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Conrad High School senior Brady Barnhill, pictured with his dog Diesel, is the first high student to earn a certificate in cybersecurity through the Dual Enrollment program at UM's Missoula College.

MISSOULA – For the past two years, **Conrad** High School senior Brady Barnhill has been a college campus of one.

Barnhill is studying online to earn a certificate in cybersecurity from the University of Montana's Missoula College. Each day, on his own, he sits down to learn about server administration, networking, cryptography and other topics relevant to an exploding professional field that impacts everything from government defense to the safety of personal checking accounts.

Barnhill is actually the first high school student to complete this certificate as part of Missoula College's **Dual Enrollment program**, which offers students opportunities to earn college credits before they even enter a university campus

"I was talking one day to our neighbor (Montana State Rep.) Llew Jones, and he brought to my attention UM's cybersecurity program and my Dad talked to me about it, too," Barnhill said. "I really like computers and work with them a lot, and they thought it might be a good idea to enroll."

The Dual Enrollment program offers two pathways to college-level courses – in-class concurrent instruction from qualified high school teachers and the Early College program, which students can take online or at the UM, Missoula College and UM Bitterroot campuses. Students who live in-state get their first two classes free and a tuition discount of 50% after that. Credits earned transfer seamlessly to colleges in Montana and most out-of-state schools.

Dual Enrollment Director Jordan Patterson said the program originally offered just math and computer classes but now has a course catalogue with subjects ranging from American government to an introduction to the trades.

"The program is a wonderful way for students to explore a variety of subjects while also getting a better idea about what college courses are like," Patterson said. "Brady is an excellent example of someone taking advantage of the opportunity to see what college education is really all about."

Barnhill is one of more than 60 high schoolers from across the state enrolled in the Early College program. Most students live in Missoula and surrounding counties, but others hail from Billings, Havre and locations across Montana.

For the most part, Barnhill said the cybersecurity courses have been well designed and easy to follow. Some he said were actually a "breeze."

Monica Tomayer, adviser and teacher at Conrad High School, has known Barnhill since he was in seventh grade and said he has all the skill sets needed to succeed in programs like Early College.

In addition to the cybersecurity certificate, he's also earned 31 credits from nearby Great Falls College.

"Brady is not only organized and motivated, but he also knows to ask for help when he needs it. That's really important for students taking remote classes," said Tomayer, who added that Barnhill's skills with coding and other computer programming came to the fore in her robotics class.

"He's super interested in computers and likes to use his hands to fix things," she said.

Barnhill recently put his computer knowledge to use at Conrad's Bliss Cycle Sales, where he works selling parts and gear for motorcycles and four wheelers. He also cleans local offices and mows lawns in the summer.

"The other day, we thought one of our computers died at the store, but after several days, I was able to revive it and it works great again," said Barnhill, who is an avid gamer, specializing in Fortnite, Call of Duty and Madden.

Throughout his high school studies, Barnhill has competed in wrestling, which he's done since age 3, and swimming, where he's posted several records.

Kamie Barnhill, Brady's mom and swim coach, said they sometimes have to moderate his activities to keep him from taking on too much, but the family was supportive of him enrolling in UM's cybersecurity class.

"The program is such a benefit," said Barnhill, who has been a teacher in the area for 36 years. "They learn how to manage time and to be a college student before they leave home. It's not for all kids, but kids are also capable of anything they put their minds to."

Brady Barnhill enrolled at UM for the fall 2023 semester to continue his studies in computers and cybersecurity. He's got plenty more classes to complete but is already thinking about his future career.

“I am leaning toward forensic science right now,” he said. “I’ll go where ever the job takes me, but I’d like to stay in Montana.”

###

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UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

HAWAIIAN STUDENT FINDS SUPPORT AT UM AFTER CANCER DIAGNOSIS

27 APRIL 2023

By Kyle Spurr, UM News Service

Kaina danced with the Pacific Islanders Club shortly after her cancer diagnosis.

MISSOULA – Kaira Kaina, a Native Hawaiian and sophomore at the University of Montana, grew up on Molokaʻi,

a small tropical island of about 7,000 people with no chain restaurants and no traffic lights.

She didn't know anything about Montana and had never visited the mainland before she enrolled at UM in fall 2021. Like many other out-of-state students, she discovered the TV show "Yellowstone" and became intrigued with Montana. She saved up for a one-way plane ticket, packed one bag and took her first flight on a large commercial plane over the Pacific Ocean.

"I watched that dumb show and I fell in love," Kaina said. "I fell in love with the scenery, the towns and the mountains."

Two years later, Kaina found a tight-knit community at UM as a member of the Pacific Islanders Club. She also made friends through her communication studies major and working three jobs on campus.

"The past two years have been the best of my life," Kaina said. "I really got to engage with a lot of people."

So when Kaina was diagnosed with breast cancer last month, the University community



stepped up to support her. Shortly after her diagnosis on March 23, Kaina moved back to her Hawaiian island to start receiving medical care closer to family, but she felt the Montana support from across the ocean.

More than 100 people, many from UM, donated to a [GoFundMe online campaign](#) and raised more than \$8,100 for Kaina's medical expenses. The funds will be especially helpful since Kaina had to leave her three jobs with UM Housing, the UM Bookstore and Office for Disability Equity.

Since her diagnosis, Kaina has been understandably scared, stressed and frustrated. But she's also felt extremely loved by friends and strangers in the UM community. She's seen old coworkers at the UM Bookstore, former classmates from her freshman year and other acquaintances donate to her GoFundMe.

"It's just so incredible," she said. "I feel like I've burned all my emotions out recently, but when I would go and check out the GoFundMe, I felt an overwhelming joy and happiness. It's almost like these people were sitting there holding my hand with me."

Kaina's celebrated her 20th birthday five days after her cancer diagnosis. She spent the first half of the day at a doctor's appointment, but then her friends in the Pacific Islanders Club hosted a birthday party for her in UM's Branch Center. The theme was a "Pink Party," to honor the color associated with breast cancer awareness. Kaina's friends filled the Branch Center with pink decorations and one of her friends cooked Dungeness crab.

"We had so much food and cake and I got roses," Kaina said. "Everybody really spoiled me on my birthday."

Before she returned to Hawaii, Kaina joined one last Pacific Islanders Club event called the Ho'ike. The April 9 event was one of the club's largest of the year and drew about 400 people to the University Center ballroom.

Kaina had a bandage on her chest where a chemo port was implanted two days before the Ho'ike. But that didn't stop her from showing off her Hula dancing skills and honoring her Hawaiian heritage with her Montana community.

"I was front and center," she said. "I have a reputation to uphold and there was no way somebody was going to take my spot."

At the Ho'ike, members of the Pacific Islanders Club took a moment to acknowledge Kaina and wish her well before she traveled back to Hawaii.

"I got to tell everybody how much I appreciate them and how much I will miss them," she said.

Jessica Ponce, a UM senior on the Griz golf team and former member of the Pacific Islanders Club, met Kaina when she first arrived on campus. The two worked closely together as executive members of the club.

Ponce said the club calls Kaina "Ms. Aloha" because she is kind to everyone she meets and always says hello.

"Kaina is a sweet soul," Pounce said. "That's something I've always admired about her."

When Ponce heard about Kaina's diagnosis, she was away at a golf tournament. The news was hard to hear and put life and sports into perspective.

She is confident that her friend will manage the challenges to come and stay positive through the journey.

"The way Kaina has handled this is amazing," Ponce said. "I'm just hoping she keeps her smile and if it does get hard I hope she knows we are still here and we will always be there for her."

When Kaina came to Montana sight unseen two years ago, she never expected to find so much support from a club like the Pacific Islanders and other friends on campus. However, Kaina did have one connection to UM prior to enrolling.

Kaina discovered her aunt, who died of breast cancer about six years ago, was a mentor and friend to Amy Capolupo, the director of UM's Office for Disability Equity. Capolupo grew up in New York state. While in high school she met Kaina's aunt, who was a positive influence.

"When I met Kaina, I felt like this is my opportunity to pay that forward," Capolupo said.

Capolupo helped Kaina get on a **residency track with the Registrar's Office** since she could not

afford out-of-state tuition. The residency track required Kaina take six credits a semester and establish residency in Montana.

Capolupo said her office is happy to assist students like Kaina navigate those processes. The Office for Disability Equity also works closely with students who have serious medical issues such as a cancer diagnosis.

For Kaina, she has a long year ahead. Her plan is to start chemotherapy this summer and have surgery to remove the grape-size lump from her chest this fall. Doctors have told her she should be able to return to Montana by the end of the year to start radiation therapy.

Kaina is focused on beating cancer and plans to return to UM to finish her degree in communication studies. The thought of rejoining her friends on campus keeps her motivated.

With her degree, she wants to find a career and make a difference on her small Hawaiian island.

