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JUNE

RECENT NEWS

SCHOOL OF LAW

UM Public Administration Student Connects Residents With City

27 JUNE 2022

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES, RESEARCH

UM Bio Station Study Finds Microplastic Pollution in Flathead Lake

23 JUNE 2022
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

UM To Hold Listening Session on Renaming Eck Hall
23 JUNE 2022

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

Famed Ethologist and Conservation Icon Dr. Jane Goodall to Speak at UM
21 JUNE 2022

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

Griz Chat: Russian Scholar, Journalist Studies Fake News During Tense Time
20 JUNE 2022
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

Michael Rohd Joins University of Montana to Lead New Co-Lab
17 JUNE 2022

COLLEGE OF FORESTRY AND CONSERVATION

UM Campsite Researcher to Present National Academy of Sciences Lecture
16 JUNE 2022

MISSOULA COLLEGE

CyberMontana Bringing Critical Cybersecurity Training to Big Sky State
15 JUNE 2022
COLLEGE OF HEALTH

UM’s Popular Online Master of Social Work Meets Students Where They Live
14 JUNE 2022

DAVIDSON HONORS COLLEGE

UM Awards Prestigious Provost’s, Dean’s Scholarships
10 JUNE 2022

ATHLETICS, UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

Champion Barrel Racer Represents UM at National Rodeo
09 JUNE 2022
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES
Tiny Organisms Yield Big Returns for UM Early Career Researcher
08 JUNE 2022

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA
UM Awarded $2M for Low-Income, First-Gen Students
06 JUNE 2022

COLLEGE OF HEALTH
UM Student Leads Inclusive Efforts, Earns Newman Fellowship
03 JUNE 2022
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES
UM to host 2022 Institute on Collaborative Language Research
02 JUNE 2022

DAVIDSON HONORS COLLEGE
Students Earn UM’s 2022 Presidential Leadership Scholarship
02 JUNE 2022

Launch UM virtual tour.
MISSOULA – Engaging with city government can be difficult for residents if they don’t feel they have a meaningful voice. This is where University of Montana student Ashley Brittner Wells comes in.

Brittner Wells is the new community engagement specialist for the City of Missoula’s Office of Community Planning, Development and Innovation. Her role in this position is to help the government interface with Missoula’s residents.

“I get to focus on helping people engage with city government,” said Brittner Wells, a student in the Department of Public Administration and Policy of UM’s Baucus Institute. “This opens up conversations between the city and people who may feel they don’t have the ability to reach out on their own.”

She has worked a variety of different jobs, all within the public and nonprofit sectors.

“I have always liked working with the public, and every job I’ve had has involved being a liaison with the community,” Brittner Wells said. “I feel lucky to connect the public with public service. I grew up in East Missoula and went to college here. I wanted to engage with the community I grew up in.”

While Brittner Wells had many of the skills needed for this position, extra training from the Baucus Institute’s inaugural Baucus Leaders Montana Program helped her take these skills to the next level.
The Baucus Institute Department of Public Administration and Policy is housed within the Alexander Blewett III School of Law. DPAP provides an innovative public service education for pre-career and in-career public and nonprofit administration students.

“Our Montana Baucus Leader Program affords students opportunities to use their skills from the classroom to connect during applied summer learning experiences,” said Dr. Sara Rinfret, the MPA director. “Our goal is to carry out Sen. Baucus’ commitment to public service. Ashley’s Baucus Leader experience provided her with additional skills and connections to land a new position to be a leader for city government.”

“When I found out about the certificate of public administration, the first two weeks of class had me hooked,” Brittner Wells said. “The program coalesced the skills I already had, and then sharpened them. I am able to utilize the skills learned in class on a daily basis in my position with the city.”

She took part in a mentorship program with Missoula County and a fellowship with her future boss, Eran Pehan, through the Baucus Leaders Montana fellowship at the City of Missoula.

“You are learning with working professionals in class, and the mentorship portion gives you connections and helps you see the bigger picture,” Brittner Wells said.

Pehan is the director of Community Planning, Development and Innovation for the City of Missoula.

“Ashley brings a wealth of skills – both natural experience and from the Baucus Institute,” Pehan said. “She approaches this position with a bigger-picture view of how a community works. It is unique to be able to take a 10K view of a situation and be able to get into the weeds to get things done.

“These skills make her very effective. She has the ability to listen to citizens, build relationships and coordinate people around issues. She doesn’t shy away from conflict; she leans into it, providing people a voice.”

The Office of Community Planning, Development and Innovation promotes equitable growth in a sustainable community. It creates plans on homelessness, climate change and national policies at a local level.
“We study growth in the city and are making sure we grow with an equitable and inclusive lens,” Pehan said. “We want to make sure that as Missoula grows, no one is left behind. Ashley is learning new skills through DPAP and then turns around and applies them. We get to try new things and see how they work. It is an incredible example of how real-world experience pairs with academic experience.”

In reflecting on this new position, Pehan sees the benefit of having a longer-term approach in working with the community.

“Before Ashley’s position, we only interfaced with the public on a project-by-project basis,” Pehan said. “Now there is one person overseeing all projects. This will develop into an institutional knowledge that connects the dots and makes us more effective as public employees. It makes people feel connected to the local government in a way they haven’t felt before. Government makes better decisions when citizens are involved.”

As for Brittner Wells: “I feel lucky to be a part of the department. This position is very exciting. People in our community are interested and want to be engaged. I get to help tell those stories and share those concerns and get to connect people. People know what they want. It is more about getting them to the table than being their representative.

“It’s about empowering people.”

###

**Contact:** Phil Stempin; director of events, marketing and communications; UM Blewett III School of Law; phil.stempin@umontana.edu; 406-243-6509.
By Ian Withrow, UM News Service

**FLATHEAD LAKE** – They’re in our oceans and rivers. They’re in the food we eat and the water we drink. They’ve even been detected inside the human body. They’re called microplastics – particles of plastic so small they can’t be seen by the naked eye. While researchers have known for years that these microplastics exist in Flathead Lake, the
concentrations and origins of the microplastic pollution have remained a mystery.

Now, thanks to a study conducted at the University of Montana’s Flathead Lake Biological Station, scientists have a greater understanding of the amount of microplastics polluting Flathead Lake, the likely sources of these microplastics and what can be done to prevent more from finding their way into the lake’s world-renowned pristine water.

Recently published in the scientific journal Environmental Pollution, this microplastics study was led by FLBS visiting researcher Dr. Xiong Xiong from the Chinese Academy of Science’s Institute of Hydrobiology. Xiong came to FLBS in 2018 on a mission to learn more about microplastics in freshwater lakes in relatively unpopulated regions and to help provide insight to aid in their management.

“It looks quite clean, but if this clean lake is suffering from plastics, I want to check that,” Xiong said at the start of his study four years ago. “I think people think (plastic pollution) is more serious in the ocean, but many people live inland, and we need the freshwater. It may affect our daily life more directly than the plastic in the ocean.”

To conduct this study, Xiong joined FLBS Director Jim Elser and a team of biological station scientists to sample surface waters at 12 different locations around Flathead Lake over a one-year period. They then examined the samples for the occurrence, distribution and types of microplastics.

After analyzing the samples, the team discovered that, while levels of microplastic pollution measured in Flathead Lake were lower than in lakes in densely populated areas, Flathead had microplastic levels similar to or higher than lakes studied in other less-densely populated areas of the world.

In other words, Flathead Lake is now home to microplastics and new microplastic particles are arriving every day.

“Microplastics in lakes can interfere with food webs because animals like zooplankton and fish can ingest them,” Elser said. “They can carry toxins into the animal, displace real foods and physically damage digestive tissues.”

There are three main ways that microplastics reach Flathead Lake, according to the study. One way is atmospheric microplastic deposition. This occurs when microplastics are transported to
Montana from other more populated areas by the atmosphere (e.g., wind and clouds) and then fall into Flathead Lake – either directly from the air (known as dry deposition) or through snow and rainfall (wet deposition).

Microplastics in dry deposition were highest in the fall season, while wet deposition was highest in the winter season.

“This study showed that microplastics are literally raining – and snowing – down on us out of the sky,” Elser said.

The other two other ways in which microplastics can enter Flathead Lake are through the lake’s major river inputs, which includes the Flathead River on the north end of the lake and lakeside sources near larger shoreline communities such as Polson, Bigfork and Lakeside.

At the mouth of the Flathead River, the biggest source of microplastics is most likely from plastic waste disposal, which in Flathead County is primarily landfill rather than recycling. Although landfills located in the Flathead Watershed are not open pit, microplastics are mobilized via leachate (water that picks up contaminants) and via the soil of the landfill when winds carry away dust.

Meanwhile, in the more highly populated shoreline areas of the lake, researchers found that concentrations of microplastics were especially high. In addition to plastic packaging, many of today’s clothes are made from fibrous plastics. These synthetic fabrics break apart on a microscopic level during washing and then are transported and deposited into our waters through home septic drain fields and community water treatment plants.

