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COLLEGE OF HEALTH

UM FACULTY MEMBER APPOINTED TO PRESTIGIOUS NATIONAL HEALTH COUNCIL

29 OCTOBER 2021
MISSOULA – Dr. Andrij Holian, a University of Montana professor of toxicology in the Department Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Sciences and director of the Center for Environmental Health Sciences in the Skaggs School of Pharmacy, has been invited to serve on an influential National Advisory Environmental Health Sciences Council.

NAEHSC advises high-level federal government leaders such as the secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the director of the National Institutes of Health and the director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences on research, training and other matters significant to meet national research goals.

In the announcement on Holian’s invitation to join the council, NIEHS acknowledged the UM professor’s outstanding scholarship, academic accomplishments and experienced leadership in the fields of toxicology, inflammation and the immune response, and signal transduction pathways in tissue injury.

“This appointment is a significant honor. Being able to contribute to setting research priorities and program balance at NIH is both exciting and daunting,” said Holian of his invitation. “This would not have been possible without the many exciting contributions of outstanding students and staff that I have had the privilege of working with at the UM Center for Environmental Health Sciences over the years.”

“This is the first time anyone from UM has ever served on an NIH council that I can remember,” said Scott Whittenburg, UM vice president for research and creative scholarship. “Dr. Holian’s appointment is both a great honor for him and an important advancement for researchers at UM, as it provides us a seat at the table with the National Institutes of Health during discussions of NIH issues and funding priorities.”

Marketa Marvanova, dean of the Skaggs School of Pharmacy, said the school is “extremely proud” of this recognition given to Holian and the impact this appointment will make.

“This is a testament of his lifelong dedication to research, discovery and education in toxicology and environmental sciences and his great productivity over decades,” Marvanova said. “This is also a great testament to the quality, high-caliber research done by our faculty at the Skaggs School of Pharmacy, which has impacts both nationally and internationally.”
Contact: Scott Whittenburg, UM vice president for research and creative scholarship and dean of the Graduate School, 406-243-6670, vpr@mso.umt.edu.
Viet Thanh Nguyen, a New York Times bestselling author, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and a MacArthur “Genius” Grant awardee, will present a lecture (digitally) as the first speaker in UM’s annual President’s Lecture Series this year.
MISSOULA – The University of Montana will welcome Viet Thanh Nguyen, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author and recipient of the prestigious MacArthur “Genius” Grant as the year’s first speaker in the President’s Lecture Series. Nguyen will present virtually at 6 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 4. The lecture is free and open to the public. Participants can register by visiting https://bit.ly/UMNguyen.

Viet Thanh Nguyen.

In 1975, Nguyen and his family arrived to the United States as refugees during the Vietnam War. Nguyen’s fiction and non-fiction explore themes about the many ways that war stays with displaced people. As a Vietnamese-American novelist, he examines representation in wartime, resilience, the immigrant and refugee experience, identity, love, family, race, resistance and humanizing minorities.

He is the author “The Sympathizer,” a New York Times bestseller and winner of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

Other books include “The Refugees”; “Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War,” which was a finalist for the National Book Award; and “The Committed,” a sequel to the “The Sympathizer.” Nguyen also has written for The Atlantic, The New York Times, Time magazine and The Guardian, and his articles have appeared in numerous journals and books.

His most recent book, “The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives,” is UM’s Griz Read selection and includes a collection of short stories of first-hand experiences of 17 global refugee writers that has been called by the New York Times “a powerful dispatch from the individual lives behind current headlines.” Proceeds from his book support the International Rescue Committee.
The Griz Read program provides a common connection through a thought-provoking book. All members of the campus community, especially first-year students, are encouraged to read the Griz Read each year.

Erin Saldin, UM assistant professor of English and the Griz Read committee chair, said “The Displaced” is a timely selection for the Griz Read program.

“The Griz Read provides a campus- and community-wide experience, inviting students and community members to engage with an author’s work in a variety of ways in and outside of the classroom,” Saldin said. “We are thrilled to have the chance to hear from Viet Thanh Nguyen, whose work speaks urgently to the moment in which we find ourselves. He and other authors in ‘The Displaced,’ ask us to consider what it means to be members of a global community. We are so excited to hear from him on Nov. 4.”

The MacArthur Foundation, who awarded Nguyen a “Genius Grant” in 2017, noted that his work “not only offers insight into the experiences of refugees past and present, but also poses profound questions about how we might more accurately and conscientiously portray victims and adversaries of other wars.”

Nguyen currently teaches at the University of Southern California as the Aerol Arnold Chair of English and is a professor of English, American studies and ethnicity and comparative literature. He also works as a cultural critic-at-large for the Los Angeles Times and is actively involved with promoting the arts and culture of Vietnamese in the diaspora through arts organizations. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife and two children.

With his work, Nguyen hopes people consider the “necessity of thinking and feeling from the position from people who are not like them and imagining the perspective of other people an expanded capacity for empathy.”

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Contact: Office of the President, UM, 406-243-2734, thepresident@umontana.edu.
UM alumna and Missoula resident Stephanie Land, shown here with her children, has seen her best-selling book, “Maid,” reach a worldwide audience on Netflix. (Photo by Ashely Farr)
**UM Writing Alumna Reflects On Netflix Global Hit ‘Maid’**

**MISSOULA** – "Maid," written by University of Montana alumna Stephanie Land, has become a worldwide hit. Before Netflix created a series inspired by the memoir, it began as an essay for a UM writing class called "Confessions of the Housekeeper" by Land, an English major at the time. Her essay went viral, spurred a book deal and Land would go on to write "Maid" on a MacBook at a kitchen table in Missoula. The memoir would eventually become a New York Times best-seller, with an acknowledgment page thanking UM faculty, among others, for their mentorship and support.

Land graduated in 2014 from UM with a bachelor’s degree in English. The rest of the story is currently being watched by millions.

Netflix estimates that more than 67 million people have watched “Maid.” In fact, the hit series is on track to become the most-watched limited scripted series the platform has ever produced. The series was inspired by Land’s memoir “Maid,” currently at No. 4 on the New York Times paperback best-sellers nonfiction list and endorsed by former U.S. President Barack Obama as the “story of America.” The work is being lauded across the country as cracking open a critical conversation about poverty, grit and America’s problematic support of those who work and support the rest of the country while operating in the shadows.

Starring Margaret Qualley (born in Missoula) and Andie MacDowell, the series reveals Land’s background as a single mother who finds work as a housekeeper to make a living while navigating poverty, homelessness and domestic violence.

The show refers to UM as the Montana College of Fine Arts and heavily features Missoula. Perhaps more than advertising Missoula as a literary promised land, Land’s capacity to identify and develop a writing voice at UM, and then make her own way into the business of writing (without much help), is a trait that is uniquely Montanan – and is an authentic success that the entire Grizzly community is celebrating.