“That’s my plan,” she said, “to come back home and try to help people the best I can with my degree.”

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Kaina is focused on beating cancer and returning to her studies at UM.

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MISSOULA – Libraries have always been part of the story of economic development in Montana. In addition to providing a rich array of readings, books and periodicals – along with the expertise to guide inquiry – libraries provide meeting space, informational resources and internet access that expands research opportunities. Now, librarians are exploring ways in which they can elevate entrepreneurship, and bring their unique perspective and knowledge to the economic development world.

‘Economic development’ means something highly unique in Montana, due the strong influence of entrepreneurship and heritage of business experimentation. This rich history of entrepreneurial spirit has only continued to grow in recent years. A report by “The Blueprint” ranked Montana as the best state to start a business in 2021, and, according to U.S. Census Bureau data, the number of new business applications in Montana rose 50% between January 2020 and January 2021.

Economic development organizations such as Accelerate Montana Rural Innovation Initiative (AMRII) strive to provide rural entrepreneurs with the same resources available to city dwellers.

According to Sarah Grissom, AMRII’s Americorps Vista, despite the resiliency of Montana business owners, those in rural locations often face institutional barriers to entrepreneurship including access to a rich array of economic development organizations and resources available in Montana.

AMRII Outreach and Engagement Manager Karl Unterschuetz says their goal is to “develop a team Montana, in a way that everybody in rural Montana can compete with anyone anywhere in the U.S. Part of that is access to current information and these supporting resources.”

That includes small town libraries which have been a longstanding pillar of rural communities, according to Amelea Kim, Lifelong Learning Librarian at the Montana State Library. Historically, people have gone to libraries to sort through job postings and search for new opportunities.

“Libraries have directly and indirectly helped with a lot of economic development efforts across the state,” said Kim, “That hasn’t been an explicit part of public library scope, or something that people immediately associate with library services.”

But Kim says the link between libraries and economic development has become stronger in recent years, as the two entities begin to foster relationships.

Kim describes her position at the Montana State Library as creating a “library for librarians.” She works with public libraries across Montana to help provide support training and information resources so that librarians can better serve their communities. After she noticed a growing interest for economic initiatives within the library world, Kim connected with Unterschuetz at AMRII. They began to imagine ways that libraries could help support aspiring entrepreneurs. Under the Montana Libraries SPARK program – a statewide initiative for public libraries to

provide economic development support to Montanans – they created a framework for an entrepreneurial support curriculum. Within the program, librarians can receive training on how to support early-stage entrepreneurs. The course includes material such as identifying business and startup types as well as support strategies.

“People have said the course has been helpful to understand the entrepreneur’s point of view,” said Kim. “They feel much more confident in their ability to answer questions and connect them with the right resource.”

But librarian’s time is scarce and most librarians do not have the capacity to take an online course and act as entrepreneurial coaches, despite interest.

After considering this, Kim and Unterschuetz pivoted their focus to an approach that provides librarians with entrepreneurial tools and awareness to connect those interested with resources.

“I think that most libraries see themselves as a support entity, and it became pretty clear that a lot of organizations are already providing incredible services in Montana,” said Kim. “Libraries are excited to just connect people more to those services.”

Grissom is now compiling a base of resources and content that may be useful to someone interested in starting a business, which will serve as a place that librarians across Montana could direct aspiring entrepreneurs. AMRII and Kim hope to provide librarians with awareness of organizations and programs across the state so they can connect people with the right resources.

In the future, Kim hopes for seamless integration between the economic development world and the library world.

“I’d love for libraries to be a touchstone for the economic development environment, whether it’s simply a flier or greater involvement in a project,” Kim said. “Libraries should always be part of the equation, a way to get people into the ecosystem who might not otherwise encounter it.”

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UM HOSTS CYBERSECURITY TRAINING WORKSHOP FOR NATIONAL GUARD AND INDUSTRY

27 APRIL 2023

Missoula College Dean Tom Gallagher addresses a crowd at the annual Cyber, IT and CS Career Networking Event.

MISSOULA – Professionals from Montana’s electrical cooperatives, Northwestern Energy, federal government, state government and the National Guard recently joined faculty experts from the University of Montana for a cybersecurity training workshop.

The event, hosted in April, focused on securing Montana’s electric grid and brought together the professionals who are responsible for protecting power generation and distribution facilities from cyberattacks. The cyber threats facing Montana are real and large-scale attacks on electric infrastructure have taken place in other regions of our country.

“They can infiltrate into our infrastructure system or they can get through our network,” said Lea Potoczny, Montana Electric Cooperative Association chief operating officer. “It can cause major damage to our system and ultimately can shut the power down.”

“Disrupting the power grid is something that nation-states are certainly interested in,” said Northwestern Energy Vice President of Technology Jeanne Vold. “They want to disrupt our lives as much as possible. From a financial perspective, there could be nefarious actors that are interested in infiltrating accounts or obtaining customer information or something that’s going to benefit them financially.”

UM offers cybersecurity certificates and degrees, which serve as an entry-level credentials that industry and government leaders are looking for to help fill the 1,100 open cybersecurity jobs in Montana. Events like this help ensure all responsible parties are working to address the state’s cybersecurity posture.

“Defending against cyberattacks is a team effort,” said Dr. Tom Gallagher, dean of Missoula College. “Effective communication and collaboration are needed. As a geographically large rural state, these individuals do not have the opportunity to train together. This event created communication, collaboration, and teamwork by bringing together the professionals responsible for protecting Montana’s electric grid with cybersecurity experts from federal organizations and academia.”

CyberMontana, a statewide cybersecurity resource housed at UM regularly hosts cybersecurity trainings for members of the Montana Army National Guard. This partnership provides critical incident response training to the guardsmen who will be responsible for helping to solve the state’s future cyber breaches.

“It’s not if it’s going to happen it’s when,” Montana Air National Guard General Buel Dickson

added. “Who do we contact? How do we shut it down and how do we get back online and up and running for the public?”

The Montana Cybersecurity for Montana Electric Grid Training was developed through a collaboration created by UM and an National Science Foundation-sponsored project to secure the Pacific Northwest Smart Grid. The project brought together the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), Montana National Guard, Cyber406, CyberMontana, Montana Electric Cooperative Association, Northwestern Energy and local and state information technology offices.

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UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

ASPIRING DOCTOR FINDS MENTORSHIP, INSPIRATION AND REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE AT UM

26 APRIL 2023

UM senior Wyatt Walters will graduate this spring with a degree in biology and a biochemistry minor, equipped for his next step on the path toward becoming a pediatrician.

By Abigail Lauten-Scrivner, UM News Service

MISSOULA – When Wyatt Walters retires, he hopes to reflect on his life as one that’s been in service to others. That is, if he isn’t too busy starting a whole new career.

A senior University of Montana biology student with a biochemistry minor, Walters also is completing a **Franke Global Leadership Initiative certificate** and is a recipient of the James M. Wylder Presidential Leadership Scholarship in the **Davidson Honors College**. His resume includes working with patients in an Alzheimer's care center and helping research the disease at the McLaughlin Research Institute, volunteering for youth organizations such as Flagship, tutoring students in chemistry with UM Study Jam and serving as a certified nursing assistant.

The common thread between all of Walters’ pursuits? Each build on his dream of becoming a pediatrician serving children in rural Montana.

“Kids crack me up, they’re so darn funny,” Walters said. “It never feels like work.”

Finding curiosity and joy in what, to many, would feel like work is part of what drives Walters’ success in his numerous ambitions. But his career dreams stem deeper into his roots, reaching all the way back to his childhood. Walters grew up on a cattle ranch in **Vaughn**, a small town near **Great Falls**, raised by two parents who both worked as medical professionals.

Like most rural parts of the country, primary care in remote areas of the state lag behind urban centers – and the need for pediatric care is even more acute. General pediatricians per 100,000 residents numbered fewer than eight in rural communities compared to nearly 15 in urban parts of Montana in 2021, **according to a University of Washington report**. Walters hopes to attend medical school at UW as part of WWAMI, a multi-state medical education program to alleviate health care shortages in rural Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho.

Walters wasn’t always enthusiastic about living in a rural community, but he came to appreciate his hometown. When he wasn’t helping out on the ranch, he spent his childhood skiing, hiking and fishing in his backyard on the Sun River.

“Looking back on it, I’m super lucky,” Walters said. “I really love Montana.”

While growing up with parents who both work in the medical field may make it seem that Walters was predestined to become a doctor, he said his parents helped cultivate his aspirations but never pushed him into pursuing a career as a physician. They supported his natural interests in medicine, biology and helping others, encouraging him to become a better

student of science.

That innate scientific curiosity was further cemented at Great Falls Central Catholic High School. Walters took an AP biology class with Kris Warren, a science teacher who would go on to serve as both a source of inspiration and a role model for Walters. Warren taught him to think of the human body as a puzzle to be solved – an idea that he found captivating. When college approached, Walters decided to become a lifelong student of science.