Plastic waste from other human activities also is worthy of attention. A variety of water activities such as kayaking, sailing, speedboating, water skiing and fishing are important outdoor pursuits in the Flathead Watershed. But these activities involve plastic boats, ropes, floats and fishing line that can degrade and transform into microplastics over time.

Though the levels of microplastics in Flathead Lake are relatively low, they are concerning. However, researchers are quick to point out that much can be done to reduce their presence in Montana’s waters.

“While we need to know more about microplastic impacts in our lakes, we know enough to act
to reduce plastic inputs now,” Elser said. “Each of us can reduce our use of plastics, properly dispose of them and implement impactful approaches such as laundry filters. We can also encourage businesses to do the same and for governments to provide facilities and systems to better handle plastics in our watershed.”

Fibrous microplastics can be reduced by improving laundry practices and wastewater treatment or by reducing the use of synthetic fiber material in favor of natural fiber clothing and materials. As an example, a recent study in California found that the adoption of in-line filters in washing machines had the potential to decrease annual synthetic microfiber emissions to natural environments by nearly 80%.

Further strengthening disposal measures of plastic waste by both residents and visitors could greatly help reduce microplastic contamination in Flathead Lake. Such measures include better education about the harms of improper plastic disposal, enhancing plastic waste recycling in the region and reducing the overall use of plastic products, such as single-use plastics common in the food service industry.

When it comes to reducing atmospheric microplastic deposition, researchers said extensive solutions are needed. The total production of plastic waste in the United States is 42 million tons per year, which is much higher than other countries per capita. This suggests that, even in an area of relatively low population, Flathead Lake will remain at risk from microplastics arriving by air until nationwide measures can be taken.

Xiong and his research team said more studies are needed to better understand and address our microplastic problem, not only in the Flathead Watershed but also throughout the world. The good news is that, because human activities are indisputably the only source of microplastics, this is a problem that we have the power to solve.

Additional authors on the study include FLBS research scientist Tyler Tappenbeck and Chinese Academy of Sciences researcher Chenxi Wu.

For the complete study, visit the Environmental Pollution website at https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0269749122006595?via%3Dihub

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UM Bio Station Study Finds Microplastic Pollution in Flathead Lake

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Launch UM virtual tour.
MISSOULA – The University of Montana will hold an on-campus listening session on Thursday, July 7 to gather public comment on the proposal to rename the Liberal Arts Building after Dennis and Gretchen Eck.

The proposed name is the Dennis and Gretchen Eck Liberal Arts Building.

The listening session will take place from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. in the President’s Room of Brantly Hall on July 7 – in accordance with Montana Board of Regents of Higher Education Policy
1004.1. Public comments may also be submitted electronically via email to news@umontana.edu or through the U.S. Mail to Brantly Hall 101, University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812.

“It is with great enthusiasm that I offer full support for the proposal to rename UM’s Liberal Arts Building,” said Julie Baldwin, interim dean of UM’s College of Humanities & Sciences. “The proposed name, the Dennis and Gretchen Eck Liberal Arts Building, is fitting, given the generous support Dennis and Gretchen have provided to the college over the past several years.

“The support of Dennis and Gretchen has enabled us to undertake a complete transformation of the teaching, learning and technology environment of one of UM’s most heavily used buildings for academic instruction,” Baldwin said. “Their generous support will impact students for generations to come.”

Dennis and Gretchen are both native Montanans and alumni of UM. Dennis grew up in Wolf Point and Gretchen in Butte. After completing a degree in history and political science in 1967, Dennis launched a successful career in corporate retail, serving in executive leadership positions with Jewel Companies Inc., The Vons Companies, Coles Myer and Ulta Beauty Inc. Today, he is the principal of DKE Retail Studies.

Dennis and Gretchen have contributed more than $11 million to UM. Their gifts have funded renovation of the major portion of the Liberal Arts Building. They also funded the University’s S.E.A. Change Initiative, which prepares students to be change-drivers and next-generation leaders who champion gender equity, and established a scholarship fund for Native Americans.

UM’s Liberal Arts Building is one of the highest frequented buildings on Montana’s flagship campus. It was constructed in 1953 and has served as the primary home for UM’s humanities offerings. Due to the contributions of the Eck Family, the building now includes 25 classrooms with innovative teaching technology, a 120-seat auditorium, a new central building entrance on the famed Oval, three student and faculty engagement hubs, several ADA accessible restrooms, a new academic advising center and significant upgrades to the building’s sprinkler, electric, HVAC and internet infrastructure.

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UM To Hold Listening Session on Renaming Eck Hall

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Launch UM virtual tour.
Global icon Dr. Jane Goodall will speak at UM on Sunday, June 26. Her lecture is free and open to the public. Photo: Jane Goodall Institute

MISSOULA – Dr. Jane Goodall, DBE, founder of the Jane Goodall Institute and a UN
Famed Ethologist and Conservation Icon Dr. Jane Goodall to Speak at UM

Goodall’s talk, “Hope Through Action,” is part of UM’s President’s Lecture Series and co-sponsored by UM’s Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center and the International Wildlife Film Festival. The lecture, which is free and open to the community, will take place at 6 p.m. on the Oval and virtually for those who can’t attend in person.

Goodall’s scientific legacy stretches back more than 60 years to her groundbreaking research of the then little-known wild chimpanzees living in Tanzania’s Gombe National Park. With mentorship from paleoanthropologist Dr. Louis Leakey, Goodall’s research transformed the study of wildlife. Her revelatory observation that chimpanzees make and use tools rocked the scientific landscape, forever redefining our understanding of the relationship between humans and other animals.

Since then, Goodall has built on innovative science and a lifetime of advocacy – particularly through her global organization the Jane Goodall Institute, founded in 1977. Her trailblazing efforts advanced community-led conservation, empowering local communities to own the process of sustainable development and conservation. Roots & Shoots, the institute’s international youth program, supports young people in all 50 U.S. states and over 50 countries worldwide to be the change in their communities and change the world for the better.

“There is much that all of us can learn from Jane Goodall and her tireless efforts to protect not only the wildlife that inhabits our planet, but the people, too,” said UM President Seth Bodnar. “She has proven that the well-being of one does not have to come at the expense of the other. We’re extremely excited to have her visit UM, and I encourage all of Missoula to come hear her important message.”

Goodall is the author of numerous books, including her newest, “The Book of Hope: A Survival Guide for Trying Times,” and she has been the subject of multiple television documentaries and feature films.

A global icon, Goodall has been the recipient of many honors, most recently receiving the esteemed Templeton Prize in 2021. Her other honors include the Medal of Tanzania, the National Geographic Society’s Hubbard Medal, Japan’s prestigious Kyoto Prize, the Benjamin Franklin Medal in Life Science, the UNESCO 60th Anniversary Medal and the Gandhi/King Award for Nonviolence. In April 2002, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan named Goodall a UN Messenger of Peace. In a 2004 ceremony at Buckingham Palace, she became a Dame
Famed Ethologist and Conservation Icon Dr. Jane Goodall to Speak at UM

Commander of the British Empire. In 2006, she received France's highest recognition, the Legion of Honor.

UM’s President’s Lecture Series was created to provide citizens of Montana opportunities to gather, learn and discuss the ideas and issues that animate our communities. More information about the event, including how to livestream the lecture, will be available on the President’s Lecture Series webpage.

The University will provide 500 chairs for the event that will be placed underneath a large, shaded tent on a first-come, first-served basis. If attendees want to spread out across the Oval or arrive to the lecture late, event organizers encourage them to bring their own chairs.

Contact: Dave Kuntz, UM strategic communications director, 406-243-5659, dave.kuntz@umontana.edu.
Famed Ethologist and Conservation Icon Dr. Jane Goodall to Speak at UM
Anastasia Zhukova, a Russian journalist, is improving her language skills at UM's English program.
MISSOULA – Anastasia Zhukova found herself a stranger in a strange land this spring.

The 17-year Russian journalist landed a prestigious Humphrey Fellowship, a Fulbright Exchange Program funded by the U.S. Department of State, which allows professionals from abroad to study a year at American universities to foster mutual understanding. This brought Zhukova to the University of Montana for four months, just as Russian troops invaded Ukraine and tensions spiked to Cold-War levels between her homeland and the West.

She admits the timing is not ideal. But it gives her a front-row seat to compare and contrast media coverage in the two countries while providing insight into a topic she finds fascinating: fake news.

Zhukova is honing her language skills at UM’s English Language Institute, which provides the only long-term English training for Humphrey Fellows in the U.S. UM has hosted the Fellows since 2013, and this year she is one of 14 scholars on campus from 13 countries with a wide array of professional backgrounds.