As the show continues its global rocket ride, Land carved out time for her alma mater and shared thoughts about access to higher education, the ways institutions support students (and how they can do better), holding a seance on campus, why writing long papers helps in the long run, and what it means to take a risk and declare a major that you love.

**UM News:** You arrived at UM after a few harrowing years. Making it to Missoula and UM was a climactic event in “Maid.” What about arriving on campus felt so moving to you?
Land: I’d wanted to attend UM for six years by the time I got here in December of 2011. But I enrolled in the sociology program, because I thought my life couldn’t afford getting an art degree. I guess I also thought that would be an “acceptable” reason to move in the court system, since I had to ask for permission to move my daughter 500 miles away from their dad. After my first semester, though, I knew I wouldn’t be happy here unless I made the jump to being a writer, which is what I originally wanted to do. Before summer school started, I switched my degree in English and had my sights on earning an MFA in nonfiction.

UM News: At a time when America’s discussions about equity, upward mobility and economic disparity are on the frontlines, why do think “Maid” has sparked a broader conversation about essential labor in our country?

Land: What we have been calling “essential” since the pandemic began when it comes to our low-income workers, has become, what I think, is “entitled.” We expect people to clean up after us, but we don’t want to pay those who do a living wage or benefits. The conversation surrounding those who are accepting better jobs or staying on unemployment has been horrible, especially by our own governor. He ended unemployment boosts and offered a $1,200 bonus for going back to work. That pays for what, a month of daycare for two kids, if that?

We expect people to support us and our families while we don’t support them by voting people into office who will create real legislation reform to help them with what they need to not just survive, but thrive. That needs to change.

UM News: We’re living at a time when majoring in the liberal arts can raise concerned eyebrows. Yet here we are, with your story that has captivated the country and began as an essay. What advice might you give to UM students with a talent in their heart for writing?

Land: Well, I can pass along the advice UM Associate Professor David Gates gave me: “The world is totally fucked, so you might as well do what you want.” Aside from that, I would highly recommend learning about the business of writing. Becoming a freelancer has a huge learning curve, and most people don’t realize that much of your time will be spent doing administrative tasks, creating a brand and website, figuring out taxes and health insurance and is basically running your own business. There are a lot of online classes that teach this. One that I like is online through Catapult.

UM News: In 2019, former President Barack Obama listed “Maid” on his recommended
list of books of the summer as a reminder of “the dignity of all work.” What does it mean to you to work as a writer now, with a deep understanding of those who work and live in the shadows?

**Land:** The greatest part of my job is my ability to advocate for low-wage workers and those who live in poverty. It is what I cling to when things start to get overwhelming. It’s been really incredible to watch my story create some change in the world, and I hope it continues to for a long time.

**UM News:** You persevered and fought hard for your success – two components of getting any college degree. While there are many pathways to becoming a professional writer, what’s the best advice you gleaned in a UM classroom that has influenced you?

**Land:** Honestly, it was producing pages. In my last semester of college, I wrote over 100 pages as a single mom to a 6-year-old and who was pregnant with her second child, alone. I’m still amazed I made it through that year with good marks. It helped as a freelancer, though, because a lot of my job was pitching an essay or article and, if they accepted, the turnaround was pretty quick and I often had to keep up with the news cycle. So, all of those reports on Shakespeare that I procrastinated and wrote at the last minute were actually very useful!

**UM News:** Higher education across America and (even here at UM), is undergoing a reckoning of how to make an education more accessible to a wider demographic of students and diverse learners. Getting through a bachelor’s degree as a single mother on federal assistance is a much different experience than most “traditional” university students. What about your experiences at UM can help other universities widen the net and serve students in new ways?

**Land:** It definitely would have helped me to have evening and weekend classes to choose from. My last semester of college I wasn’t able to work because I had classes every day, where before I tried to stack all my classes on Tuesday and Thursday, so that I could work. But even then, I couldn’t work the required 20 hours a week to receive most benefits and was kicked off of food stamps.

More access to on-site child care would have been huge. And child care that was outside the Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. schedule. My kid did go to a daycare in the “X” buildings, but it only paid for the hours I was physically in class or at work, so if I had an hour or two between those things, I ended up paying for it. There were some days I needed three different babysitters to make it to all of my classes. I’m so eternally grateful to my professors.
who allowed my kid to come to class with me. I don’t think I could have succeeded in college without them.

UM News: “Maid” is a worldwide hit on Netflix, your book was a New York Times best-seller and you’ve spotlighted Missoula as a haven for writers. Yet, you were somewhat infamously rejected from UM’s MFA program. What have you gleaned about academic barriers and success?

Land: I fought to move to Missoula. My kid’s dad fights change. I could not simply move to another state. I could not afford to. I could barely afford to apply to UM’s MFA program, let alone five others. I heard many reasons for my rejection, from I’d already learned everything (in my two years as an undergrad) that I could from the teachers who taught graduate-level classes, to my not being a “supported” writer (meaning no trust fund or spouse), but I have always suspected that the rejection was from my being pregnant with my second daughter as a single mom. A professor had told me once that “babies don’t belong in MFA workshops.” Whatever the reason was, since I’d become friends with a lot of MFA students because they were closer to my age, it felt personal. It hurt. I didn’t really see it as an academic barrier until I started seriously considering a career as a professional writer and that teaching in academia would not be an option. Currently, I only see teaching in an academia setting as reason as to why an MFA is necessary, and often that’s not a guarantee.

UM News: What writers inspire you?

Land: All writers inspire me, honestly. The ones who do the most are those who are vulnerable in telling their truths. Who cry at readings. Those who are marginalized and not part of the white male trope who often dominate best-seller lists. Every writer inspires me.

UM News: Do you have any rituals as a writer or habits you’ve developed over years?

Land: When I was starting out as a freelancer, I did it with a sleeping baby in my lap, on the floor in the living room in our apartment at low-income housing. I moved to the kitchen table to write “Maid” on an 11” MacBook Air someone had gifted me when my youngest was in daycare. I rely on playlists. Now, well, I’m getting a she-shed, and that’s pretty exciting. Being home with three kids in a pandemic does not make for good writing space. I hope to be able to stare at a wall in silence for a few days … or weeks … and get to tapping out words in big quantities again.
UM News: Favorite UM memory?

**Land:** Definitely meeting at the Jeannette Rankin building late one night near Halloween with a bunch of grad students and Debra Magpie Earling to summon some spirits. I’m not *totally* sure if we did, but one of us got a photo of a weird white presence next to us. Debra’s storytelling class was a respite as a whole. I wish I could have taken it multiple times. Same with Robert Stubblefield’s Montana Writer’s Live.

**UM offers a bachelor’s degree in creative writing** and a Master of Fine Arts. Housed in the **College of Humanities and Sciences** (not the Montana College of Fine Arts), the program is one of the oldest and most prestigious in the country, shaped by mentorship from a committed and diverse group of faculty, visiting writers, alumni and peers.