Walters is the first to admit that UM wasn't his initial pick, but upon stepping on campus for a tour, he was met with a welcoming atmosphere and supportive faculty and staff in the DHC and **pre-medical sciences program**. Walters realized attending UM meant gaining a team of people who would help him succeed.

"I realized that if I needed assistance, they would have my back," he said.

That team of people came to include DHC faculty member Dr. Bruce Hardy, who taught Walters in his Ways of Knowing course freshman year.

"Wyatt was outstanding from the day he walked into class," Hardy said.

Hardy hasn't had Walters in his class for three years, but his immediate enthusiasm and thoughtfulness left an impression that lasted after the semester ended. Their shared interests led Hardy to continue mentoring Walters throughout his academic journey. Hardy worked as a pediatrician and pediatric cardiologist for about 40 years before joining DHC faculty, giving him unique insight into how to prepare Walters for success after UM.

Hardy said he's confident Walters will graduate prepared to become a great pediatrician – not only because he has the smarts to do well on his exams but, more importantly, because of his compassionate temperament and genuine curiosity.

"Lots of students can learn a lot and memorize, but Wyatt is curious about human nature and doing the right thing," Hardy said. "I know he will be an amazing pediatrician. He is made for this career."

Coming to UM also allowed Walters to test his ambitions himself, taking him out of the familiarity of Montana and into rural villages around Kabale, Uganda, for a medical internship.

The experience was part of completing the GLI certificate's [Beyond the Classroom learning requirement](#).

Volunteering at pop-up HIV and maternal clinics, Walters spent last summer rising early to care for long lines of patients while making due with a lack of resources. The highlight of the internship was watching a doctor safely perform a cesarean delivery of a premature baby. Walters said the opportunity was a teaching moment he'll never forget. The experience confirmed he's on the right track, and inspired him to join Doctors Without Borders someday in the future.

But for now, Walters plans to take a gap year after graduation to earn his EMT license before applying to medical school. He's already started studying for the MCAT.

Walters has his "retirement plan" figured out, too: teaching high school biology and inspiring more students to love science.

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SCHOOL OF LAW

UM CHAMPION ATHLETE CROSSES FINISH LINE TO GRADUATION

25 APRIL 2023

UM law student and track star Carly Smiedala has wanted to be a lawyer since she was 8 years old.

MISSOULA – University of Montana law student Carly Smiedala was one of the fastest high school runners in Montana state history – ranked eighth in the nation in the 800 meters during her senior year at **Helena** High School.

When it came time to pick a university, then, her options were wide open.

For a time, she considered the University of Alabama, but family circumstances changed her plans and led to a decision to stay in state.

“I didn’t apply to any Montana schools or talk to any of the Montana coaches because I always wanted to move out of state and pursue my dream of running in the SEC or the ACC,” said Smiedala, who soon worried her delay in applying might postpone starting college. “Most college athletes know the stress of signing day and the intensity that comes with the timing of scholarships.”

Not one to wait for events to unfold, Smiedala picked up the phone and called Brian Schweyen, then head coach of UM’s track and field program and was soon offered a full scholarship to join the Griz.

“Coach Schweyen is the sole reason I had the opportunity to even continue my track career and education,” Smiedala said. “He immediately took me under his wing and guided me through the next chapter of my life, helping me become a champion on and off the track.”

That included breaking several records – one a 35-year-old mark in the 800 meters with a time of just over two minutes – and making the podium (or “placing”) in multiple Big Sky Conference championships.

“I felt like I was part of a big family at UM,” Smiedala said. “I found mentorship from many of my coaches and professors. They took me in and helped me become who I am today.”

Along with records in track, Smiedala earned a degree in psychology as an Academic All-Big Sky Conference student four years in a row.

Smiedala then went on to apply her academic skills, taking the LSAT and enrolling in UM’s [Alexander Blewett III School of Law](#).

“I decided when I was about 8 years old that I wanted to become an attorney,” she said, “There’s just something about a powerful woman in a pantsuit.

“And, I think all along I also wanted to find a way to give people a voice who didn’t have one and help the people who are fighting with everything they have to be heard, but no one is

listening,” she added.

Due to COVID-19, athletes were granted additional eligibility, and Smiedala attempted to balance being the first Griz student athlete to compete during law school. The transition from full-time athletics and undergrad student to full-time athletics and law school wasn't easy.

“I had never been challenged academically like I was in law school,” said Smiedala. “Going to law school while putting my heart and soul into my sport was just not realistic.”

Smiedala's athletic eligibility ended during her second year of law school. She took her last lap around the track and moved into a new phase of her life, applying her training discipline to studying law.

“In track, all I had to do was move my arms faster coming down the homestretch,” said Smiedala. “In law school I had to reevaluate how I study and learn and find out what it took for me to find balance with my academics and overall mental-emotional health post-track and field.

“Everything they go over in law school will show up on a test, in practice, or on the bar exam,” she added. “I would study flashcards while working out on the stair climber to stay focused.”

With practice Smiedala was able to adapt to the rigors of school. She made a plan, stuck to it and will graduate this semester with a law degree, as well as a Master in Business Administration.

Smiedala, who is focusing on criminal law and works in the domestic violence clinic at the law school, credits her supervising attorneys, Brandi Ries and Emily Lucas, for providing her with guidance and an experience incomparable to any other professional experience in her life so far.

“These are the women in the pantsuits who I have always wanted to be,” said Smiedala. “They are incredibly passionate and dominant women in the field of law.”

Smiedala's perseverance and championship mindset is paying off. She is working at a local law firm and is preparing to take the state bar exam soon. She has multiple job offers and is excited to become a lawyer and continue to establish her professional identity.

“Law school has been life-changing for me. The perspective I have gained is something I hope to only build upon,” Smiedala said. “If there’s one thing I know, it’s that the opportunity to continue my education has completely enriched my life, and that is not an opportunity that everyone has.”

Smiedala is grateful for all those who supported her in her studies and athletic life, most of all her mother, Amy Smiedala.

“My mom is my hero,” Smiedala said. “She is the definition of strength, case closed.”

###

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COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

UM STUDENT REVAMPS CAMPUS RECORD LABEL, CREATES CAREER

24 APRIL 2023

During his four years at UM, Jack Person resurrected the campus recording label, Switchback Records, and the entertainment management club, creating vibrant student-led organizations that nurture the local music scene and train entertainment management professionals.

MISSOULA – Sometimes something as routine as a work-study job can alter the path of a student's life.

For University of Montana graduate Jack Person that change in course started early, working in

the **College of Business' Entertainment Management** office.

“I saw a flier for the UM Entertainment Management program, and I just went down to the office, even before I started school, and asked Mike Morelli (the former program director) if he might have a position available,” said Person, who wanted to stay in his beloved state while attending college. “And he said ‘Yeah, come on down, and we’ll interview you.’”

UM is one of only a handful of universities in the country offering an entertainment management curriculum. It counts as its alumni entertainment professionals working for companies such as William Morris Endeavor, the largest talent agency in the world, and for organizations such as Paramount’s “Yellowstone,” Live Nation and Logjam Presents.

While Person would go on to earn double majors in management information systems and anthropology with honors, he became a veritable maestro in all things entertainment management on campus. That included resurrecting UM’s student record label, Switchback Records, and the Entertainment Management Student Group – both laid dormant by the pandemic.

“Switchback was down to three students when Jack got involved,” said Morelli, now executive director of the Missoula Children’s Theater, “and he just kept doing what needed to be done and finding ways to make things better.”

For Person that meant tabling at events, producing marketing materials, booking shows and recruiting students looking for a stage – figuratively and literally – for their creative spirit. Often, he would be the first to arrive at an event to set up mics and speakers and one of the last to leave taking down sets.

“When I started, not many people knew Switchback was a thing,” said Person, who hails from **Lolo** and attended Sentinel High School in Missoula. “We’d do 10-minute gigs in the business building, not anything huge.”

With unflagging enthusiasm – “chutzpah and tenacity” as Morelli describes it – Person helped grow bookings and Switchback’s reputation not just on campus, but throughout the Montana music community.

Today, Switchback Records hosts shows at campus venues such as the Oval and Urey Lecture Hall. They will host the 2nd Annual Weary Travelers Music Festival on the Oval on

April 29 – an event with five hours of live, local music and food trucks. They also offer free recording sessions for aspiring local musicians, produce a zine dedicated to the Missoula music scene called “Record Scratch” and partner with the Montana Area Music Association, where Person now serves on the board of directors.

MAMA’s mission, Person said, is to support the state’s artists through entertainment opportunities and promote fair wages.

“Switchback is essentially the on-campus version of MAMA,” Person said, “and we are very excited to be affiliated with such a successful nonprofit, especially with the momentum they are building in recent years.”