Zhukova hails from Sakhalin, an island off the east coast of Russia near Japan. She earned her undergraduate degree at Krasnoyarsk in central Siberia, and she later attained a master’s degree in education. She has been a radio, television and online reporter, and for several years she hosted the morning show on regional radio stations. Before becoming a Humphrey Fellow, Zhukova worked as the editor-in-chief of the news department of a Sakhalin media company.
“We are focused on informing residents about important events in the region and in the country, and we also help people solve their problems,” she said. “My extended family is quite large, with parents, two sisters and their nuclear families. Now they miss me very much and worry about how I will live in the U.S.A. for almost a whole year. But I reassure them, because in Missoula all people are very kind and friendly.”

UM News recently asked Zhukova about her adventure to the mountains of Montana during such a tense time.

**UM News: What prompted you to seek out a Humphrey Fellowship?**

**Zhukova:** With the development of the Internet and social networks, the world of news began to change very quickly. In the past people specially bought newspapers or turned on the TV or radio to find out what was happening in the world. Now a few seconds are enough to go to the website or app and get information. When I visited the U.S. for the first time in 2017, I saw enthusiasm with which editorial staffers in America use new technologies for their work. And it helps them to be closer to the audience. Therefore, I wanted to gain knowledge about how this system works in the U.S.A., and I am very glad that I’m a Humphrey Fellow right now.

**What has it been like traveling to the U.S. during this time of COVID-19 and rising tensions between our two nations?**

To arrive in the U.S.A., I had a long journey. I spent more than 30 hours on the road from Armenia to Missoula, Montana. Now there is no direct flight between Russia and U.S.A, therefore there were many transfers and expectations at airports. But I did not feel disrespected or neglected because I am from Russia. As for COVID-19, in recent years the need to wear masks, take a vaccine or pass an express test has become an ordinary routine, so this did not cause any inconvenience. On one flight there was a condition that you could not use a fabric mask – a medical one was needed. I had several masks with me, so I did not have to look for a new mask at the airport.

**As a Russian citizen, how have you been treated at UM and by the people of Montana?**

When I arrived, I met with the English Language Institute team and other members of the Humphrey Program. They all knew that I was from Russia. They all reacted to me with kindness. Some even expressed words of sympathy about what is happening now. In the early days, I was very worried about how other people and residents of Montana would react when
they would find out that I am from Russia. But that didn’t become a problem. I have never encountered discrimination or aggression. All people are very friendly.

**What are your thoughts about how Russian media outlets and U.S. media outlets are covering the armed conflict in Ukraine? What has struck you about the coverage?**

One of the main principles of journalism is to show all sides to the conflict. But now the U.S. and Russian media most often support different positions of the conflict in Ukraine. Therefore, sometimes only information is voiced that will help the audience think only the actions of their country are correct.

**You are interested in the term “fake news” in both your homeland and the United States. What do you hope to learn about fake news?**

In my opinion, fake news is now one of the important problems for the media. Now, even journalists do not always want or do not always have time to check the sources of information, and fake news can appear even in respected publications. And when readers or viewers see the news with a shocking title, they also usually don’t want to waste their time checking this fact. They are just inclined to this news. I would like to know if there are technologies that allow you to identify fake news without wasting a lot of time. This could help journalists and audiences receive only truthful information.

**What has been your most interesting experience during your journey to America?**

I visited America for the first time in 2017. I then flew through Japan and the Pacific Ocean and returned along the same route. Now I flew across Europe and the Atlantic Ocean. So for me, a trip around the world through both hemispheres of our planet has now ended, and I can put a checkmark in front of this desire. In addition, on international flights, I really like to watch flight attendants. In my opinion, in Russia they are more stringent, and on European and American airlines they are more friendly.

**What is the main thing you hope to gain from this entire experience?**

During the year of Humphrey, I hope not only to gain new knowledge but also to be useful to the community. I would like to be a volunteer in organizations that help people overcome crisis situations. As I noticed during these two months in Missoula, in the U.S.A. much attention is paid to mental health. There is support to help you survive a hard time. I would like to support
my colleagues professionally, especially if they need psychological support during these times.

###

**Contact:** Anastasia Zhukova, Humphrey Fellow from Russia, anastasia.zhukova@umconnect.umt.edu; Carissa Luginbill, UM English Language Institute program coordinator, 406-243-2895, carissa.luginbill@mso.umt.edu.

Launch UM virtual tour.
MISSOULA – The University of Montana welcomes Michael Rohd as director of the new Co-Lab for Civic Imagination (CCI), focusing on building collaboration between campus, local, regional and national partners.

Rohd also will join the UM faculty in the College of Health and the College of the Arts and Media, serving in a collaborative role that will prioritize cross-discipline coordination.

“I feel deeply grateful and excited to join UM at this moment under the leadership of President
Michael Rohd Joins University of Montana to Lead New Co-Lab

Bodnar and Provost Mahdavi,” said Rohd. “I have already had the opportunity to meet campus faculty and staff, and am overwhelmed by the talent, thoughtfulness and generosity of my new colleagues. I believe in the power of arts, culture, design and heritage to help us build both meaningful academic journeys for students across sectors and disciplines, and impactful opportunities for innovative problem-solving and coalition building across communities and regions. I recognize how much I have to learn about Montana, about the 12 sovereign Tribal Nations on this land and about the University itself. I look forward to listening and learning as I get to work helping build and deepen connections between the campus and the community, and between communities across the state and region.”

In one of her first hires, Provost Dr. Pardis Mahdavi has brought to UM an artist and community dialogue designer with a national record of cross-sectoral work and thought leadership. For 30 years, Rohd’s professional focus has been on civic imagination, defined as the capacity amidst residents and local leaders to collectively and creatively envision a just, healthy and equitable futures for everyone. CCI will support the re-imagining of institutional and systemic practices inside and outside higher education through collaborations rooted in cultural work within sectors such as public health, education, sustainability, workforce development, community development and racial equity.

“I am very excited to have Michael join UM,” said Mahdavi. “He brings with him decades of valuable experience and his innovative approach to building collaboration across campus and beyond is critical to our mission. I am proud to support the work of the CCI as this new co-lab builds important bridges that will serve our students, our state and our society.”

Prior to joining UM, Rohd co-founded Sojourn Theatre in Portland, Oregon in 2000 and spent a decade building relationships and projects in the Pacific Northwest. In 2007, he joined the faculty of Northwestern University in Chicago and then five years later co-founded the Center for Performance and Civic Practice, a national resource for arts/municipal partnership projects. Rohd was most recently an institute professor at Arizona State University where he worked with the leadership team being assembled there with a mission of disrupting and innovating the ways arts and design are perceived and deployed in community settings beyond the arts sector.

While there, he helped launch the Projecting All Voices and Arizona Creative Communities Initiatives, collaborated with the ASU Art Museum and Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, helped build new campus programming around sexual assault prevention, and was deployed as a process designer and facilitator across the campus to help address issues of conflict resolution and leadership development.
Michael Rohd Joins University of Montana to Lead New Co-Lab

He frequently serves as an advisor, coach, curator and thought partner with collaborators around the country on projects at the intersection of arts, community development and local government with a focus on capacity-building for cross-sector, public good collaborations. Recent partners include the State of Kansas, Georgetown University, American Library Association, National League of Cities, ArtPlace America, Chicago’s Goodman Theater, United Way, Cook Inlet Housing Authority in Alaska and the City of Chicago.

He serves as the civic collaborations director for One Nation/One Project, a national arts, municipality, public health initiative, culminating in summer 2024 with massive participatory arts and public health spectacles in 18 U.S. cities and towns, and as co-designer/co-lead on a collaboration with American Library Association that is helping develop Civic Imagination Station partnerships at libraries around the U.S. as part of a grant-supported pilot cohort.

Contact: Dave Kuntz, director of strategic communications, 406-243-5659, dave.kuntz@umontana.edu.

Launch UM virtual tour.
Michael Rohd Joins University of Montana to Lead New Co-Lab
MISSOULA – For a nation that loves to camp, the past few summers have been fraught with more than mosquitoes and getting damp firewood to light. For many, just landing a site at a national park has been a logistical landmine, requiring more flexibility and fortitude than folding
Will Rice, assistant professor of outdoor recreation and wildland management at the University of Montana, has studied this subject in depth. He will talk about the scarcity and rising demand for campsites – and the unintended income and racial inequities that come with it – at an upcoming National Academy of Sciences Distinctive Voices lecture.

Rice’s lecture, “When the Last Campsite Fills: Allocation of Outdoor Recreation in an Age of Extreme Scarcity,” is open to the public and will be held online at 8 p.m. (MDT) Wednesday, June 22. The link to the livestream is online at https://livestream.com/nasem/0622rice and registration is available at http://www.nasonline.org/programs/distinctive-voices/upcoming-events.html.

The event is part of a prestigious lecture series that features experts in science, engineering and medicine who discuss innovations, discoveries and emerging issues in their field.