On the acknowledgment page of “Maid,” Land includes these words about some of her instructors at UM: “To my teachers … Debra Magpie Earling, for saying my “Confessions of the Housekeeper” essay would be a book with such conviction that it became my own prophecy to fulfill. Thank you for bringing out the storyteller in me. Also to Barbara Ehrenreich, Marisol Bello, Lisa Drew, Collin Smith, Judy Blunt, David Gates, Sherwin Bitsui, Katie Kane, Walter Kirn, Robert Stubblefield, Erin Saldin, Chris Dombrowski, Elke Govertsen for patiently ushering and guiding my written words into coherence with utmost encouragement and empowerment. Thank you.”

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**Contact:** Dave Kuntz, UM strategic communications director, 406-243-5659, dave.kuntz@umontana.edu.
UM Writing Alumna Reflects On Netflix Global Hit ‘Maid’
UM Names Renowned Photographer as Next Pollner Professor

21 October 2021

Daniella Zalcman

Zalcman was named the T. Anthony Pollner Distinguished Professor for spring 2022 in the UM School of Journalism.

"Daniella has impeccable credentials as a working photojournalist and will expose our students to an incredible wealth of experience and knowledge," said Denise Dowling, director of UM's journalism school. "She also is a strong leader who is founder and executive director of Women Photograph, a nonprofit that works to elevate the voices of women and nonbinary visual journalists worldwide, among other exciting initiatives."

Zalcman’s UM course will focus on documentary photography and building a sustainable photojournalism business. Students will work on one documentary topic for the entire semester, working as if it were a commissioned piece for a magazine. Students will pitch, budget and plan coverage. They will discuss ethics, project management and safety in the field.

"I’m thrilled to be spending the spring semester in Missoula and sharing as much insight as I can about ethical visual storytelling practices, building a sustainable career as a photojournalist..."
and how we can all collectively build a healthier and more equitable industry together,” Zalcman said. “I can’t wait to meet the next generation of documentary photographers and learn more about the stories and projects that excite and motivate them.”

Zalcman earned a bachelor’s degree in architecture from Columbia in 2009. Her ongoing project, “Signs of Your Identity,” has won the Arnold Newman Prize, the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award and others. She also is co-founder of “Indigenous Photograph,” an online site that elevates the work of Indigenous visual journalists, and co-founder of “We, Women,” a project to amplify women and gender nonconforming voices during an era of divisiveness and distrust in politics. She also is co-author of the Photo Bill of Rights, an effort to build a more inclusive and equitable visual media industry.

Zalcman is the 28th T. Anthony Pollner Distinguished Professor. The professorship was created in 2001 by the family and friends of T. Anthony Pollner, a 1999 School of Journalism alumnus who died in a motorcycle accident.

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**Contact:** Denise Dowling, professor and director, UM School of Journalism, 406-243-5250, denise.dowling@umontana.edu.
UM Names Renowned Photographer as Next Pollner Professor

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UM's Missoula College has partnered with a local manufacturer to provide classes and degree pathways to the firm's more than 120 employees.
MISSOULA – More than 120 local employees will have access to Missoula College classes and degree pathways in a new partnership between a local manufacturing firm and the two-year college, embedded within the University of Montana.

Missoula College has recently partnered with Elite One Source, a Missoula-headquartered manufacturing firm of dietary supplements and custom products. The workforce education partnership between the college and Elite One Source will provide a new certificate program – Manufacturing Certificate of Technical Skills – to Elite employees, providing a path to earn a general associate of science degree or to eventually complete a bachelor’s degree through UM.

This partnership will provide flexible, credit-based workforce education for employees with an emphasis on building professional and workplace skills. Employees that work for Elite One Source can pursue coursework in manufacturing processes, technical skills, communication, career readiness, human relations and workplace safety.

The new certificate also is open to all employees in the manufacturing industry.

Missoula College Dean Tom Gallagher said the new certificate is an example of leveraging a local workforce economy into new innovative educational opportunities.

“This manufacturing partnership is the first of its kind,” Gallagher said. “It is an innovative program and has been created based upon the needs of the employer.”

Gallagher said it’s critical to listen to local employers and find new opportunities for Missoula College and UM to partner in providing education and workforce training to meet industry demand.

“In addition to developing new skills in manufacturing processes, employees will complete a block of coursework aimed at developing professional skills such as career readiness, interpersonal skills in the workplace and professional communication,” he said.

Elite One Source Director of Operations Alex Fowler said Missoula’s manufacturing presence is growing, along with the demand for frontline workers possessing the right combination of technical and professional skills.
“We feel that the existing gap in talent is the largest threat to our future growth plans,” he said. “Elite is delighted to collaborate with Missoula College to further the development of its associates in core manufacturing concepts and support further growth of the manufacturing sector in the greater Missoula area.”

Fowler said these new skills will equip their associates with the ability to make a significant impact to their operation.

“With a strong program that produces ready-to-work frontline industrial manufacturing associates, the Missoula manufacturing community should have a steady talent pipeline and can continue to satisfy customers for years to come,” he said.

The new Missoula College curriculum has received support from the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center, which serves the manufacturers of Montana by helping them assess and improve their manufacturing operations, providing trainings and workforce development.

“Manufacturers across western Montana are telling us that attracting and retaining a skilled workforce is their top challenge right now,” said Steve Dybdal, MMEC business advisor. “This program will not only help Elite One in the short term, it may produce a model certificate program that can be replicated at other colleges around the state. This could result in major long-term benefits for other manufacturers and our statewide economy.”

For more information on the new partnership or to learn more about the Missoula College visit https://mc.umt.edu/.

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Contact: Tom Gallagher, dean, Missoula College, 406-243- 7801, Tom.Gallagher@mso.umt.edu.
MISSOULA – The University of Montana’s Family Medicine Residency of Western Montana
UM’s Medical Residency Placement in Rural Areas Ranks High

was recently ranked second in the nation among surveyed residency programs for graduating the most family physicians that go into rural practice.

The Rural Training Track Collaborative conducts an annual survey of residency programs to recognize programs that consistently produce a high number of rural doctors on a three-year rolling average. The 2021 survey found that UM’s medical residency program produces an average of seven new rural doctors each year. The University of Kansas ranked first with 10 doctors.

“From the beginning of our program, we have focused on recruiting and training family doctors for rural Montana,” said Dr. Darin Bell, associate director for rural education. “We have a dedicated network of rural hospitals and clinics who help out with that process. We couldn’t be happier to see that our efforts and those of our partner institutions continue to produce such high numbers of rural doctors coming out of our program.”

Montana suffers from a shortage of primary care physicians with one prediction from a national health policy center showing almost 200 new doctors will be needed in the state by 2030. UM’s family medicine residency program was created in 2013 – the same year Montana had the lowest number of residency positions of any state in the country – to develop family physicians who are compassionate, clinically competent and motivated to serve patients and communities in rural and underserved areas of Montana.