Members of the UMEM Student Club attended the Pollstar Live! Conference in Los Angeles, meeting entertainment industry leaders and landing job offers.

Like Switchback, the student entertainment management club was “little more than two students and a bank account” when Person took over, said Andrea Luoma, interim director of the entertainment management program. He would go on to reconnect the group with the campus-wide Associated Students of UM and find funding to support student activities, including trips to entertainment industry conferences.



“The club just blew up on Jack’s leadership,” Luoma said. “It’s one of the most attended student clubs on campus.”

That leadership, she adds, come to the fore when the club attended industry conferences in Los Angeles and Nashville.

“Some of the members had never traveled outside the state – never mind to a big city – and Jack made sure everyone was comfortable and had whatever help they needed,” she said.

This spring, 10 students went to L.A. for the Pollstar Live! conference, setting up lighting and LED signage and meeting industry leaders. Pollstar Live! is the world’s largest gathering of entertainment professionals.

“Our big thing as far as the club is to get students jobs in the industry, and we go to these conferences with professional resumes and business dress prepared to talk about who we are and what we do,” Person said. “And all of the students on that trip were offered employment.”

That included Person, who will start this summer working for Show Imaging, a national entertainment production company in San Diego.

“I will have to leave Montana,” Person said, “but I am excited.”

###

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University of Montana MBA candidate Lance Neirby also serves as the CEO of Montana Silversmiths, a Montana-based Western fashion label based in Columbus. Photo courtesy of Montana Silversmiths.

MISSOULA – University of Montana MBA candidate Lance Neirby has spent a career perfecting one of the world’s oldest trades to make beautiful things.

His craftsmanship has taken the form of NFL rings, World Series Championship trophies and the world-famous Tiffany & Co. solitaire diamond engagement rings, to name a few pieces.

Spending more than 20 years honing production and manufacturing, metalsmithing and

craftsmanship, he's abided by a personal mantra: ABL.

Always be learning.

"I guess I hate being bored," he said. "If you're not looking at the next growth step in your own leadership skills and getting better at the things that make you and your team successful, then you're not going upward."

During his tenure with Tiffany & Co., Neirby spent 11 years creating luxury pieces for the global brand as a master silversmith and senior manager, producing trophies for elite sports, including the World Series. Photo courtesy of Montana Silversmiths.

Neirby was encouraged by mentors to seek additional business education to expand his business and financial acumen. Three years later, he was named CEO of **Montana Silversmiths**, a Montana-based Western fashion label based in **Columbus** in its 50th year of business. In his new role, Neirby now leads the multimillion-dollar private equity company and continues to focus on expanding his leadership skills.



"Life is all about the mentors and leaders you have around you, and I've been lucky to have surrounded myself with both my entire career," Neirby said. "So, when people who I really respect suggested I seek an MBA, I thought long and hard and knew this was the next step for me."

Montana Silversmiths has an employee program that financially supports professional development and education. But Neirby wanted to fund the MBA himself.

"It was important to me that I own this and that I do it myself," he said. "I wanted the MBA

program to be Montana-based, so it was UM all the way.”

So Neirby enrolled in UM’s **Master of Business Administration** in the **College of Business**. The MBA program is purposefully designed for flexibility. Students can select remote instruction and tailor the classroom delivery to meet them where they are. He chose to complete the program fully remote in Columbus.

Balancing a full-time job, a spouse and two kids and about 15 to 20 hours of coursework a week wasn’t easy, but the three-year program provided Neirby the rich training and skills he now counts as necessary.

He said UM business classes taught by Professors Jakki Mohr, Theresa Floyd and Michael Harrington were particularly impactful in the areas of fundamental business law, accounting, high-tech marketing and organizational management.

“The classes I took were outstanding, and I really respect the faculty because they make you work hard, no question,” Neirby said. “For someone like me, coming from the arts, everything is explained at a level and in layman’s terms in a way that’s directly applicable.”

“In my course, students learn how to apply the principles of adaptive leadership to a current challenge they are facing in their career,” said **Theresa Floyd**, UM associate professor. “Lance took full advantage of this opportunity. He was an excellent student and deeply engaged in every conversation. I know he’ll continue to succeed in any path he chooses.”

Neirby said the cohort of fellow students in the program was a value-add, too.

“I got to know other folks around the state in different areas and businesses, and that’s been great to make connections – particularly when it comes to business networking.”

Nationally renowned for its cowboy-culture line of belt buckles, jewelry and lifestyle products, Montana Silversmiths is the official licensed jeweler for Professional Bull Riders, the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association and the American Quarter Horse Association. It also holds a Guinness Book of World Records for producing the world’s largest belt buckle.

In addition, the company is also the officially licensed jeweler for the TV series “Yellowstone.” The show’s popularity has **injected \$70 million into Montana’s economy** and helped consumers

connect with the authentic designs of Montana Silversmiths, Neirby said.

Neirby added that the popular show has catapulted the culture of western jewelry on the national scale, with a particular revenue impact at the company's beginning year sales opportunities in Texas.

But Neirby is clear that the country has long been "obsessed" with the romantic mystique of the West. He even made a graph tracing popular Western cinema from the early '70s and its impact in urban areas that Neirby said shows "an appreciation of the greater cowboy culture over time, which has resulted in widespread adoption of Western fashion and accessories all over the country."

He said the "Western" values of faith, family and freedom are evident in Montana Silversmiths' design aesthetic, which he thinks resonated with a large percentage of the country long before the Duttons arrived.

"The mark of a healthy business is not, 'Are we still going to be successful if Kevin Costner stops wearing our product?' but 'we are stable and sustainable even if he doesn't.' Our distribution network is not dependent on the show, even though it's a major asset. The MBA program helped me articulate this understanding."

Before joining Montana Silversmiths in 2016, Neirby spent 11 years creating luxury pieces for Tiffany & Co. as the iconic jeweler's master silversmith and senior manager for the company's elite sports league trophy shop and exclusive solitaire diamond rings.

"I learned so much at Tiffany's about mentorship, training and leadership," Neirby said. "Their company has the smarts and wherewithal to understand that well trained employees in management and leadership translates to a successful team and company."

Neirby holds a bachelor's degree in studio arts from Carleton College and an MFA in metalsmithing and jewelry from Rochester Institute of Technology.

He will add an UM MBA to his resume this May when he attends **UM Commencement**.

On his to-do list in the near future: find ways to leverage more manufacturing in Montana and create an employee pipeline in jewelry, fine arts and technology.

“I’m proud to be a Grizzly,” he said. “For every other art kid out there, let me tell you it’s possible to find your path. You can do a lot when you’re focused.”

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COLLEGE OF THE ARTS AND MEDIA

HEALING MOVES: UM OFFERS NEW PRE-DANCE THERAPY CONCENTRATION

19 APRIL 2023

Seely Garrett (right), one of the first students in UM's new Pre-Dance Therapy Concentration, works with participant Liam Mulcaire-Jones in New Visions Dance class. (Photos by Ridley Hudson)

By Cary Shimek, UM News Service

MISSOULA – One magical moment can change the trajectory of a life. Take what happened to Seely Garrett.

As a high student in **Helena**, Garrett assisted with a dance program for people of all abilities. She helped with a Cohesion Dance Project production called “Nutcracker on the Rocks,” and one of the performers was a 9-year-old girl struggling with worsening muscular dystrophy.

“There came a moment where she goes across the stage, and she is supposed to present her right arm and then her left arm,” Garrett said. “And the performance gave her this adrenaline, and she rode her little wheelchair out there, and there came the biggest arm movement we had seen from her in a year.”

Garrett’s voice hitches a little from the memory.

“For those of us in the know – who had worked with her – we were all on stage tearing up,” she said. “It felt very special to witness this person who might not always have the chance to perform in things like that. We saw her actually getting stronger through her dance. It was powerful to see.”

Such inspiration fueled Garrett, now a junior at the University of Montana, to become one of the first students to take a new concentration in **Pre-Dance Therapy**. Like pre-med, this new academic offering preps students for further studies beyond their undergraduate years.

The concentration launched fall semester with five students in the first cohort. The architects of the new offering are two dance faculty members, Professor Heidi Jones Eggert and Assistant Professor Brooklyn Draper of UM’s **College of the Arts and Media**.

“People need to understand that dance is a healer,” Eggert said. “We have folks who come in and have physical limitations and maybe don’t communicate verbally as easily as the rest of us. But you get the music going and the juices flowing, and suddenly they make eye contact when they wouldn’t make eye contact before. Something just ignites in them. Or their range of movement is really limited, but after 10 to 15 minutes of having fun with music and movement, they are just swinging their arms.”