“Right now, if you are trying to reserve a spot for a specific date in a popular federally managed campground, you may have a 3% chance of actually getting it,” Rice said. “To succeed you need a host of advantages like flexible work schedules and high-speed internet, and for those
with lower-income jobs or living in rural areas, that can be a real problem."

In his lecture, Rice will share results from a recently published study that he and colleagues at the W.A. Franke College of Forestry & Conservation conducted, which used big data to explore inequities in the national park system.

Rice also will talk about a campground project he worked on in the past year with colleagues at the University of California, Santa Barbara, Bren School of Environmental Science & Management.

Rice served an advisor with Dr. Kaitlyn Gaynor of the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis and Bren’s Dr. Frank Davis, to “two brilliant students”– Clarissa Boyajian and Halina Do-Linh – who created a pilot app that allows people to analyze patterns in access to and demand for federally-managed campsites.

“It beautifully underscores what we found in our published research,” Rice said.

Rice is currently meeting with the National Park Service and others in the field on possible remedies to level the access to federal campgrounds, and he plans to do more research on the subject in the coming months.

“Federal agencies are very interested in addressing these discrepancies and identifying best practices moving forward," Rice said.

###

**Contact:** Dave Kuntz, UM strategic communications director, 406-243-5659, dave.kuntz@umontana.edu.

Launch UM virtual tour.
UM Campsite Researcher to Present National Academy of Sciences Lecture
MISSOULA – The philosophy at CyberMontana is that everyone, no matter their age or place in life, should be fluent in computer security.

Now one year old, this statewide initiative already counts its alumni middle school students conquering code at summer STEM camps and Montana National Guard members learning to
identify cyber breaches and remediying their efforts.

“I like to say if you are in the sixth grade or older, we have something for you,” said Dianne Burke, CyberMontana’s director and a cybersecurity faculty member at the University of Montana’s Missoula College.

Funded by the Montana Legislature in 2021 and housed in Missoula College, CyberMontana provides cybersecurity awareness, training and workforce development for businesses and residents across the state.

Its work is set against a backdrop of growing worldwide cyberbreaches that can pose, at the least, annoying email phishing, and the worst, multimillion-dollar damages to business and institutions. According to IBM the average total cost of a data breach in 2020 was $3.86 million and took an average of 280 days to identify and contain.

Meanwhile, 80% of companies say they have a hard time finding and hiring security personnel according to consulting firm Gartner, and by 2029, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts the cybersecurity job market will grow by more than 31%.

As the first institution in Montana to be recognized by the federal government as a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense, Missoula College is uniquely qualified to lead the new initiative, said Tom Gallagher, dean of Missoula College, which operates CyberMontana in coordination with faculty from other two-year colleges across the state.

“The need for trained cybersecurity professionals at all levels is absolutely critical to protect Montana’s businesses and to grow our economy,” he said, adding that the coursework offered through CyberMontana has been vetted and approved by National Security Agency through the Centers of Academic Excellence in Cybersecurity program.

In addition to degree programs in cybersecurity, CyberMontana offers on demand training for business employees featuring 20- to 30-minute training modules, professional development courses like coding bootcamps and customized cyber training, and programs for the public on subjects as diverse as password management and safely navigating Wi-Fi in public settings.

CyberMontana has launched the Montana Cyber Range, a virtual resource that allows participants a platform to practice cyber defense activities through lab exercises, simulations, and competitions from anywhere in the state.
Burke is particularly excited about several innovative programs that CyberMontana also offers – a rapid training program launching this summer for a Certificate of Technical Studies in Cybersecurity and their high school dual-enrollment program providing juniors and seniors with a three-credit online introductory course in cybersecurity. These trainings lead to both academic and industry-recognized credentials.

“We are committed to increasing the number and diversity of young people going into the pipeline for this important professional field,” Burke said. “Our hope is this dual enrollment program will be a key step toward that important goal.”

###

**Contact:** Dave Kuntz, UM director of strategic communications, 406-243-5659, dave.kuntz@umontana.edu.

Launch UM virtual tour.
MISSOULA – Like a lot of parents facing an impending empty nest, Fort Belknap resident Nona Main found herself last year asking what’s next?

With a background in public health and health education, the mother of a soon-to-be-graduating high schooler already had rich professional experience, but she wanted to do even
Fort Belknap resident Nona Main wants to use her Master of Social Work degree to improve her community through policy changes and helping Native children.

“I wanted something online that I could take while also working,” said Main, a member of the Aaniiih and Nakoda tribes of the Fort Belknap Indian community. “I saw on Instagram that the University of Montana was offering a new online option for their master’s degree in social work, and I decided to apply.

“The application was seamless and staff was very helpful,” she added.

One of UM’s fastest growing programs, UM’s online Master of Social Work posted a 200% increase in enrollment over the past year. Amanda Cahill, a clinical assistant professor in the School of Social Work, said the program’s robust history of quality programming and affordability has contributed to the popularity of the school, which earned a top 100 rating for best schools for social work by U.S. News & World Report in 2022.

UM launched the online MSW option in fall 2021, Cahill said, to address the need for more accessible education, particularly in rural and Indigenous communities. Its current class includes students from 23 states – as far away as Vermont and North Carolina – and two
“A core value of social work is meeting people where they are in their lives,” Cahill said.

For student Hannah Perno that happens to be the Flathead Valley, where she moved seven years ago from upstate New York with an undergraduate degree in environmental policy and urban planning. After a stint working for the forest service as a fire fighter and being a bit of a “ski bum,” she considered moving to Missoula to get a graduate degree.

“With the online option I have been able to remain part of the community that I love and am active in, which is a huge source of purpose and connection for me while pursuing this graduate degree,” Perno said.

Assistant Professor Ashley Trautman, chair of the School of Social Work, said social workers are uniquely positioned to respond to some of society’s most pressing social justice issues, citing homelessness, high rates of suicide, mental health challenges and continued assaults on tribal sovereignty.
“Social workers are trained to accompany individuals, families and communities in crafting meaningful interventions that honor their dignity and worth,” Trautman said. “By helping students stay in their home communities while completing their education, the MSW online program reduces barriers to accessing graduate education, and in doing so, our program is increasing the number of trained social workers ready to address social justice issues across our state and country.”

The program’s focus on social justice resonated deeply with Main, whose professional experience included two years working for UM’s National Native Children’s Trauma Center and nine years in health education with youth and underserved children in the Fort Belknap and Crow communities. She earned her undergraduate degree in liberal studies and Native American studies from Montana State University-Billings.

“I like the structure of the UM’s social work program and its anti-racist approach. This program addresses that head on,” said Main, who currently is working as a senior research program coordinator through a Johns Hopkins’ program studying suicide on reservations. “I have felt as a student in the program that I can authentically speak without fear. It’s felt like a safe space.”

Both Main and Perno are still exploring the many career avenues that someone with a master’s in social work can take, including research and public policy.

Main said she is passionate about improving her community through policy changes and improving life for Native children.

Perno, having been a firefighter, is interested in being a therapist for first responders, but she also has seen what the housing crisis has done in her community, so applying her new skills in policy and programs may be in her future. This summer she is working at The Abbie Shelter, a Flathead Valley provider of services for women escaping domestic violence, and will complete her practicum at the shelter this fall.

The practicum is a core component of the three-year MSW program, requiring students to engage in direct service work in their communities for a total of 900 hours throughout their course of studies. Perno said it may lead her into working in issues related to domestic violence.

“I am leaving my options open,” Perno said. “But I look forward to using my new skills to making a difference in areas that matter in my community.”
Contact: Dave Kuntz, UM strategic communications director, 406-243-5659, dave.kuntz@umontana.edu.
UM’s Popular Online Master of Social Work Meets Students Where They Live
A talented group of first-year students will join UM's Davidson Honors College this fall as Provost's Honors Scholars and Dean's Leadership Scholars.

MISSOULA – A talented group of first-year students will arrive at the University of Montana this fall as the Davidson Honors College Provost’s Honors Scholars and Dean’s Leadership Scholars.

The scholarships are among the most prestigious awards for incoming students in UM’s
UM Awards Prestigious Provost’s, Dean’s Scholarships

Davidson Honors College and significantly reduce the cost of attending UM.

**Provost’s Honors Scholars** are awarded to students around the nation based on academic performance, public service, leadership, personal qualities and potential for future impact. Based on the same criteria, **Dean’s Leadership Scholars** are recognized for academic excellence, demonstrated leadership and potential.

The students hail from Maryland to Arkansas to Alaska and will study a diversity of fields from wildlife biology to political science to art.

DHC Dean Tim Nichols said this year’s incoming students are accomplished scholars, athletes, artists and leaders in their schools and communities.

“The exemplary academic records of this class are exceptional,” Nichols said. “We are thrilled to welcome them to the Davidson Honors College, where they will be surrounded by other talented, motivated students for an elevated, enriched and enlivened UM education.”