Residency training location is one of the largest factors determining where physicians choose to practice and the populations they choose to serve. For this reason, UM’s program strives to train more residents in rural areas during their training years.

The program accepts 10 new residents each year from about 800 medical student applicants. The three-year training program prepares them to practice rural family medicine, with a goal of having them stay in Montana.

So far, UM’s program has graduated six classes, and 72% have gone on to practice in rural or underserved areas, with 70% remaining in Montana communities, including Browning, Helena, Lewistown, Libby, Polson, Red Lodge, Ronan, Butte, Miles City, Columbia Falls and Whitefish, Missoula and Kalispell.

“We are pleased to have been recognized again for our successful training of rural physicians,” said Dr. Rob Stenger, UM’s residency program director. “Congratulations should be extended
to all our partners who help train our residents and connect them to the communities they are going to serve after graduation.

The residency program is sponsored by Missoula’s Providence St. Patrick Hospital and Community Medical Center, as well as Logan Health in Kalispell. Resident and faculty physicians have outpatient clinics at Partnership Health Center in Missoula and Greater Valley Health Center in Kalispell. All residents spend a significant portion of their time working and training at a network of 15 rural hospitals and clinics throughout western Montana.

RTTC is a network of medical schools and primary care residencies across the United States dedicated to increasing the training and development of doctors who practice primary care medicine in rural areas

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Contact: Dr. Rob Stenger, program director of UM’s Family Medicine Residency of Western Montana, 406-258-4131, robert.stenger@mso.umt.edu; Dr. Darin Bell, assistant director for Rural Education, 406-258-4124, darin.bell@mso.umt.edu.
UM’s Medical Residency Placement in Rural Areas Ranks High
MISSOULA – Griz Nation has another team to fill the bleachers for: Griz Hockey.

The newly minted, officially recognized club team is capitalizing on Missoula’s love of hockey and drawing hundreds of fans in their first season. The 24-member team is composed of UM students from Montana and beyond.
The team’s general manager and assistant coach is UM alumnus Tucker Sargent, who also is the coach of UM’s club lacrosse team. Sargent said he has wanted to restart UM’s hockey team for many years. Up until about 10 years ago, the University yielded a team, but it petered out. Now, Griz Hockey is back.

“Missoula’s hockey culture is incredible, and now that we have our own team, it’s just a great addition to this school and community,” he said. “I’ve been amazed by the turnout and the support so far.”

Sargent said the team’s student athletes are from all over Montana and the country who want badly to “play hockey for UM.”

“Having a hockey team is another great way for us to recruit students who have an opportunity to play hockey here, when UM might not have been on their radar,” he said.

The team has a 3-0 record so far this season, having beat Gonzaga twice (6-0 and 7-2) and Montana State University (4-2). The team has so much support already, they’re already selling custom fan jerseys. Tickets sold out for their first home game with more than 1,000 fans in attendance and Sargent said he’s “been amazed by the crowd turnout.”

The team has added an additional 300 seats to the rink and a student section for this Friday’s game against MSU by installing more bleachers to keep up with the demand.

“If you want to see a great show and have fun with friends cheering on UM, I suggest you get to a Griz hockey game this Friday,” said Sargent.

University of Montana President Seth Bodnar will perform the ceremonial puck drop at 7:30
p.m. tonight in Missoula’s Glacier Ice Rink at the Missoula County Fairgrounds as Griz Hockey hosts MSU for the second time this season. Tickets will be available at the rink on Friday night, or ahead of time at Hockeywolf and Lacrossewolf Headquarters located at 2621 Brooks St. in Missoula. Tickets cost $5 for students, $5 for kids under 13 and $10 for adults.

The team is providing a bus for a free shuttle from the Adams Center to Glacier Ice Rink with pickup times at 6:45 p.m. and 7:15 p.m. Parking is available at the rink and additional parking is across the street in the Les Schwab Tires parking lot, courtesy of Les Schwab Tires.

For more information, including a schedule and roster, visit grizhockey.com. Follow the team at @umgrizhockey on Instagram. Fans can also catch the game live locally on ESPN 102.9 radio or watch the live stream on www.grizhockey.com/video.

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**Contact:** Tucker Sargent, general manager, assistant coach, Griz Hockey, 406-546-6172, tucker.sargent@gmail.com.
UM sophomore Christian Newby keeps a bag packed just in case the pandemic improves and he can travel to Japan to study abroad.

MISSOULA – University of Montana sophomore Christian Newby spent the summer with his suitcase packed and fingers crossed.
Like hundreds of other Grizzlies, the **Whitefish** native had hoped to study abroad this year, but the continuing COVID-19 pandemic has put a full stop to his Japan adventure for now. The situation will change, he’s convinced, but it may be a year or more before he can finally pursue his passion to learn more about Japanese culture.

For junior Taylor Curry, travel to France was possible because of its low levels of COVID-19 infection rates. The political science and French major, now studying at Université Jean Moulin in Lyon, knew his chance to go overseas was precarious at best, requiring more fortitude than normal to navigate the process.

“We were warned early on that the trip could be canceled any day, even on the eve of departure, but if we wanted any chance at going we had to complete every task required of an ordinary year with the addition of COVID requirements,” said Curry, who is from **Great Falls**.

“Luckily, UM’s study abroad office proved a fierce ally for us students, and I’m
sure I owe my being here to their advocacy.”

Curry and Newby’s stories illustrate how the pandemic has made efforts to place students and faculty abroad such a challenge. With many universities across the nation continuing to forgo study abroad, it’s something of a triumph, then, for UM to place nine students and a handful of faculty members overseas this fall.

Donna Anderson, senior international officer and executive director of UM’s Global
Engagement Office, credits the success they have had to UM’s commitment to keeping their international office open during the pandemic, along with a well-developed process for approving travel that involves the Curry Heath Center, risk management, the legal office, the Provost’s office and the Global Engagement Office.

“It required tremendous effort, but we now have a great infrastructure in place which not every institution has,” Anderson said. “We’re very fortunate.”

Keeping all of the pieces moving in sync has required staff to monitor the travel status of multiple countries on an almost daily basis. Due to Montana University System guidance prohibiting travel to Centers for Disease Control Level 4 countries at this time, UM students are only allowed to travel to countries where the CDC rates Level 3 or lower, said Marja Unkuri-Chaudhry, associate director of the Global Engagement Office.

“We had students ready to go to Ireland, but then it popped up to Level 4 so they couldn’t go,” Unkuri-Chaudhry said.

Graphic design student Rebecca Vann transferred from Montana State University to UM for the opportunity to study in Spain, but it, too, is now Level 4. A senior, Vann said this spring will be her last chance as a student to practice her Spanish abroad.