Like any good dance professor, Eggert speaks with her hands when she talks – especially when excited about a topic. For the past dozen years, she has taught New Visions Dance, a UM therapeutic program that offers dance and creative movement classes to adults with varying developmental, cognitive and physical abilities. The innovative class has existed at UM for the past quarter century, when it was started by the now-retired Karen Kaufman.

All UM dance therapy students are required to co-teach New Visions Dance – as Garrett does on Mondays during spring semester – as well as assist with UM Children’s Dance Classes.

Draper said it was dance students helping with programs like News Visions Dance who consistently pushed for the new Pre-Dance Therapy concentration and potential careers as dance movement therapists. She said they just felt so good after the classes and saw how meaningful such programs could be for those involved.

“Those students coming out of those dance classes, they would say, ‘I’m sad that not everyone has this, and I need to take this out into the world,’” Eggert said. “It was amazing to reflect that these 18- to 22-year-olds wanted others to have these opportunities.”

Some of those students, who earned a Bachelor of Arts in dance from UM, went on to graduate school in dance therapy. Draper and Eggert used the guidance and feedback from these recent alumni to help design the new concentration.

“Just a few institutions across the country are doing anything like this at the undergraduate level,” Draper said. “It’s just very few, but it’s going to grow. The awareness is expanding.”

The Pre-Dance Therapy concentration offers all the prerequisites needed to qualify for a graduate program in dance/movement therapy. The nearest such program is Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado, and there are a few more on the East Coast. International graduate programs also are available.

The interdisciplinary concentration combines dance and psychology curriculums. Draper said classes such as Dance as a Healing Art and the Science of Dance are essential, and students are required to take targeted psychology courses and a variety of dance forms.

“We encourage them to take diverse offerings,” Draper said. “We want them to dip their toes in all areas.”

Though the concentration readies students for future study in graduate school, it also immediately prepares them for community work using dance therapy after their undergraduate studies.

“It preps students beautifully to take these classes into community centers and old folks’ homes

or schools,” Eggert said. “It trains them with this mindset that movement can bring us together as a community.

“I truly think this makes studying dance in college more accessible,” she said. “Because previously it was training to be a dancer, performer, choreographer or even a teacher. And there is a presumption that one needs a certain background or certain body type or whatever. But this allows people to study dance for different reasons. You might not get hired as a professional dancer, but you can find a job teaching and helping spread this joy.”

Garrett double-majors in both psychology and dance (with a Pre-Dance Therapy concentration) and is still deciding her future path. Among her options are becoming a school psychologist or continuing on to study dance/movement therapy in graduate school.

“I think being a school psychologist would be amazing, because Heidi and Brooklyn, and the other amazing professors in Pre-Dance Therapy have given me something in my toolbox that I can bring out to work with students and kids at any school.”

She said dance therapy is a unique discipline to study.

“Most universities don’t have it, and I have it right here in my home state,” Garrett said. “I think of how special that is.”

###

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Seely Garrett (far left) helps Connie Lewis (center) and others participating in UM's New Visions Dance class.

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COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

UM STUDENT BUSINESS STARTUP CHALLENGE RETURNS FOR 34TH YEAR

18 APRIL 2023

UM student Finan Lund-Andersen presents at the 2022 John Ruffatto Startup Competition, where he earned the contest's Intent to Launch Award.

MISSOULA – The state's most exciting student startup competition returns to the University of Montana this April. The public is invited to attend the 34th annual John Ruffatto Startup

Challenge, presented by the UM College of Business, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 28, in Gallagher Business Building Room 106.

The competition, sponsored by Ontra Marketing Group and Missoula Economic Partnership, is open to select students enrolled in higher education across Montana. It provides more than \$50,000 in prize money to students who pitch their business ideas to a panel of judges.

Businesses, organizations and individuals committed to the future of entrepreneurship in Montana provide all of the prize money for the event and participate as judges. Competitors pitch a vast array of venture ideas. Previous winning concepts include such things as filtering brewery wastewater with mushrooms and cricket farms for edible protein.

A record number of applications were received for the 2023 competition, with 76 different teams entering the event. From those applications, a top-12 were selected, representing multiple majors and levels. Each of these teams has the unique opportunity to present and network with business professionals and community leaders attending the final-round presentations.

From the top-12 that will pitch to judges throughout the day, a final four will be selected to pitch during the public finals at 5:30 p.m. on April 28. The live finals are free and open to the public. Doors to the event open at 4:30 p.m., with the main programming beginning at 5:30 p.m.

Now in its third decade, challenge finalists include a number of established Montana businesses, including Five on Black Brazilian Grill, Market on Front, Morphose Exercise Systems, GeoFli and Big Sky Brewing.

For more information visit the [John Ruffatto Startup Challenge webpage](#). For questions regarding the competition, email Erik Guzik at erik.guzik@umontana.edu.

2023 Finalists

Pop-Ins Care Match (University of Montana – Alaina Cain): Our solution for affordable childcare revolves around the idea to utilize possible caregivers and adjust working hours to make it more flexible and appealing to providers while making it organized, efficient and affordable to parents. The premise of the application would be that of Uber or AirBnB, meaning using an underutilized resource to benefit the end user.

Lab 19 (University of Montana – Carly Dahms): The purpose of Lab 19 is to raise the value and entertainment standard for sports events – specifically in enclosed arenas (like hockey rinks) because the FAA does not regulate the airspace. Meaning, it is easier to plan and operate drone shows without the interference of government entities. Lab 19 is different from other drone light show companies because of our ability to perform in enclosed buildings.

Ed-Visor (University of Montana – Ellie Gashwiler and Jason Firth): Registering for classes is overwhelming and confusing due to the limited information available for students. Our startup seeks to solve this by giving information through interactive quizzes that match students to their best-suited classes. We aim to empower students to be confident in their academic selections in order to lower class/school dropout rates, increase class attendance and raise grades. No student wants to waste money and no school wants to lose students.

Renewably Consulting LLC (University of Montana – Samuel Gilbertson): A boutique sustainability consulting firm, Renewably empowers businesses to adopt sustainable strategies and practices that drive positive environmental impact and financial success. We provide expert guidance and customized solutions to help clients reduce their carbon footprint, engage their employees and improve resource efficiency. Our mission is to enable organizations to operate environmentally and socially responsibly and contribute to a more sustainable future for all.

RestReviews (University of Montana – Avery Holden and John Milton): RestReviews is the latest app to prevent picking the wrong place to poo. We are putting the “rest” back in the “room.” The app allows users to make the best decisions on what restrooms to visit and avoid, and also allows users to leave a review of different restrooms they have visited. A user downloads the app and either browses from past user restroom reviews or takes the opportunity to create a new review with ease.

PlayAway (University of Montana – Carlisle Jones): As a lifelong musician, I have always been frustrated with the problem of being unable to practice when away from home due to the hassles and risks of traveling with an instrument. PlayAway seeks to create a user-friendly online marketplace in which customers can rent instruments from other individuals or retail stores. We want to be of service to touring professionals, as well as hobbyists, and make renting instruments as easy as booking a Turo.

BioFitness (University of Montana – Aanen Moody): This is a 10-week online course with instructional videos. This gives people a taste of what BioFitness does. We then will open a

local gym where we can take in-person clients. The ultimate goal is to have trainers who are educated in functional fitness to help guide our clients back to health.

Eco-Wrap (University of Montana – Ani Nesheim Ferguson): Eco-Wrap is the use of recycled materials to create a fabric gift wrap that ties at the top and unties for later reuse. To go along with this, we would also create bags from the same material. If possible, we would like to be able to partner with any fast fashion factory to collect scraps from those who create the most waste.

Not Your Grandmother's (University of Montana – Frank Redisi): The Not Your Grandmother's brand was born out of my passion for good food and hatred for currently available edible marijuana products. In an industry in which the current quality ranges from disgusting to subpar, a change needs to be made. Creating high-end, artisanal edibles would solve this problem. The purpose of this product is to raise the standard for edible marijuana products and eventually dominate a quickly growing recreational marijuana industry.

Arrested Locomotion (University of Montana – Zach Roosa): We would work with consumers and hospitals to print simple and fast prosthetic equipment for users awaiting their new or replacement prosthetics, which often come with a three- to six-week wait time in which universal and non-customized prosthetics offer significant discomfort to the consumer. We would print a same-day, 3-D, simplified-but-still-customized leg to allow the consumer more comfort during this transition period.

The Morning Tee (TMT) (University of Montana – Drew Schlimgen and Isabella Garrard): “The Morning Tee” (TMT) is a free golf application that acts as a coach and companion for golfers. The way the app functions starts with the user feeding footage of their swing into the app. A standard swing analysis algorithm crunches the data and gives it to AI, which then translates numbers into natural language and acts as an e-coach. (i.e translating “increase swing speed by 10.2%” into “try swinging a bit faster next time!”).