**The class of 2022 Provost’s Honors Scholars are:**

**ALASKA**

Aveline Larroque is from **Anchorage, Alaska**. Larroque is a graduate of IDEA Homeschool and their goals are to earn a bachelor’s degree in chemistry with a concentration in forensic chemistry and to work for the FBI as a special agent or analyst. Along with reading, Larroque’s favorite activities include knitting, traveling and volunteering.
ARKANSAS

Elijah Caplan of Bentonville, Arkansas, is interested in studying environmental science and sustainability. Caplan is an avid outdoorsman and an Eagle Scout. He served as lodge chief for Westark Area Council’s Order of the Arrow program (Scouting’s national honor society). With his environmental science degree, Caplan hopes to assist in slowing human-induced climate change.

ARIZONA

Delia Schmidt of Litchfield, Arizona, is interested in studying the environment and sustainability at UM. She served as an officer in Canyon View High School’s Interact, Key Club and National Honor Society, as well as the district secretary on Interact District 5495’s statewide council. Schmidt helped start and build tradition at her school as part of its first graduating class and served in student government for three years. In her free time, she enjoys reading, attending concerts and spending time with her cats and dogs.
IDAHO

Julia Branen of Moscow, Idaho, is interested in studying psychology. Branen is a three-sport student-athlete and earned a spot at the state competition in both track and volleyball, as well as receiving the Outstanding Individual Scholastic Award. She was part of the National Honor Society and was selected for the College Board National Rural and Small Town Recognition Program. Branen said her two most memorable academic experiences are studying wildlife in Yellowstone National Park for a week during the summer with Ecology Project International and then traveling to China for two weeks to explore the culture and practice Chinese language skills.

ILLINOIS

Ethan Marshall from Aurora, Illinois, is interested in studying environmental science and sustainability. Marshall was a four-year varsity cross-country and track athlete, Illinois state scholar, outdoor enthusiast and music fan.
MONTANA

Averi Bertram of Bozeman is interested in environmental studies and graduated at the top of her high school class. Born and raised in Montana, Bertram has an appreciation for the outdoors and a passion for protecting the environment. She hopes to bring this passion to the DHC and major in Environmental Studies with a pre-law minor. Bertram aspires to be an environmental lawyer and hopes to move society toward a more sustainable future. In her free time, she enjoys hiking, golfing, hunting, fishing and baking. She was a member of the high school golf team and National Honor Society, and she also volunteers at THRIVE Bozeman and FACES Bozeman.

Liam Edwards is from Chinook. He loves politics and skiing and is enthusiastic about joining the Davidson Honors College. Edwards was student body president and enjoyed influencing positive change in his high school and community. Liam also was actively involved in speech and drama – specifically “Memorized Public Address,” for which he placed first at the divisional tournament.
Madalie Kershner of Great Falls is interested in studying mathematics and art at UM. Kershner graduated at the top of her class and has been engaged in Leadership High School, National Honor Society, Rustler Buddy Program and Big Brothers/Big Sisters. She grew up going to home football games and learned to appreciate the campus. Becoming a part of the Griz family was a dream for years.

Rowan Lucas from Lolo is interested in exploring careers in law. Lucas was involved with the Sentinel Dance team and National Honor Society and was editor-in-chief of the Spartan Scoop.

Daniel Martin of Dillon graduated top of his class at Beaverhead County High School. Martin enjoys hiking, fishing, running and basically anything the outdoors has to offer. He is an active member of his cross-country team, Academic Olympics, FFA, National Honors Society and
many other organizations in Dillon.

Logan Sites of Livingston is graduating at the top of his class at Park High School. Sites has been involved with band, Science and Academic Olympiad, Business Professionals of America, National Honor Society and 4-H. He played soccer and enjoys rock climbing and taekwondo.

Olivia Vesovich is from Livingston. She believes strongly in the power of education and her ability to make a difference in the world. Vesovich is interested in studying English at UM. She was part of the IB Diploma Program at Hellgate
High School and has been actively involved in climate action and politics through Students Against Violating the Environment group and Forward Montana.

Jake Watkins is from **Whitefish**. He attended high school in California to train at an international tennis academy. Watkins will play tennis for the Griz and pursue a degree in biochemistry at UM. He enjoys fishing, mountain biking, wake boarding, surfing and hanging out with friends.

**WASHINGTON**

Chloe Saxton of **Seattle** is a student-athlete at Holy Names Academy. Saxton has maintained a 4.0+ GPA all four years
of high school. She was the recipient of the Tomich Family Scholarship for the past three years at her school and is a member of the National Honor Society. Saxton also has a leadership role in her travel softball club, and lettered in softball at Holy Names Academy, where she was co-captain and MVP. She also engaged in leadership at her school, including helping run a religious retreat and serving as a peer mentor. Outside of sports and academics, Saxton likes cooking, music, art and spending time outdoors.

The class of 2022 Dean’s Leadership Scholars are:

MARYLAND

Ryan Fleetwood was born and raised in Hagerstown, Maryland. He attended North Hagerstown High School, where he served as the president of the Key Club, vice president of the Model United Nations, treasurer of the Student Council and a member of the National Honor Society. Through his leadership experiences, Fleetwood found a passion for community service and enjoys volunteering with organizations like Children in Need. He loves to hike, fish and explore the outdoors. He is interested in studying environmental science and sustainability at UM.
MISSOURI

Madi Reese of Kansas City, Missouri, is a graduate of St. Teresa's Academy. She is interested in studying environmental science and sustainability at UM. In high school, Reese was co-president and co-founder of Stars for UNICEF, editor of the Windmoor Literary Magazine and a Math Hub mentor. She enjoys golfing, hanging out with friends, writing movie reviews and developing film. Her environmental passion includes climate change and sustainability, as well as gardening.

MONTANA

Claire Bernard is from Rapid City, South Dakota, and moved to Bozeman after graduating high school in 2021. Bernard is interested in studying journalism and Spanish and exploring a career in law. She enjoys playing the bass – both in orchestra class and with her punk band. Bernard is a passionate reader, writer and speaker. She enjoys running with the cross-country team, writing poetry and working with nonprofits.
Ryan Dolan of **Billings** is interested in exploring communicative sciences and disorders UM. Dolan is actively involved in service in the Billings community through Special Olympics and Reading Rocks. Her passions include volunteer work, reading, exercise and challenging herself, academically. She is interested in a degree in healthcare because she enjoys helping people.

Emmi Xiao Bi Highness of **Helena** is interested in studying psychology at UM. She is passionate about reading and writing. Highness has been involved in local March for Our Lives events and the local Chinese New Year celebration, as well as volunteer work at the local science museum. In her free time, you can often find her playing guitar, singing and, of course, writing songs. In high school, Highness was actively involved in the mock trial team. When not cooped up inside, she loves lake days in the summer and skiing in the winter with family and friends.

Elliot Sanford of **Bigfork** is interested in studying
geosciences. Sanford spent a summer working at the Montana State University Agricultural Research Station in Creston. He was engaged with the Bigfork High School Cave Club, where he developed GIS maps from monitoring and surveying Montana caves.

Noah Squires of Denton is graduating from Denton High School with a 4.0 GPA and was FFA chapter president. Squires is interested in exploring the field of pharmacy. He is a member of the Montana National Guard and is an emergency medical technician.

Taryn Thompson of Libby is interested in studying history education. Thompson was student body president at Libby High School. She enjoys being involved in her community, socializing, playing the baritone, drawing and listening to music.
SOUTH DAKOTA

Nevaeh Starr is from Pierre, South Dakota. She is passionate about writing and hopes to be a journalist. She enjoys weightlifting, swimming, reading and writing. Starr was engaged in STEM Savvy leadership and was a Gov2Gov freshmen mentor. A particular teacher encouraged her to work with her school's newspaper, The Governor, which has set her on a path to study journalism at UM.

###
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Launch UM virtual tour.
Ashtyn Carlson, a barrel racer on the UM Rodeo team, will represent Montana at the College National Finals Rodeo in Casper, Wyoming.

Ashtyn Carlson won the barrel racing national championship in 2019.

By Kyle Spurr, UM News Service
MISSOULA –

Ashtyn Carlson has waited three years for her return to the College National Finals Rodeo.

In 2019, Carlson won the barrel racing national championship as a member of the College of Southern Idaho team. She joined the UM Rodeo team that fall in hopes of repeating as a national champion in barrel racing and developing her goat-tying and breakaway-roping skills to win an All-Around championship.

“That was my plan and then everything got messed up with COVID-19 and then I broke my ankle,” Carlson said. “But I’ll be back in the chute for another title.”

The business major from Loma, Colorado missed the entire 2021 season with a broken ankle, after the 2020 rodeo season was canceled due to COVID-19. Carlson returns to the national stage this month following a second-place finish in barrel racing in the Big Sky Region to qualify for the College National Finals Rodeo in Casper, Wyoming.

Carlson has her sights set on winning another gold buckle, the award given to national champions. She has competed at the professional level at events in Colorado and Utah and experienced other high-stakes rodeos, but she said nothing compares to the atmosphere at the College National Finals Rodeo.