“I speak Spanish, but I’d certainly like to be better,” said Vann, who credited Unkuri-Chaudhry and her staff for their focus on supporting students attempting to study abroad.
“We communicate with students on a regular basis, and all of them knew what the pandemic meant,” said Unkuri-Chaudhry. “But still it is heartbreakingly for students. We are keen to help them in other ways whenever possible, including looking to switch them to other programs.”

Planning is now in the works for spring 2022 programs, when the University hopes to revive 36 global study abroad programs. This will include coordinating with UM’s counterpart universities throughout the world.

“It will be a heavy lift, but we’re excited,” Unkuri-Chaudhry said.

With fall semester in full swing, Newby said his initial frustration has subsided, and he is convinced his chance to study in Japan will eventually happen.

“There are so many benefits to studying abroad,” said Newby, who is majoring in cellular molecular neuroscience, or “brain stuff.”

“The benefits are scholastic but also personal and professional.”

After a few months in France, Curry is acclimating to life and study abroad.

“I feel well established and infinitely grateful to the UM study abroad office, which got me here,” he said. “I’m hopeful that more students will soon be able to have the rich immersion that I’m living.”

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Contact: Donna Anderson, senior international officer and executive director of UM’s Global Engagement Office, 406-243-2288, donna.anderson@mso.umt.edu; Marja Unkuri-Chaudhry, associate director of the Global Engagement Office and director of Education Abroad and Partnerships, 406-243-2296, marjac@mso.umt.edu.
UM Resumes Study Abroad Program
Team members of the new UM-led climate initiative ResilienceMT include Beth Covitt, head of science education research and evaluation with spectrUM Discovery Area; Robin Saha (center), associate professor and director of UM’s Environmental Studies Program; and Peter Reynolds, a community partner and board chair of the Bitterroot Climate Action Group.
MISSOULA – With a $450,000 grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an interdisciplinary team from the University of Montana and statewide partner organizations are launching ResilienceMT. The project will support community climate resilience in Montana’s rural and tribal communities that are vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Working with the Blackfeet Nation, Fort Belknap Indian Community and communities in the Bitterroot Valley, ResilienceMT will engage high school students, their teachers and families through a mobile, interactive educational exhibit. ResilienceMT also will conduct forums to support communities’ climate resilience efforts, networking and resource-sharing across the state.

The project team is led by principal investigator Robin Saha, UM associate professor of environmental studies, in collaboration with Beth Covitt, head of STEM education research and evaluation at spectrUM Discovery Area, and Paul Lachapelle, professor of political science at Montana State University.

The three-year project will support community climate resilience capacity by enhancing communities’ understanding of climate risks related to wildfire, drought, extreme heat and flooding, as well as their ability to respond with community-based adaptation strategies.

As part of the program, a ResilienceMT Mobile Climate Resilience Exhibit will travel the state visiting community schools in Browning, Hays, Corvallis and Hamilton.

“We’re excited to collaborate with teachers to develop activities ranging from exploring community climate impacts and responses using digital story maps, to building model fire-ready houses, to experimenting with DIY air filters to improve indoor air quality during smoke season,” Covitt said.

Dennis Longknife, climate change coordinator for the Fort Belknap Indian Community and a ResilienceMT partner, said this program will be valuable as his tribe revises its draft Climate Adaption Plan, which is funded through the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

“ResilienceMT will really help the community get more involved and more aware of climate risks, and our resilience projects now planned and under way,” Longknife said.
Saha noted it’s important to get this work started as soon as possible, because partner communities are already experiencing negative effects of climate change.

“The ResilienceMT project will help them better understand these impacts in light of historical trends, consider future projections and community vulnerabilities and develop strategies for increasing resilience to future changes,” Saha said.

Learn more see NOAA’s announcements on: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

###

**Contact:** Robin Saha, UM environmental studies associate professor, 406-243-6285, robin.saha@umontana.edu; Beth Covitt, head of STEM education research and evaluation, spectrUM Discovery Area, 406-243-4828, beth.covitt@umontana.edu.
UM researchers joined a team of international collaborators who drilled boreholes through 650 meters of bedrock to study the dynamics of the Greenland Ice Sheet as it responds to a warming climate.
MISSOULA – For more than a decade, a team of University of Montana researchers and students have studied the dynamics of the Greenland Ice Sheet as it responds to a warming climate. Department of Geosciences researchers Toby Meierbachtol and Joel Harper said water has always been central to their research.

“The water from melting of the ice can run off the surface to the ocean and contribute to sea level rise, it can refreeze in place and actually warm the ice, and it can even reach the bottom of the ice sheet and act as a sort of lubricant to make the ice slide quickly over its bed,” Meierbachtol said. “The importance of water in controlling the response of Greenland to warming is hard to overstate.”

As outlined in their recent article in Nature Geoscience, Meierbachtol, Harper and an international team of researchers discovered that changes to the ice sheet have an immediate
impact on the groundwater underlying the Greenland island, an area larger than the state of Alaska.

“We have been focused on water's impacts on ice sheet change," said Harper. “But our most recent findings show that changes in the ice sheet have a real impact on Arctic hydrology – specifically the massive groundwater system extending under the ice sheet.”

This latest revelation occurred thanks to a marriage of drilling techniques, with international collaborators boring an angled hole 650 meters through bedrock underneath a Greenland glacier to measure groundwater conditions deep under the ice sheet. Meanwhile, UM and University of Wyoming researchers drilled 32 holes from atop the glacier, through nearly a kilometer of ice, to measure water conditions at the interface between ice and bedrock, which forms an important boundary controlling groundwater flow below.

The system that UM has perfected over the years involves drilling with a combination of very hot water under high pressure typically for 12 or more hours at a time.

"We practice and rehearse to make the operation flow smoothly,” Harper said, noting they always include one to two undergraduate students on an expedition. “Everyone on the team has an important and specific role to fill.”

After drilling the team installs sensors in the ice column and at the ice sheet bed to measure ice dynamics and water conditions as water flows under the ice to margin. Time is always of the essence because the cold ice freezes the hole shut in as little as two hours.

The dual drilling approach facilitated the first-ever measurements of groundwater response to a changing ice sheet, and the eight-year data record yielded some unexpected results.

“By studying areas that were covered by ice 10,000 years ago during the last ice age, the field has known that the huge mass and vast amounts of water from melting ice can impact the underlying groundwater,” Meierbachtol said, “but the paradigm has been that the groundwater response to ice sheet change is long: thousands of years. What we’ve shown here is that the groundwater response to Greenland's change is immediate.”

This new understanding could have important downstream implications for how Greenland’s thinning impacts the Arctic, Harper said. The thinning ice could reduce the rate of groundwater flow to the ocean, changing the water temperature and salinity balance that is important for ocean circulation patterns.