Connection to Care Pharmacy (University of Montana – Cassidy Thompson and Jora Bolena): Health care in the U.S. continues to be a rough playing field for patients. Patients often struggle to have access to providers, and when they do, all of their questions are not addressed. Connection to Care Pharmacy will bring health care home by adapting to the evolving environment of Telehealth. By consulting with patients, we will improve medication adherence, improve patients' understanding of their health and decrease medication errors. This will improve outcomes.

###

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COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES

UM RESEARCHER USES AI TO UNDERSTAND LUNG CANCER CELL VULNERABILITIES

18 APRIL 2023

Mark Grimes, a researcher and UM biology professor, uses AI to learn more about lung cancer vulnerabilities.

MISSOULA – A scientific team that includes University of Montana biologist Mark Grimes recently used artificial intelligence to better understand how protein groups in lung cancer cells regulate cell division and metabolism.

The work may lead to greater understanding of lung cancer vulnerabilities and future anti-cancer therapies. The findings were [published in PLOS Computational Biology](#).

“We examined how cells respond to anti-cancer drugs used to treat lung cancer,” Grimes said. “We used machine-learning algorithms to detect patterns in data that are difficult to see because our human brains are not all that great at seeing patterns in large spreadsheets.”

He said lung cancer is still a major cause of mortality. New drugs to treat lung cancer can work for a while, but cancer cells may evolve and form new tumors, causing relapse. To solve this problem, attacking cancer cells with a combination of drugs could work, but only if researchers gain a better understanding of cancer cell weak points.

“The great thing about this work is that we’ve turned the patterns we discovered into networks that represent cell signaling pathways that are affected by cancer mutations and drugs that target mutated genes, called oncogenes,” Grimes said. “This work takes this approach to the next level by looking at interactions between the pathways, which are groups of proteins that work together in the cell.”

He said this gave his research team both higher-level and molecular-level views of the interactions between the pathways that cause cancer cells to divide and regulate their metabolism.

Grimes said cancerous tumors often have a hyperactive metabolism and limited supply of oxygen.

“So identifying links between these pathways presents opportunities to attach vulnerabilities in the import and utilization of nutrients in combination with other anti-cancer therapies.”

Other partners in the research include Georgetown University; Moffit Hospital in Tampa, Florida; and the University of Manitoba.

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UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

UM'S KYIYO POW WOW SET FOR APRIL 21-22

17 APRIL 2023

The pride and spectacle of UM's student-run Kyiyo Pow Wow return to campus Friday and Saturday, April 21-22. (UM photos by Tommy Martino)



A grand entry during the 2022 Kyiyo Pow Wow at UM.

MISSOULA – One of the nation’s oldest student-run powwows and a beloved University of Montana tradition, the **Kyiyo Pow Wow**, will be held on campus Friday and Saturday, April 21-22, in the Adams Center.

Unifying Indigenous people from across the nation and Montana, the annual celebration preserves the rich heritage of tribes and cultures while renewing old traditions. Now in its 54th year, the powwow will feature Native singing, dancing, story sharing and other events.

Grand entry times are at 7 p.m. Friday and at noon and 7 p.m. Saturday. Admission is free for children 6 and under and seniors over 65. General admission is \$7 on Friday, \$12 on Saturday or \$15 for the entire weekend.

The event is back to full strength after being canceled in 2020 and 2021 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It’s such an honor to uphold this momentous celebration after all the hardships we’ve

collectively experienced in the past three years,” said Riley Werk, co-president of **Kyiyo Native American Student Association**.

Werk said celebrating her culture and people puts a joy in her heart that motivates her to be involved in activities with the Native student population on campus.

“As a first-year student, hosting Kyiyo is an experience I am more than happy to have,” she said. “The positive effects that celebrations such as these have on our people are truly remarkable, in the aspect that it brings joy and excitement.”

“As a result of the COVID pandemic, mental health has been in a decline,” she said, “and I can guarantee that this celebration is going to provide positive yields for our mental health and well-being.”

The 2023 Kyiyo Royalty are:

- Miss Kyiyo: Cailei Cummins.
- Miss Kyiyo: Morgan Layne Shakespeare.
- Little Miss Kyiyo: Tamia Audyn Bull Bear.

The 2023 Kyiyo head staff are:

- Master of Ceremony: Ruben Little Head Sr.
- Head Man: Conan Cutstherobe.
- Head Woman: Wozek Chandler.
- Arena Director: Walter Runsabove.
- Head Drum Judge: Aaron Denny.
- Head Dance Judge: Jeremy Shield.
- Host Drum: Dry Lake.

For questions about specials, entries or other information, email kyiyo@umontana.edu. More information is online at <https://www.umt.edu/kyiyo//kyiyopowwow/>.

The UM Alexander Blewett III School of Law also is holding its **21st annual Indian Law Week** in the days leading up to the powwow. Events run April 17-21, and a full schedule is online at bit.ly/3JMacrE.

###

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SCHOOL OF LAW

UM LAW STUDENTS SECURE LEGACY, FORM FLY FISHING SOCIETY

14 APRIL 2023

UM law student Henry Charpentier, of the law school's Fly Fishing Society, ties flies in preparation for another trip to local rivers.

MISSOULA – One hot Saturday morning in early August, University of Montana law students Henry Charpentier and Lukas Vining cast out lines on the Missouri River to unwind from their respective summer internships. Without a cloud in the sky, they had a perfect view of the trico hatch on the water.

Charpentier catching trout on the Missouri River.

Unfortunately, trico are miniscule insects, and this meant that the fish could easily spot the anglers. Even under ideal circumstances, the fish don't always rise.

“But bad fishing makes for good conversation,” said Charpentier, and what with their final year of law school approaching, they weren't devoid of topics.

Floating in Vining's drift boat from Wolf Creek Bridge to the Dearborn access point, they discussed their experience as law students, as Montanans, as fishermen. They talked about the time they lost to COVID and their place in the law community they hoped to help build. They spoke of how they wanted to create a legacy within the law school surrounding their shared love of fishing and how they might achieve it.



From that riverside conversation grew the Fly Fishing Society, an independent student organization at UM's **Alexander Blewett III School of Law**, which has amassed over 15 members since its conception in the fall semester of 2022.

Led by Charpentier, a **Billings** native who himself grew up fly-fishing, the Fly Fishing Society has fished rivers, held lectures and volunteered for banquets since its conception. While their winter activities have been limited to fly tying and dreaming of the perfect trout, the FFS has big plans for warm weather.

While many lawyers across the country unwind after a long day with a round of golf, Montanan lawyers float the state's abundant waterways with fishing rods in hand. However, the Fly Fishing Society doesn't just fish: They work to ensure future generations of law students can fly-fish to unwind as well.

*UM third year law student Dion Choi prepares to fish
Rock Creek.*

Partnered with national nonprofit Trout Unlimited – an organization with over 300,000 members that focus on protecting and restoring trout and salmon populations – FFS focuses on policy aiming to protect rivers and streams from pollution.

“They’ve done a lot of work here in Missoula with Rock Creek and the Clark Fork, getting rid of the mine tailings that were here decades ago and creating a suitable habitat for fish,” said Charpentier of the local WestSlope Chapter of Trout Unlimited. “It comes up a lot in Montana with fights over stream access laws or fishing regulations, so there’s a lot of opportunity to provide state or federal commentary.”



Beyond environmental activities, FFS is also looking to stretch their casting prowess toward some healthy competition; with spring all but here, Charpentier is working to organize a fishing competition against the Fly Fishing Society at Montana State University. As for what that may look like?

“You award point totals based on the species of fish and then size caught – say a rainbow is worth five points but a brown is worth seven, something like that,” says Charpentier predicting an ultimately victory for his team no matter the competition.

“This is the only law school in the country where you can fly-fish 200 yards from campus,” he said.

###

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COLLEGE OF HEALTH

UM RESEARCHER HONORED BY ESTEEMED BIOLOGICAL ENGINEERING INSTITUTE

13 APRIL 2023

*Andrij
Holian*



(center), a UM researcher and professor of toxicology, was inducted into the AIMBE College of Fellows on March 27 in Arlington, Virginia.

MISSOULA – Accomplished University of Montana researcher Andrij Holian, who directs UM’s **Center for Environmental Health Sciences**, may need a bigger trophy case.

With his latest accolade, Dr. Holian was named to the College of Fellows of the American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering. Election to this organization is one of the highest professional distinctions accorded to a medical and biological engineer. The College of Fellows is composed of the top 2% of such engineers.

“It’s a humbling honor,” said Holian, who is a professor of toxicology in the Department of Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Sciences in UM’s College of Health. “This is important for the additional recognition that it provides to the diverse research enterprise that exists at the University of Montana

Holian was nominated, reviewed and elected by peers and members of the College of Fellows. According to AIMBE, he was selected “for fundamental understanding of bioactivity and toxicity of nanomaterials and advancing science in safe nanomaterial development and potential therapeutic treatment.”