“I tell people all the time that the college finals has so much more energy than any pro rodeo or other stage that I’ve been on in my entire career,” Carlson said. “It’s a lot to handle. If you can’t handle stress it’s probably not the place for you.”

Carlson found a home at Montana when she was recruited by UM Rodeo coach Kory Mytty, a
Champion Barrel Racer Represents UM at National Rodeo

former professional rodeo competitor who made the College National Finals Rodeo in 1988 and 1989 while at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton, Oregon.

Mytty is always impressed by Carlson’s competitive spirit.

“Ashtyn is very fiery,” Mytty said. “She loves to win and is extremely competitive.”

Mytty, who coached 11 athletes on this year’s team, said the team is a mix of Montana residents and others from Canada and across the U.S., including New York, California, Colorado, Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

As the UM coach for the past 10 years, Mytty said the team has gained more fans each season. At the UM Spring Rodeo in Missoula earlier this year, more than 2,000 spectators came to watch each of the two nights of competition.

“We never had that many people at our college rodeo before,” Mytty said. “That was really a testament to people wanting to get out and get some entertainment.”

Carlson plans to offer more entertainment for rodeo fans next season. This is her senior year, but she will return next season to take advantage of an extra year offered due to the pandemic.

And with her at every rodeo is her horse, Stick, a dark bay Quarter Horse that Carlson has been riding for the past 12 years. Carlson rode Stick during the national championship in 2019 and will have him again this month in Wyoming.

“We have this language between us,” Carlson said. “We feed off each other’s energy. It’s something I can’t really explain. It’s just a bond.”

Nobody would blame Carlson if she eventually moves on from rodeo considering she still feels her healed ankle flare up during competition and has bone chips floating around both knees from her legs hitting the barrels so many times. But rodeo is her passion, and Carlson can’t wait to represent Montana at the College National Finals Rodeo next week, and hopefully next year.

“People always talk about Texas or Arizona when they talk about college rodeo, but I want to get Montana in people’s minds,” Carlson said. “I want to get us on the map and get more recruits here in the next few years. That’s my goal.”

###
Ashtyn Carlson joined the UM Rodeo team in 2019 after two years with College of Southern Idaho.
Brandon Cooper, a UM evolutionary geneticist, recently earned a prestigious CAREER award from the National Science Foundation.

MISSOULA – Endosymbionts are little critters that actually live inside the cells of other organisms. Brandon S. Cooper, a University of Montana
evolutionary geneticist, recently earned a $1.5 million grant from the National Science Foundation to study these organisms – especially how they interact with their hosts and the environment – which could help improve health for a huge swath of the world’s population.

Cooper’s award is from the Faculty Early Career Development Program. CAREER awards are one of the most prestigious NSF awards, given to promising early career faculty members to provide a foundation for a lifetime of leadership integrating education with research.

As further proof of Cooper’s rising star at UM, he already earned a $1.8 million Outstanding Investigator Award for early stage researchers from the National Institutes of Health. Then in collaboration with UM Professor Jeffrey Good and other faculty at UM, Cooper also brought in about $1.5 million from NIH to work on SARS-CoV-2 surveillance and evolution in Montana.

All told, he’s pulled in about $6 million in research funding since arriving at the University in 2017.

“I’m thrilled and very grateful to have such strong NSF and NIH support,” he said. “This new award will enable us to answer exciting new questions while providing novel educational opportunities to students in Montana.”

Cooper’s lab works on the most common known endosymbionts in nature, studying how they survive and persist inside the hidden world of a cell’s interior. Specifically, he and his lab members study endosymbiotic Wolbachia bacteria, which infect about half the insects on the planet. When placed inside mosquitoes, Wolbachia variants associated with fly hosts that Cooper studies block arboviruses that cause human diseases such as dengue.
Cooper said the World Health Organization recommends further developing Wolbachia biocontrol efforts like the World Mosquito Program, which aims to protect 500 million people from disease by 2030 by establishing pathogen-blocking Wolbachia in mosquito populations.

“Our work assesses Wolbachia-host interactions in many natural systems to better understand how these bacteria spread and establish,” said Cooper, who is an assistant professor in UM’s Division of Biological Sciences. “Our broader research goal is to understand why Wolbachia are the most common endosymbionts in nature.”

Despite being so common, Wolbachia prevalence varies through time and space in many host species.

“We will unravel the genetic interactions between Wolbachia and their hosts,” Cooper said, “as well as interactions with environmental factors like temperature, which influence Wolbachia prevalence in host populations.”

He is excited the new funding includes components to help educate and train first-generation and Native students in Montana.

“I am a first-generation college student myself,” he said, “and I hope to make science and STEM careers more accessible to students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds.”

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**Contact:** Brandon S. Cooper, assistant professor, UM Division of Biological Sciences, 406-243-5122, brandon.cooper@mso.umt.edu, @drosobachia.

Launch UM virtual tour.
Tiny Organisms Yield Big Returns for UM Early Career Researcher
UM Awarded $2M for Low-Income, First-Gen Students

MISSOULA – The U.S. Department of Education has awarded the University of Montana with a $2 million Upward Bound grant to provide support to low-income students in Missoula and the Blackfeet Nation who are the first members of their families to attend college.

The funding will benefit UM’s TRIO Upward Bound, an intensive intervention program that
prepares students for higher education through various enrichment courses. At least two-thirds of the students in each local Upward Bound program are from low-income economic backgrounds and families in which neither parent has a bachelor's degree.

“I am delighted to announce that Upward Bound at UM is funded to serve students in Missoula and Browning,” said Dr. Anna-Margaret Goldman, the director of TRIO Upward Bound. “With this funding cycle, we are thrilled to include two additional schools, Sentinel and Heart Butte High Schools. This addition allows us to reach students from new communities that could benefit from Upward Bound.”

Upward Bound programs provide students instruction in literature, composition, mathematics, science and foreign language during the school year and a six-week, campus-based summer experience. Upward Bound also provides intensive mentoring and support for students as they prepare for college entrance exams and tackle admission applications, financial aid packages and scholarship forms.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 86% of Upward Bound participants enroll in postsecondary institutions immediately following high school graduation. From October 2020 to September 2021, more than 70,000 students participated in 966 Upward Bound TRIO projects throughout the United States and its territories.

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 established Upward Bound. It was the first of seven federal “TRIO” programs to later be authorized by the Higher Education Act of 1965 to help students succeed in higher education. This program was established to serve students whose parents do not have a college degree as they navigate the complexity of higher education and help remove obstacles preventing students from thriving academically.

“We could not be more excited about the UM TRIO Upward Bound Program being awarded renewal funding,” said Dr. Sarah Swager, UM vice provost for student success. “Upward Bound has been helping Montana students prepare for, make the transition into and succeed in higher education for over 50 years. This grant renewal will not only ensure that the services Upward Bound provides remain available, but through the expansion of the program's service network to additional high schools in Missoula and Heart Butte, even more participating students and their families will benefit. Congratulations to Upward Bound Director Anna-Margaret Goldman and to the entire UM TRIO Upward Bound team.”

“As systemic inequality and financial hardship hinder students’ success in getting to and
through college, TRIO programs such as Upward Bound take on new importance because they address many of the barriers that prevent low-income, first-generation students from earning degrees,” said Maureen Hoyler, president of the non-profit Council for Opportunity in Education.

Upward Bound has been funded at UM for 56 years and served over 3,000 students.

If a family is interested in joining Upward Bound, or a teacher wants to learn more about our TRIO services, please contact the program at 406-243-2219 or visit https://www.umt.edu/trioub/.

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**Contact:** Anna-Margaret Goldman, TRIO Upward Bound director, 406-218-1838, anna-margaret.golman@mso.umt.edu.
UM Awarded $2M for Low-Income, First-Gen Students
UM student Sophia Rodriguez earned a 2022 Newman Civic Fellowship for her leadership in efforts to create more inclusive spaces on campus.

Rodriguez is inspired by her cousin, Lauren McDonald (above).
MISSOULA – Sophia Rodriquez, a University of Montana student majoring in communicative sciences and disorders, knows first-hand the challenges people who experience autism and other neurodiversities face each day.

Rodriquez grew up with a cousin, Lauren McDonald, who has level 3 autism, the most severe form that greatly impairs her verbal and nonverbal communication.

“She gets up every day and she smiles, and she has to face a world that judges her and makes things so hard for her,” Rodriquez said. “She is my motivation for so much of what I do. I am so inspired by her.”

Rodriquez of Yakima, Washington came to UM in 2019 to learn more about how to help those like her cousin who have specialized needs. She became the student director of MOSSAIC (Mentoring, Organization, and Social Support for Autism/All Inclusion on Campus) program and a member of the Global Leadership Initiative where she works toward a certificate in social inequalities and human rights.

Through her work addressing social inequalities and efforts to create more inclusive spaces, Rodriquez was selected for the 2022 cohort of Newman Civic Fellows.