“In thinking about the complex feedbacks that occur from Greenland’s ongoing change, we as a field have really neglected the groundwater component because we thought it was more or less dormant over the decade to century timescales that are important for us as a society,” Harper said. “But now we recognize that the groundwater system actually changes quite rapidly, and there are some compelling reasons for why this could really matter for the broader Arctic.”

Future research will need to work toward quantifying the impacts of groundwater change on the ocean, both Meierbachtol and Harper noted. But the first step was the discovery.

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Contact: Toby Meierbachtol, assistant research professor, UM Department of Geosciences, 406-239-0885, toby.meierbachtol@mso.umt.edu; Joel Harper, professor, UM Department of Geosciences, 406-243-5867, joel@mso.umt.edu.
UM College of Business students learned about potential jobs this week at Employer Information Booths in the Gallagher Business Building.
MISSOULA – With students again roaming campus this fall, another tradition returned for College of Business students at the University of Montana.

Employers lined the main corridor of UM’s Gallagher Business Building on Wednesday to speak with business students about full-time, part-time and internship opportunities within their organizations.

The event, known simply as Employer Information Booths, is one of three opportunities during the fall semester for companies and recruiters to come to campus and speak with business students. In any given year, more than 100 alumni and business leaders come through the College of Business to connect with, recruit and hire business students.

“Our goal is to give students the opportunity to have a job in hand before they graduate,” said Estella Anderson, director of career readiness and employer relations at the college. “The great thing for our business students is that everything – from meeting with employers to interviewing – can be done in the Gallagher Business Building.”

Along with three employer and recruiter events, the business college holds over 10 career readiness programming talks and workshops for students, ranging from interview tips and preparation to resume writing and everything in between. Most workshops are led by College of Business faculty and industry alumni.

“I would estimate 99% of recruiters who come to our employer events and help with workshops are College of Business alumni,” Anderson said. “Most of our graduates have been through the process our students are going through now and love to help their fellow Griz.”

Reggie Tilleman, a finance and Master of Business Administration alumnus of the College of Business and now a relationship manager at Northwest Farm Credit Service, was back speaking with students at the Employer Information Booth event.

“I like to work with UM College of Business students because they are always well prepared to hit the ground running,” Tilleman said. “UM students have the critical thinking skills that we look for when hiring employees.”

As a College of Business student, Tilleman interned with the credit service in 2017 before
taking a full-time position upon graduation. Over 80% of UM business students complete at least one internship prior to graduation.

Career development is just one aspect of the Gianchetta Student Success Center in the College of Business. GSSC is a one-stop shop for students seeking any kind of academic or professional assistance. The center offers access to academic advisers, an internship coordinator, workshops, guest speakers, career advisers and more.

Visit the UM College of Business Career Development website for more information on opportunities for business students and employers.

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**Photos:** UM College of Business students learned about potential jobs this week at Employer Information Booths in the Gallagher Business Building.
The Partnership Health Center clinic in Seeley Lake

MISSOULA – The University of Montana-sponsored Family Medicine Residency of Western
*Montana* has expanded its resident physician medical services to Partnership Health Center’s *Seeley Lake* Clinic.

The expanded service was made possible by a federal grant through the Health Resources & Services Administration. The residency program is one of 20 organizations nationally to receive the HRSA grant, with the goal of increasing rural training and exposure for resident physicians specializing in family medicine and primary care.

Training in rural areas is paramount to the FMRWM mission to train clinically competent physicians to practice in rural and underserved areas of Montana. According to a 2016 analysis by the University of Washington, resident physicians training in rural and underserved areas are more likely to continue practicing in those areas. Fifty-two of 56 counties in Montana are currently designated as primary care shortage areas.

The first resident physician to train at Seeley Lake is third-year resident Dr. Zach Carlson. He is one of three residents who will share patient duties at the Seeley Lake Clinic this academic year. Dr. Nick Zakovich, a third-year resident and Dr. Jacqueline Ordemann, a second-year resident, also will provide services at the clinic.

“I was excited for the opportunity to rotate to Seeley Lake because of the potential for more acute visits, since unlike Missoula there are no urgent care clinics or emergency rooms nearby to handle these needs,” Carlson said. “I’m happy to report my first clinic session exceeded this expectation. Taking care of patients with acute concerns in an area with limited resources is great practice for a potential future job in a rural area, and I look forward to more experiences going forward to better prepare me for my future practice.”

Interested residents submitted an application for consideration for the Seeley Lake position. Three residents were chosen and will continue providing services through the 2021-22 academic year. FMRWM will take applications each year to replace graduating residents. Program managers also expect to extend the rural continuity clinic program to Kalispell track residents in the coming year.

FMRWM is a three-year family medicine residency program based in Missoula with a track in Kalispell. Each year the program recruits 10 first-year residents and graduates 10 third-year residents. At any given time, there are 24 residents located in Missoula and six located in Kalispell.
Missoula residents complete their continuity clinic at Partnership Health Center, and Kalispell residents complete their continuity clinic at Greater Valley Health Center. FMRWM is part of the University of Washington Family Medicine Residency Network and is sponsored by Providence St. Patrick Hospital and Community Medical Center in Missoula and Logan Health in Kalispell.

###

**Contact:** Dr. Darin Bell, assistant director for rural education, 406-258-4124, darin.bell@umontana.edu.
Seeley Lake Clinic Joins UM Resident Physician Program
With hundreds of lakes and over 1100 km (684 miles) of trails, the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Area in south central Montana is extremely popular among outdoor recreationalists.
FLATHEAD LAKE – After another summer of record-breaking tourism, it remains clear that Montana’s natural environment and breathtaking backcountry continue to draw numerous visitors who serve as a major economic driver for the state. This increase in tourism recently led University of Montana graduate student Daniel Pendergraph to pose the question: What impact might this boom in human activity have on the pristine water quality of backcountry lakes?

In a new study published in Wilderness & Environmental Medicine, Pendergraph – lead author and now a graduate of the W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation’s Wilderness Institute – joined a team of UM Flathead Lake Biological Station researchers and others to determine if increased human visitation to the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Area led to an increase in human fecal contamination in backcountry lakes.

Combining a traditional fecal bacterial assay with a more novel genetic approach using polymerase chain reaction analysis, researchers found that while fecal contamination was present in some bodies of water, in most cases the source of that contamination did not appear to be human.

With hundreds of lakes and over 1100 km (684 miles) of trails, the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Area in south-central Montana is extremely popular among outdoor recreationalists, including those interested in backcountry backpacking and horseback travel. Visitors to the area often concentrate their activity around lakes and water sources near popular summits.

“Although the region is remote,” Pendergraph said, “increasing human visitation to the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Area has the potential to negatively affect water quality, with particular concern about human-derived fecal contamination.”