The 140 new AIMBE Fellows were inducted March 27 in Arlington, Virginia. They are employed in academia, industry, clinical practice and government. AIMBE Fellows represent 30 countries and include three Nobel Prize laureates.

At that same conference, Holian received two other awards from the Society of Toxicology: one for “Excellence in Mentoring” and another for “Significant Contribution in Advancing the Field of Nanotoxicology.”

Holian's varied research interests often focus on the molecular and cellular mechanisms of lung injury from a diverse array of sources, from nanomaterials and methamphetamine to biomass smoke. He also has studied the asbestos-contaminated vermiculite mined in Libby.

In 2021, Holian was invited to serve on the influential National Advisory Environmental Health Sciences Council, which 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. His expertise was sought regarding research, training and other matters significant to meet national research goals.

“Andrij has long been an important part of the research enterprise at the University of Montana,” said Scott Whittenburg, UM vice president for research and creative scholarship. “It’s researchers like him – who are world leaders in their fields – who helped UM become a top-tier R1 research institution.”

###

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RESEARCH

SIX UM STUDENTS AWARDED PRESTIGIOUS STEM FELLOWSHIPS

12 APRIL 2023

MISSOULA – The National Science Foundation recently awarded six University of Montana students with the 2023 Graduate Research Fellowship Program award – one of the nation’s most prestigious honors in science, technology, engineering and math.

As part of the award, each student is provided a five-year fellowship with NSF, including three years of financial support, an annual stipend of \$37,000 and a cost-of-education allowance of \$12,000 to the student’s current institution.

“UM students continue to outpace many of their peers in efforts to secure prestigious awards and nationally recognized scholarships,” said Kylla Benes, director of UM’s Office of External Scholarships and Fellowships. “The NSF Fellows who earned this award represent the high-level STEM research that students undertake while on our campus. We are thrilled to see each of them continue their efforts through the support of the NSF.”

The six fellowships earned by UM students are the most in the history of Montana’s flagship institution. The award winners and their majors are:

- Marcelo Almora Rios, mathematics education.
- Bridger Creel, ecology.
- Rosalee Elting, organismal biology.
- Dominick Faith, microbial biology.
- Connor Meter, ecology.
- Ethan Shafron, ecology

The record number of NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program award winners is a testament to UM’s rapidly growing research enterprise.

A year ago, **UM earned the top-tier “R1” research institution** designation. This recognition classifies UM as one of the top research universities in the world. During the past decade, **UM research expenditures have more than doubled** – reaching an all-time high of \$126 million last fiscal year.

“The level of research at UM has never been greater,” said Scott Whittenburg, UM vice president for research and creative scholarship. “With a record number of NSF Fellows this year, UM is once again showing the rest of the country the top-tier, graduate-level research that takes place on our campus each day.”

“We are incredibly proud of the work our faculty do in recruiting such talented graduate students, who in turn play a vital role in advancing UM’s research and teaching missions,” said Ashby Kinch, dean of the UM Graduate School. “The GRFP Awards really demonstrate the

range and depth of talented graduate students that UM attracts on the basis of our strong graduate programs and our dynamic faculty.”

In addition to the six UM students who received this year’s GRFP awards, another UM student and two former students were recognized with honorable mentions. Those students are Sophia Fitzgerald, Charlotte Langner and Autumn Robinson.

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COLLEGE OF HEALTH

UM STUDENTS, FACULTY LEAD NEURODIVERGENT INCLUSION EFFORTS

11 APRIL 2023

UM students Sophia Boughey (left) and Taylor Sadewic give a presentation about neurodiversity inclusion on the University of Montana campus.

By Kyle Spurr, UM News Service

MISSOULA – Each Tuesday night during the fall and spring semesters, a group of University of Montana students gather with peers who have autism, ADHD and related disorders.

The social gatherings have included ice skating on the UM Oval, walks for ice cream and board game nights. The casual environments allow the UM students to connect with their peers and learn more about autism and neurodiversity, while their peers are able to find support and develop friendships.

“I didn’t have an opportunity to interact with many individuals on the autism spectrum in high school so this has been my first experience but it really has changed my life,” said Sophia Boughey, a sophomore from **Red Lodge** who is double majoring in psychology and communicative sciences and disorders. “I was not expecting to gain so many incredible friendships from this class.”

Boughey and her classmates have planned the Tuesday gatherings this semester in their Autism on Campus Service Learning class. The gatherings also are a feature of **UM’s MOSSAIC (Mentoring, Organization, and Social Support for Autism/All Inclusion on Campus) program.**

“Having a space for people to come and ask questions about what they are feeling and experiencing with neurodiversity, that’s what we are here for,” Boughey said. “That’s why we go to the class so we can learn these things and help them understand the journey they are on.”

The Tuesday gatherings are part of a larger effort to make campus more inclusive to those who are neurodivergent and have disorders such as autism, ADHD and dyslexia. The effort has gained momentum in recent years, said Dr. Jennifer Schoffer Closson, a clinical assistant professor in the **UM School of Speech, Language, Hearing and Occupational Sciences.**

“The past two years I have been humbled by the number of people reaching out to me for support on how to make the campus more inclusive,” Schoffer Closson said. “Faculty, staff, and students have shown me that they have feelings that everyone belongs and they are happy to support them.”

Schoffer Closson created the MOSSAIC program 11 years ago and has focused her research and teaching on neurodiversity inclusion. She describes neurodiversity as normal variations of the brain that often result in strengths such as being especially creative and an out-of-the-box thinker.

“It’s the idea that everybody is a unique thinker and there’s no one right way or wrong way of

thinking,” she said. “We need those diverse brains to solve the problems of the world.”

Schoffer Closson estimates 20% of the UM campus community is neurodivergent based on national statistics. A recent study found 16% of UM students access services from the UM Office for Disability Equity.

Those who are neurodivergent often face barriers on campus. For example, people with ADHD can get distracted by the flickering of fluorescent lights, and people with autism can struggle with group work because socializing is a challenge.

To support the neurodivergent community on campus, Schoffer Closson secured funding last year for light covers over fluorescent lights and inclusion kits filled with fidget spinners, ear plugs, videos to educate people and signs for students to alert instructors of their comfort level. One sign reads “today I am just listening.”

The inclusion kits are starting to run low and Schoffer Closson is pursuing new grant funds to replenish them.

Other targeted support includes enlisting UM graduate student clinicians to teach people with autism and ADHD how to better organize and plan. At the undergraduate level, the Tuesday night gatherings through the Autism on Campus Service Learning class continues to make a huge difference for the students and their neurodivergent peers, Schoffer Closson said.

“The students work really hard to make it fun and engaging,” Schoffer Closson said, “It’s just a safe and fun place to be.”

UM sophomore Taylor Sadewic, a communicative sciences and disorders major from **Sandpoint, Idaho**, took the service learning class last fall and experienced the benefits of the Tuesday gatherings.

“From the very first night I knew this was something I wanted to put my all into,” Sadewic said. “All the participants are incredible. It was cool to have this structured environment where we could get to know each other.”

Sadewic found a passion for working with those on the autism spectrum while in high school, where she worked in a special education class and babysat a young girl with autism. She is

pursuing her interests at UM, and says students of any major should consider taking the service learning class and join the Tuesday gatherings.

“Part of making the world a more neurodiverse inclusive place is increasing education at the college level across all majors,” Sadewic said. “College students are the future, and they can take knowledge of neurodiversity with them after graduation and make change in every career path.”

The weekly Tuesday gatherings have been a highlight for Sadewic and her classmate, Boughey.

Both students presented information this semester at an event centered around making the outdoors more accessible for people with disabilities. Sadewic and Boughey shared their experiences with their neurodivergent peers. Part of their presentation featured an anonymous note written by a participant in the Tuesday gatherings.

The participant wrote how he looks forward to the weekly meetings and how important it is since he rarely gets other opportunities to socialize.

Boughey carries the handwritten note in her backpack as a reminder that she is making a difference for her peers.

“It was so sweet,” Boughey said. “It’s probably one of my most prized possessions.”

###

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UM / News / Award-Winning Poet to Read at UM as Part of President's Lecture Series



Kevin Young will close out this academic year's collection of President's Lecture Series events at the University of Montana on Tuesday, April 18.

By Abigail Lauten-Scriver, UM News Service

MISSOULA – The University of Montana will close this academic year's chapter of President's Lecture Series events with “**An Evening of Poetry and Healing with Kevin Young**” on Tuesday, April 18.

Free and open to the public, Young will read from his collection of poems during the 7:30 p.m. event in the University Center Ballroom. A question and answer portion will follow. Sign language interpretation will be provided.

Young is the author of 13 books of poetry, two award-winning books of nonfiction and editor of several poetry collections. His latest publication is a children's book titled “Emile and the Field.”