Students selected for the yearlong fellowship are leaders on their campuses who demonstrate a commitment to finding solutions for challenges facing communities locally, nationally and internationally.

Rodriquez joins 173 student civic leaders from 38 states, Washington, D.C. and Mexico to form...
this year’s cohort. The Newman Fellowship will provide Rodriquez with a year of learning and networking opportunities, including a conference this fall in Boston.

“It means a lot because I’m so honored to represent the groups I work with,” Rodriquez said. “I’m so grateful and honored that I can provide more education and awareness toward what adults with autism and other neurodiversities need.”

UM President Seth Bodnar nominated Rodriquez for the Newman Fellowship. In his letter, Bodnar described her as a leader who works toward creating a more equitable environment on campus.

“She has committed significant time throughout her years as a UM student, working with participants in the MOSSAIC program, exceeding academic program service hour requirements and participating as a member of NSSLHA (National Student Speech, Language, and Hearing Association.)” Bodnar wrote.

As the student director of MOSSAIC, Rodriquez organizes weekly social gatherings for participants with autism. Gatherings have included game nights, hikes and walks to ice cream shops.

Creating these social gatherings are especially meaningful since research has showed how hard loneliness is for adults with autism and how social interactions can be daunting, Rodriquez said.

“I create the activities to increase social interactions in a way that works with our participants and meets them where they need to be met,” Rodriquez said. “And not make them go out of their way to environments that can be really stressful for them.”

Rodriquez also is working with Jennifer Schoffer Clossen, a clinical assistant professor in the UM School of Speech, Language, Hearing and Occupational Sciences, to create neurodiverse and sensory inclusive kits on campus.

The kits will be implemented this fall and include a fidget kit, ear plugs, signs for students to alert instructors of their comfort level such as “today I am just listening,” videos to educate people on campus and covers or filters for fluorescent lights.
Rodriquez conceptualized the project and had help executing it with the entire CSD 396 Autism on Campus Service Learning class, Schoffer Closson said.

“Sophia is very enthusiastic and passionate about making UM inclusive for those that experience neurodiversity,” Schoffer Closson said. “When I talked to her about the idea of sensory kits, Sophia was fully on board.”

When Rodriquez earns her undergraduate degree next year, she plans to pursue graduate school and eventually start a career as a speech language pathologist and work with children with specialized needs. She’s interested in expanding MOSSAIC programs, including in her hometown of Yakima.

All of her career plans and passions stem from her time with her cousin. Rodriquez sees how much harder her cousin has to work to get an education, job and housing. She admires her cousin’s strength and that motivates her to make the world more inclusive.

“We can make changes to be better and be more educated,” Rodriquez said. “And that is all I want to do.”

Contact: Dave Kuntz, UM director of strategic communications, 406-243-5659, dave.kuntz@umontana.edu

Launch UM virtual tour.
MISSOULA – The University of Montana, in collaboration with Chief Dull Knife College, will host this year’s Institute on Collaborative Language Research (CoLang 2022) June 13 to July 8.

This biennial international institute offers workshops in language documentation and
UM to host 2022 Institute on Collaborative Language Research

revitalization for language activists, teachers, linguists and students from Indigenous language communities and academic fields. This year’s theme is Reciprocity and Accountability in collaborative language work.

The 39 workshops offered will cover topics in archiving, Indigenous language learning and teaching, language and health, linguistics, technology and many other subjects. With over 250 facilitators, presenters and registered participants, CoLang 2022 will host a record number of people, representing 70 Indigenous communities from around the world, including several Indigenous communities of Montana.

CoLang 2022 encourages and facilitates greater representation of Indigenous people and Indigenous languages in language work by fostering collaboration at every level of the institute. Susan Penfield, CoLang 2022 co-director, who has led workshops at several previous CoLang institutes, said “Indigenous representation at CoLang has continued to grow since the founding of the institute in 2008.”

A number of events are free and open to the public, including lectures, a poetry night and a movie night. No registration is required for these events. For further details, including times and locations of the public events, visit the Public Events page of the CoLang 2022 website. Note that all events will take place in person with no Zoom options available.

CoLang 2022 is organized by the UM Linguistics Program and Department of Anthropology, with grateful support from the All Nations Health Center, American Indian Language Development Institute, Endangered Language Fund, Humanities Montana, Linguistic Society of America, National Science Foundation, Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, UM Department of Native American Studies, UM Department of Physics and Astronomy and UM Office of Research and Creative Scholarship.

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**Contact:** Mizuki Miyashita, Colang co-director, colang2022@gmail.com.

Launch UM virtual tour.
MISSOULA – The Davidson Honors College at the University of Montana recently announced recipients of the 2022 Presidential Leadership Scholarship, the University’s most prestigious academic recognition for incoming students.

The 25 Presidential Leadership Scholars were chosen from the DHC’s largest-ever cohort of
applicants from across the country and represent the pinnacle of academic excellence and service to the community. Presidential Leadership Scholars will enroll in UM’s Davidson Honors College in addition to their chosen undergraduate disciplines. At UM they will contribute to academic innovation, garner personal and professional development opportunities and enhance their leadership skills.

“These scholars chose to attend the University of Montana over other institutions because of our academic rigor and the unique honors community we provide at the Davidson Honors College,” said Tim Nichols, DHC dean. “We are thrilled to welcome these future leaders to Missoula, where they will thrive academically, promote public service and strengthen UM’s vibrant campus community.”

The Presidential Leadership Scholarship is a four-year scholarship for incoming UM students. Students’ applications and interviews are reviewed by a committee of honors faculty and campus partners. Scholarship recipients are recognized for their meritorious academic achievements, demonstrated leadership skills and professional potential.

“This fall’s diverse and dynamic class of Presidential Leadership Scholars includes future scientists and physicians, journalists, lawyers, educators, business leaders and performing artists,” Nichols said. “They are valedictorians and varsity athletes, student council officers and all-state musicians. They are advocates for diversity, the environment and for social justice. They already have and will continue to make a difference in their communities.”

The 24 Presidential Leadership Scholars will enroll at UM in the fall and represent 12 states, including 11 scholars from Montana. The 2022 UM Presidential Leadership Scholars are:

CALIFORNIA

Charlotte Caistor of Castro Valley, California, will major in wildlife biology at UM. She is passionate about creating opportunities for children from all backgrounds to experience nature. Caistor volunteered at her local wildlife hospital, Sulphur Creek Nature Center, as well as the Oakland Zoo. She enjoys hiking, rock climbing, weight lifting, kickboxing, trapeze arts and participating in intersectional activism regarding climate change, civil rights and animal rights.
GEORGIA

Olivia Willett of Columbus, Georgia, will pursue a degree in biology at UM. She is interested in alternative medicine, preventative care practices and studying how food contributes to the human body on the molecular level. Willett also finds joy in theater, art and creative expression. She has engaged in independent research projects, was recognized at State One Act competitions, created her school’s National Art Honors Society chapter and founded the Boys and Girls Club’s Junior Theater Organization. She also is president of the Red Cross club, president of the Agriculture “Agricolga” club and vice-president of the National Honor Science Society.

INDIANA
Lisa Venckus is a graduate of Carmel High School in Carmel, Indiana. She participated in cross-country and track and was an inaugural member of the girl’s rugby team. Venckus was co-president of the Carmel chapter of the organization A Kid Again and co-founder of the Student Coalition for Consent organization. She is a member of the National Honor Society, Rho Kappa National Social Studies Honor Society and the House of Representatives at her school. Lisa also is active in the student-led climate initiative Confront the Climate Crisis and the Young Democrats club. Venckus loves to be outdoors and never turns down a good cup of coffee.

KENTUCKY

Josie Kleman is from Lakeside Park, Kentucky. She is interested in studying environmental science and sustainability and is passionate about environmental conservation. Her hobbies include hiking, skiing, reading and spending time with loved ones. Kleman also enjoys volunteering and working as a barista at a local coffee shop.

MINNESOTA
Grace Hrabik is from Esko, Minnesota, and is interested in studying environmental science and sustainability. She is a member of the National Honor Society and math team and is graduating first in her high school class. Hrabik was captain of the girls’ cross-country team and participated in varsity Nordic ski and track. Her hobbies include scuba diving, hiking and biking.

MONTANA

Zoe Belinda of Red Lodge is interested in environmental studies. She is graduating as valedictorian, was a varsity starter in volleyball and won the state championship in speech and drama. Belinda was student council president for her district and was awarded second place at state in Job Interview for SkillsUSA. She describes herself as a country girl who is goal-orientated, driven and ready to succeed at UM.

Riley Crews of Lolo is graduating at the top of her class at
Students Earn UM’s 2022 Presidential Leadership Scholarship

Sentinel High School. She is interested in studying elementary education and hopes to become a teacher, for which she is already getting practice as a substitute teacher in Lolo. Crews was National Honor Society secretary and varsity captain of her school’s cross-country team. She is a third-generation UM student and is excited to be a part of building the student environment at UM. Her interest in outdoor activities such as hiking, running and skiing made Missoula an ideal place to attend college.