Examining water samples that were collected from 21 remote alpine lake outlets and two snowmelt streams in the area, Pendergraph and FLBS Freshwater Research Lab Manager Adam Baumann used standard fecal bacterial assays to search for total coliform bacteria, as well as concentrations of Escherichia coli (E. coli) – a common bacteria found in all fecal matter. These are the same tests UM’s bio station uses to help monitor the water quality of public swimming areas in Flathead Lake through the citizen science-led Swim Guide Project.

At the end of the analysis, the researchers determined that E. coli was present in 52% of the
sampled sites. From there, Pendergraph worked with FLBS Professor of Microbial Ecology Matthew Church and Research Associate John Ranieri using digital droplet PCR assays to amplify and search for specific genes known to occur in bacteria associated with human waste. Human-associated bacteria were found in very low abundances in all sites tested, which means they were present but not quantifiable. Only one of the sites had a quantifiable presence of human-associated bacteria, but the number was still relatively low.

“Our research suggests that the major sources of total coliform and E. coli in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Area could derive from wild animals in addition to livestock, pack animals or pets brought in by human visitors,” said Pendergraph.

For researchers, the results of the study were highly encouraging. To this point, it seems the increase in recreation in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Area has not yet led to a decrease in backcountry water quality as a result of human waste. But the positive implications of the study don’t end there.

“These results highlight the utility of combining more traditional assays with emerging microbial source tracking with DNA- and PCR-based methods,” Church said. “We suspect there will be an increasing number of studies that will benefit from this approach.”

It’s important to remember that, while the human impact was minimal, the study did reveal a widespread presence of total coliforms and E. coli in backcountry water sources. Researchers stress the importance of purifying water collected in any backcountry area before consumption.

Equally important is the continued practice of safe and responsible recreation to ensure the ecological and economic sustainability of Montana’s natural resources for generations to come.

For the complete study, visit Wilderness & Environmental Medicine. Other researchers in the study included Alexander Metcalf and Thomas Deluca in UM’s College of Forestry and Conservation and Lochlin Ermatinger of the Montana State University’s Department of Land Resources

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**Contact:** Daniel Pendergraph, UM graduate student, 847-502-4527, pendergraphdaniel96@gmail.com; Matt Church, microbial ecologist, UM Flathead Lake Biological Station, 406-872-4506, matt.church@umontana.edu.
UM Researchers Investigate Human Impact on Backcountry Water Quality
LIFELONG MONTANAN CONTRACTOR CREATES ENDOWMENT FOR MISSOULA COLLEGE TRADES

05 OCTOBER 2021
Walter T. Irion and his wife Ruby, both longtime Great Falls residents, recently provided a $100,000 endowment gift to Missoula College in support of trades education for Montana's next-generation of skilled tradespeople.

MISSOULA – Missoula College received a gift of $100,000 to endow a scholarship designed to bolster access to trades education at the two-year institution. The gift comes from a career Montanan journeyman who wants to support Montana’s next-generation of skilled tradespeople.

The scholarship will support second-year Sustainable Construction Technology students in the Industrial Technology Department who are also pursuing a Construction Management Certificate.

“These additional resources will help tear down some of the financial barriers students face when pursuing their training and education,” said John Freer, director of Missoula College’s Sustainable Construction Technology Program and interim chair for the Department of Industrial Technology. “The most effective way that we can fill Montana’s workforce shortage is to invest in successful and proven programs like the Sustainable Construction Program at Missoula College. Having basic skills to work on the business is just as important as having the hands-on skills to work on the jobsite, and many students are looking forward to learning both.”

The scholarship was established by the family of Walter T. Irion. Irion and his wife of 65 years, Ruby, are both longtime Great Falls residents. Irion is a graduate of Power High School and a general contractor for over 40 years who earned his Journeyman’s Certificate from the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners in 1950.

Over Irion’s career, he built numerous homes and businesses including the Sovereign Grace Church (formerly Sunnyside Methodist) and the remodeled West Side Methodist Church in Great Falls. On the job, Irion said he led by example and wants to support students who are pursuing careers in the construction industry.

“The trade skills I learned were very important,” Irion said. “But it was time management and organization that were the most important keys to my business success. I’m proud to support the next-generation of Montana tradesmen in developing these critical skills.”
The Certificate of Applied Sciences - Construction Management degree provides students the opportunity to learn construction skills in a competency-based learning environment. In addition to general education courses, students in the program learn the various steps to becoming a successful tradesperson, as well as the additional skills required to manage their own projects or small construction-related business, including estimating, scheduling, budgeting and basic management skills.

Freer added that the heightened focus on trades reiterates the integral importance of workforce education, and the Ruby and Walter T. Irion Scholarship will provide opportunities for students who might not otherwise have the financial means to pursue these educational opportunities.

Visit the Missoula College website to learn more about the Sustainable Construction Technology Program.

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Related stories:
Missoula College Offers Job Site Safety Certification
UM faculty members across the humanities will share in a $499,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.
MISSOULA – Cornerstone humanities programs at the University of Montana received a $499,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The funding comes from the federal government’s American Rescue Plan, which rewards funding for national programming in the humanities that “are an essential component of economic and civic life in the United States.”

UM faculty across the humanities have been awarded a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Pictured (left to right) are Tobin Miller Shearer, Kelly Dixon, Scott Arcenas, Gillian Glaes, Kyle Volk, Ashby Kinch and Kathryn Shanley.

UM was awarded the maximum level of grant funding for one year to support programming, classes and scholarship in history, literature, anthropology and Native American Studies within UM’s College of Humanities and Sciences.

“On behalf of UM, our students and expert faculty across the humanities disciplines, I am inspired by what this award from the nation’s top organization in the humanities says about UM’s strengths,” said UM President Seth Bodnar. “There has never been a more critical time to celebrate and affirm what the humanities offer us all: a better world through learning about ourselves, our culture and societies, a type of learning has always been part of the fabric of a UM education.”

The grant, “Making the Humanities Public: Racial Justice, Death in a Time of COVID, and Sustaining Native Scholarship,” will be led by Dr. Tobin Miller Shearer, UM professor of history and African-American Studies and UM’s Humanities Institute.
“We are beyond ecstatic to have received this amount for the humanities,” Shearer said. “We had a compelling grant application thanks to the contributions of a stellar group of humanities scholars at UM who are continuing to do relevant and timely research and teaching.”

Shearer said the funding will support a public lecture series on racial justice, death and Indigenous knowledge, as well as a postdoctoral fellowship, a summer course for high school students interested in the humanities and additional funding for graduate student research, program backing and student scholarships.

The funding also supports additional resources for UM’s new Certificate in Public History. Last year, history students gathered 20 oral testimonies from people, businesses and organizations that had been affected by the pandemic, gaining knowledge and experience in the practice of oral history and contributing to the public record about how Montanans experienced the pandemic lockdown.

Kyle Volk, associate professor and chair of the Department of History, said the grant will deepen UM’s public impact.

