is
possible he used the model in the print for his famous painting. An Orientalist image, the print also offers a glimpse into how a European artist early in the 19th century perceived people from North Africa and the Middle East.

“I like finding that confluence of politics and war and philosophy and art and what informs the other,” Bosshardt-Patino said. “I’m a very firm believer that we would not know much about our world if we didn’t have these visual signifiers.”

“For a student, there is nothing like experiencing a work of art directly,” MMAC director Rafael Chacon said. “I am pleased to see UM students and faculty learning from and interpreting our collections and making connections. From the transcendent to the banal, this collection contains an array of works of art that articulate compelling ideas – both big and small ideas that have occupied the human imagination for time immemorial.”

The community can enjoy the curated prints from the class in the “Art Under Pressure” exhibition from March 27 to May 16.

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