Brady Drummond of Belt plans to major in management information systems and intends to pursue a consulting career after her undergraduate studies. She graduated with honors, advanced placement and dual-enrollment credits. Beyond her love for business, she has a passion for writing and reading poetry, animals and community service and involvement. Drummon is the 2021 National Poetry Ourselves Champion (a competition for original poetry) and the 2021 Montana Poetry Out Loud State Champion (a poetry recitation competition). She has been involved in rodeo and 4-H for 10 years, showing lambs, swine, steers and horses. She was also a DECA member and National Honor Society member.

Parker Friday is from Billings. She participated in student government, multiple sports and various choirs at Billings Senior High School. Parker was high school student body president, a member of Senior’s Varsity Singers and two
Students Earn UM’s 2022 Presidential Leadership Scholarship

auditioned ensembles and a member of the National Honor Society. Friday values new opportunities to learn and grow and strives to challenge herself academically. Outside of school, she loves spending time with her parents and dog, watching movies and television series and paddleboarding on Montana's beautiful lakes.

Lydia Garrick of Missoula is graduating at the top of her class at Sentinel High School and is interested in becoming a pharmacist. Garrick was a Health Occupations Students of America officer, National Honor Society treasurer, Montana Youth Symphony first chair cellist and All-State Orchestra first chair. Garrick also worked in a UM microbiology lab and presented her own research at the Junior Science and Humanities Symposium and State Science Fair. She enjoys playing cello, hiking with friends and taekwondo. Her progression from white belt to third-degree black belt has taught her perseverance and the value of dedication and hard work.

Hannah Geiger from Kalispell is a 4.0 international baccalaureate student interested in studying business.
administration. Her childhood was spent outside exploring nature through camping, hiking and kayaking, among other activities. Her intrinsic curiosity led her to delve into literature and art. Geiger said she always had her nose in a book and probably owned every National Geographic “Weird-But-True” edition to exist, but was especially drawn to fantasy and history. She volunteered at the Conrad Mansion Museum for four years, giving tours, cleaning and helping with special events, as well as at the Kalico Art Center, where she taught a free class every week for anyone to experiment with different mediums. She participated in chamber orchestra, speech and debate, She-Ra mentoring theater and the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards.

Ruby Jennings of Great Falls grew up raising animals, including horses, cows, sheep and pigs in 4-H and the National FFA Organization. She plays both tennis and violin. In school, Jennings was involved in student government and leadership. She enjoys writing and outdoor recreation such as hiking, biking and skiing. Jennings hopes to study environmental sciences and have a career in environmental sustainability.

Faith Marshall of Missoula is interested in becoming a physician. At Sentinel High School, she was the student body president, varsity soccer captain and an active member in other Sentinel athletics and activities. Marshall is passionate
about travel and looks forward to studying abroad during her college experience.

Scout McMahon of Kalispell is the self-described “confident, loud girl in history class.” Her curiosity and academic interests have been shaped by her childhood in bush planes. McMahon likes exploring the limits of what she can accomplish mentally through speech and debate, mock trial and Model United Nations, as well as physically through biking, hiking, flying and swimming. As a nonprofit chair at age 17 (and representative of that nonprofit in a lawsuit against the secretary of state for voter rights), McMahon has devoted much of her free time to building her community. She believes in giving back and wants to empower her community the same way it empowered her. When not busy with other work, McMahon likes to knit, paint and grow plants.

Marley Miller from Kalispell is a Flathead High School graduate pursuing the full international baccalaureate diploma. He was involved with Health Occupations Students of
America, DECA, student council, National Honor Society, He-Man book club (a club that reads to local second graders), track, swimming and cross-country. Miller was an executive mentor for Brave Mentoring (a mentoring program for freshmen). He also was the president of Health Occupations Students of America and DECA. He was elected governor at Boy’s State and was chosen out of the Flathead Valley for an award called “Today’s Achievers, Tomorrow’s Leaders.” He is also a DJ for school dances, weddings, and other events.

**Brittney Wagner** (Blackfeet name: Mountain Snow Woman) is from Browning and graduated at the top of her high school class. She and her family have been active with the Blackfeet Tribe and at UM. Wagner golfed at the state tournament three times and was involved in 4-H, the Niipoomakiis cultural society, Diversity Leadership Group and Girl Scouts as a robotics mentor. She is interested in exploring journalism, sports journalism, criminology, athletic training and sports medicine. Her culture is very important to her, and Wagner tries her hardest to represent her tribe, family and town in the best way possible.

**NORTH CAROLINA**

**Edwin “Buddy” Wilson** is from Eden, North Carolina, a rural
southern town where he found his passion for the outdoors in Scouting and challenging himself through robotics and marching band. Wilson spent 10th grade living at West Point and attending a nearby high school, where he joined the ski team and became editor-in-chief of the newspaper. He has spent the past two years at the North Carolina School of Science and Math, a public residential school for juniors and seniors, where he has taken environmental science classes, conducted his own biological research and been a residential life assistant on his hall. Wilson intends to study wildlife biology at UM. He is passionate about the outdoors and is excited to continue his education to one day educate others and give back to the natural world.

NEW MEXICO

Katia Chavez of Albuquerque, New Mexico, is interested in environmental science and sustainability. She loves being outdoors and exploring the natural world. In high school, Chavez was fortunate to participate in various wildlife classes and is involved in a research project studying the diet of Mexican spotted owls. She loves to hike, camp, play piano, basketball, volleyball and spend time with family. Chavez looks forward to continuing to study wildlife and the environment and participating in research projects in college.
OHIO

Penelope Meredyk is a suburban Clevelander interested in studying archeology and resource conservation. She was the vice president of her school’s environmental club by day and a competition dancer by night. When she’s not performing lead roles on stage, tutoring underclassmen or chopping down invasive species at the closest national park, you can find her in the art room with sleeves rolled up and oil pastels in hand.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Claire McAtee from Clemson, South Carolina, is interested in studying wildlife biology. Through organizations such as 4-H and FFA, McAtee has had many opportunities to experience the natural resources field. She earned the College Board’s AP Scholar with Distinction Award and completed a double industry certification in animal and veterinary science at the Pickens County Career and Technology Center. Through the PCCTC, McAtee was heavily involved in FFA, where she received state grand champion titles for both the horse evaluation and employment skills and competed at the national level in employment skills. She also was a reserve champion in the State Veterinary Science Invitational competition. McAtee was captain for varsity soccer and swimming. She is interested in protecting public land, ensuring access to conservation education and encouraging individuals to reconnect with the natural world.
TEXAS

Blixen Hofmann of Mason, Texas, is interested in studying wildlife biology. Growing up in a small Texas town and time spent at her grandparents’ ranch helped to foster her love for the outdoors. As an award-winning twirler and twirling coach for younger students, Hofmann is excited about being the featured twirler for the Grizzly Marching Band. Academically, she is ranked near the top of her high school class. Extracurricular activities include membership in state championship current event and speech teams; volunteering many hours, including as a duchess in the Mason County Round-Up Queen’s Court and Bluebonnet CASA.

WASHINGTON

Jacob Blockhan from Redmond, Washington, is graduating at the top of his class at Eastside Catholic High School and is interested in exploring majors related to research, data science and accounting at UM. Having recently lost his mom to cancer, he is dedicated to providing a strong, positive support system for his brother. Blockhan enjoys learning about and nurturing his Catholic faith. He worked at Fred Meyer and was captain of his Ultimate Frisbee team.
Keilana Mohsenian of Spokane, Washington, is graduating at the top of her class at Joel E. Ferris High School. She is interested in exploring pre-medical sciences at UM. Mohsenian was club soccer captain, co-president of her Health Occupations Students of America club and co-president of a woman’s choral group. She worked as a respite care nanny for a child with cerebral palsy and is actively involved in her church. Mohsenian loves learning (especially science), volunteer work, soccer, track and singing.

Lauren Schulte of Spokane, Washington, is interested in studying psychology. She is passionate about the outdoors, and some of her favorite memories were spent camping with her family in a rooftop tent, spending days white water rafting, fly-fishing with her dad and Nordic skiing. Schulte was active in Spokane’s dance community and worked at a local performing arts center. She also has been involved in climate action through her school’s environmental club. Additionally, Schulte grows pumpkins and produce on her family’s farm for local markets.
Ella Sherin of Olympia, Washington, is interested in majoring in Native American Studies. She enjoys spending time outdoors hiking with family and friends and dancing fancy shawl at powwows. Sherin founded the Olympia High School Native Students Union and programmed the first-ever Native Heritage Month Awareness Assembly. She also plays soccer and the baritone saxophone. Her cultural influences have shaped who she is and who she aspires to be. Sherin hopes to create a better world for those to come after her.

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