"This grant will bolster our ongoing effort to make history — and the humanities writ large — public: to bring research and programming on campus to the wider western Montana community and to involve that wider community in our scholarly work."

UM’s capacity to deliver a whole-person education as the country grapples with divisive rhetoric and pressing social challenges, are “exactly why a rich training in the humanities can equip students with sophistication and nuance that is lasting and meaningful, and makes a difference in terms of dialing up the insight, and not dialing up the heat,” Shearer said.

“It’s incredibly validating to be in a field that investigates core human values, processing death and grief and racial justice – these are each fundamental themes and ideas that reflect the historical moment in which we find ourselves,” he said.

Gillian Glaes, program director for UM’s Humanities Institute and visiting associate professor of history, said the award speaks not only to the expertise of UM faculty and scholarship but also shows UM students the relevance of scholarship in the humanities disciplines. She called the grant “a game changer” when it comes to support for faculty, students and programs that will allow for innovative work.
“The NEH grant is an incredible opportunity for us, and it’s such a pleasure to be involved in the collaborative process,” she said. “The Humanities Institute plans to serve as the nexus of all of these scholarly endeavors and to support and promote deliverables to the wider public, as the topics relate to the humanities more broadly.”

The UM Humanities Institute, formed in 2016, brings together different faculty members to work cohesively and to promote the humanities across campus and support research by students and faculty. In the midst of the pandemic, the institute worked to provide timely and relevant programming on such topics, offering a panel on racial justice and the humanities via Zoom in the fall of 2020.

Glaes, a UM alumna and instructor, said she has observed an increased level of engagement in her students around issues such as racial justice, adding that the pandemic intersected with other key elements of contemporary life, including social justice, climate change and the political landscape.

“The humanities are all around us,” she said. “People take to op-eds, podcasts, books and essays on these topics because they help us make sense of the world we’re in.”

UM faculty awarded the grant include:

- Tobin Miller Shearer, professor, Department of History, director, African-American Studies Program.
- Gillian Glaes, program director, UM Humanities Institute, visiting associate professor of history.
- Kelly Dixon, professor, Department of Anthropology.
- Ashby Kinch, associate dean, UM Graduate School, professor of English.
- Kyle G. Volk, chair, associate professor, Department of History.
- Scott Arcenas, assistant professor, Department of History.
- Kathryn Shanley, chair, professor, Native American Studies.
Donna McCrea, professor and head of Archives and Special Collections, Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library.

The National Endowment for the Humanities is an independent federal agency of the U.S. government established by the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965 and is dedicated to supporting research, education, preservation and public programs in the humanities.

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**Related stories:**
UM Launches History Internships Focused on COVID-19
Humanities Windfall: Half a Million Grant Awarded to UM

UM linguistics graduate student Aspen Decker is dedicated, professionally and personally, to the preservation of Salish, an endangered language.
MISSOULA – Every 40 days it’s estimated that a language somewhere in the world ceases to exist, taking with it shared communication, a common history, treasured traditions. For one University of Montana graduate student, saving her native language from a similar fate is both personal and professional.

Linguistics master’s student Aspen Decker, part of an ever-shrinking group of fluent Salish speakers, knows extraordinary efforts will be required to keep Salish from disappearing altogether. She is tireless in her commitment to preserving her Native culture and its language. She teaches Salish to her four children, promotes her culture through her job as an education coordinator at the Montana Museum of Art and Culture and speaks in the community whenever asked.

In September she helped kick off the Montana Book Festival, when she presented a land acknowledgment statement in Salish. She’s also in the process of launching a new student organization, the Indigenous Storytelling Club.

“The goal of the club is to create a greater representation of Indigenous ways of knowing at UM and to support the Indigenous student voice as a platform for social activism,” said Decker, a member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. “We want to empower our shared voice to talk about issues like climate change, language revitalization and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women crisis.”

For Decker, this calling to save her language began as a young child learning Salish from her great aunts – two were instrumental in bringing Salish language education to the Flathead Reservation – and deepened during her early education at the Nkwusm Salish immersion school in her hometown of Arlee.

“There was an elder at the school, Patlik Pierre, who taught me to speak fluently,” said Decker, who went on to serve on the school’s board of directors.

After graduating in 2018 with a Bachelor of Arts in Tribal Historic Preservation from Salish Kootenai College, Decker taught Native American history at St. Ignatius High School and Salish as an adjunct instructor at her alma mater.

Now in her second year of her master’s research, Decker focuses on demonstratives – words or phrases that describe the spatial or temporal location of someone or something – in Salish, collecting data from first-language Salish speakers.

“Aspen appreciates that a linguistic approach to understanding language plays a valuable role in her own language learning and teaching” said Leora Bar-el, a professor in UM’s linguistics program. “As a Salish language learner and teacher, Aspen brings a unique perspective to our program, which we hope will inspire more Indigenous language learners, teachers and activists to pursue linguistics at UM.”

During the past two years, Decker has landed two grants to help in her work. With financing from the Endangered Language Fund, she is creating Salish curriculum using seasonally based interactive games. With an Indigenous Research Center Faculty Researchers Award, she is developing curriculum for a Plains Indian Sign Language course.

Geography and events, Decker said, both play a key role in Native languages. For example, the end of buffalo hunting impacted the sustainability of shared languages. If you aren’t gathering together, in other words, you aren’t sharing your language as widely.

“Place names and what we did in those places are very important,” Decker said. “Naayccstm ‘place of bull trout’ is the name, for example, used for the Blackfoot confluence near Bonner. It refers to where we hunted and fished.”

This year, Decker joined the MMAC as its Native community and museum education...
coordinator. She serves a variety of much-needed roles in the position, said museum Director H. Rafael Chacón, including “being in the thick” of efforts at UM’s College of Arts and Media to welcome and support Native students. This includes conducting extensive interviews with the campus community, working closely with UM’s Office of the President and developing a marketing outreach campaign directed at Native and minority students.

At MMAC she is charged with injecting Native perspective into museum programming.

“Her priority is to make sure we have a Native voice present in every exhibit and program,” Chacón said, using the current exhibit, “Avis marvelous: Ornithology in 19th Century Art and Science,” as an example of how Decker has developed signage to lend native perspective.

Decker also is developing staff signage and a Native landscaping plan for UM’s new museum which starts construction this fall.

After years of practice and study, Decker said she’s achieved a level of comfort in Salish that she no longer translates from English in her head. The words flow as freely as they did for all those who started her on this journey, and she hopes with efforts made by her and her tribe they will flow freely for generations to come.

“I think my late great aunt Mary Lucy Parker would be proud to know that her great-niece only speaks Salish to her children,” Decker said, “and is keeping our language alive and thriving.”

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Contact: Dave Kuntz, UM director of strategic communications, 406-243-5659, dave.kuntz@mso.umt.edu.
UM Graduate Student Committed to Saving Her Native Language