In addition to being an award-winning poet, author and essayist, Young holds several roles, including serving as poetry editor for *The New Yorker*. He also is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a fellow of the Society of American Historians and a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets.

Many of Young's poems connect themes of grief and healing, family, African American history, community and place. Such publications include “Stones,” “Dear Darkness” and “Book of Hours,” as well as an anthology “The Art of Losing: Poems of Grief and Healing,” among others.

“I think a poem can express the complexity of grief,” Young said.

As the title of his event suggests, Young's reading will seek to explore the intricacies of grief and healing through poetry. Young said he hopes attendees will feel a sense of community and connection that, in turn, will spark conversation.

Sparking conversation is the very mission of **UM's President's Lecture Series**. The annual event provides a free, accessible opportunity for all to gather, learn and discuss ideas and issues that animate communities.

“The series has been going for several decades now, it's always been a forum for bringing some of the country's leading intellectuals here to campus and to our broader community,” said UM Political Science Professor Robert Saldin, who also serves as coordinator of the President's Lecture Series and director of The Mansfield Center's Ethics and Public Affairs Program. “I hope attendees come away having been intellectually stimulated and with some things to think about and grapple with.”

Another goal of the series is to engage the campus community with a diverse range of voices with different expertise, while also ensuring speakers aren't so specialized that they'll only appeal to a narrow slice of the community.

"We want to touch as many bases on campus as we can," Saldin said.

This past year's speakers included ethologist and activist Dr. Jane Goodall, Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute Director Dr. Lerone A. Martin, hydrology professor Dr. Jay Famiglietti and Chinese history professor Dr. Rowena He.

Young's event is co-sponsored by UM's Humanities Institute through a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and UM's creative writing program. The reading is the culmination of over 30 community events in the Humanities Institute's series "**Re-Imagining Death: Conversations About Dying, Loss and Grief.**" The series culminates in April with several opportunities to gather and discuss death, dying and grief in a supportive environment.

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COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

UM TO HOST OREPAC CEO FOR EXECUTIVE LECTURE SERIES

10 APRIL 2023

Brad Hart

MISSOULA – Brad Hart, CEO and president of OrePac Building Products, will present the next installment of the Gilkey Executive Lecture Series hosted by the University of Montana College of Business.

This in-person event at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, April 20, in Gallagher Business Building Room 106 is free and open to the public. Dr. Justin Angle, a UM marketing professor, will moderate the talk, which will center around business leadership and management.

OrePac Building Products is a family owned building materials distributor headquartered in Wilsonville, Oregon. OrePac was founded over 40 years ago by Glenn Hart and is now headed by Brad Hart. OrePac operates 10 distribution centers throughout the West, employing about 900 people and a 120-truck fleet to service customers. Products and services range from moldings, pre-hung interior and exterior doors, house wrap, decking, siding and trim, along with other specialty building materials.

Hart graduated from UM with a degree in business. Over the years, he has continued his education through various elective programs, studying leadership, management styles, sales, finance and production efficiencies. He is a diligent reader and is constantly striving to be the best leader possible.

After graduating from college, Hart spent three years working in the resort industry and then another three years working for other similar building material companies. Then, with a family philosophy of “working your way up”, he entered the family business as a salesman. After a few years, he was promoted to sales manager, general manager, vice president of sales and marketing, senior vice president of operations and, ultimately, president and CEO.



Outside OrePac, Hart serves on the UM College of Business Advisory Board, as well as the board of the AAA Auto Club. He also has worked with and supported many organizations in the Lake Oswego, Wilsonville and Portland communities.

Hart and his wife, Michele, live in Lake Oswego, Oregon, and have three boys. The eldest is a graduate of the University of Virginia Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy and is working in the Washington, D.C., legislative sector. Their second son is a senior studying hospitality management in college, and their youngest is a sophomore majoring in business supply chain and logistics while playing NCAA Division I lacrosse. Hart and his family are avid outdoor enthusiasts who enjoy snow and water skiing, biking, tennis and occasionally golf.

About the Gilkey Lecture Series

The Gilkey Executive Lecture Series was established by Harold and Priscilla Gilkey in 2004 to enrich business education at UM by providing students, faculty and the community members with direct access to business leaders.

Gilkey lecturers address issues across marketing, management, finance, ethics and leadership. In addition to leading classroom lectures and discussion, speakers present a lecture at a public forum on a topic of their choice and are invited to meet with graduate students and campus and community leaders.

Both Harold and Priscilla acknowledge the powerful impact of mentors and role models on their own professional and personal achievements.

Harold Gilkey is a 1962 graduate of UM and holds an MBA from the University of Southern California. He is retired as chairman and CEO of Sterling Financial Corp. Priscilla Gilkey is a 1962 UM graduate. She is retired as vice president of community relations for Empire Health Services, a multi-hospital system in Spokane, Washington.

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UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

GRIZ CHAT: HISTORIAN OF CHINESE SOCIETY AND POLITICS TO TALK TIANANMEN AT UM

06 APRIL 2023

Dr. Rowena He, a professor of history at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and an expert in modern and contemporary Chinese society and politics, will speak at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, April 13, as part of UM's President's Lecture Series.

By Abigail Lauten-Scrivner, UM News Service

MISSOULA – If westerners recognize anything from China’s 1989 pro-democracy movement, it’s likely the iconic image of “Tank Man,” depicting an unknown, lone individual standing in defiance in front of a line of tanks near Tiananmen Square.

While those in the U.S. often lack a full picture of the movement behind the infamous photo, Chinese citizens today also may have an incomplete image, as the government continues to ban public discourse of the Tiananmen Square protests and censor information, including “Tank Man.” Yet the impacts of the movement persist.

Such themes will be central to Dr. Rowena He’s upcoming talk at the University of Montana, **“The Betrayal of Loyalty: From Tiananmen to Hong Kong.”**

He previously visited UM in 2014 following the publication of her first book. She will return to campus Thursday, April 13, as part of the President’s Lecture Series. Free and open to the public, her talk will take place at 7:30 p.m. in the University Center Ballroom. The event serves as this year’s Lucile Speer Memorial Lecture and is co-sponsored by the Mansfield Center.

He is an associate professor of history at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and a Luce East Asia Fellow at the National Humanities Center. A historian of modern and contemporary Chinese society and politics, she is an expert in the 1989 pro-democracy movement. He was born and brought up in China and later received her Ph.D. from the University of Toronto.

Her first book, “Tiananmen Exiles: Voices of the Struggle for Democracy in China” was named one of five top books by the Asia Society’s ChinaFile magazine in 2014. It was reviewed in the New York Review of Books, Wall Street Journal, Financial Times, Human Rights Quarterly and other international periodicals. He was designated among the Top 100 Chinese Public Intellectuals in 2016.

He formerly taught at Harvard University, Wellesley College and Saint Michael’s College. She received the Harvard University Certificate of Teaching Excellence for three consecutive years and the CUHK Faculty of Arts Outstanding Teaching Award for 2020 and 2021. She also testified before a U.S. Congressional hearing and delivered lectures for the U.S. State Department and the Canada International Council.

He spoke with UM News to preview what to expect from her forthcoming event.

UM News: Without giving too much away, can you explain what the title of your lecture means?

“The Betrayal of Loyalty” is a major theme in my book “Tiananmen Exiles.” Tracing the life trajectories of three exiled students from the 1989 Tiananmen Movement in China, I use personal narratives to illuminate the making of the political consciousness of the Tiananmen generation – how their idealism was fostered by the very powers that ultimately crushed it, and how such idealism evolved in exile facing the conflicts of historical amnesia, political commitment, ethical action and personal happiness.

I will draw on first-hand experience fresh from the unprecedented social movement in Hong Kong to share my observations and reflections of the continuities and differences of this striking theme between betrayal and loyalty.

UM News: What themes, messages and ideas will your talk explore?

The talk will be in the form of a personal journey of preserving historical memories tabooed by the Beijing regime. Integrating the personal with the social, the historical and the political, the narrative accounts across time and border aim to stimulate more stories from our audience in our reflections on universal values of truth and justice, especially in this post-truth era compounded with populism and nationalism.

UM News: How does your personal background inform your research?

Where shall I begin? Come to the talk for the full story!

UM News: What do people often misunderstand about the Tiananmen Square movement, as well as modern China? What do you wish they knew?

Tiananmen was not just about repression, but also about hope – about a generation of youth’s longing for freedom and democracy that people in this country are born with but we had to fight generation after generation at high cost. Don’t take anything for granted. And safeguard your democracy.

UM News: Why should Montanans attend your talk, and what can they expect to learn?

When I last gave a talk in Montana in 2014, I wasn't even sure if anyone would show up. I had never been to Montana. Just like when I first landed in Vancouver as a new immigrant, I had never been to Canada. I had nothing but two suitcases and hope.

In 2014, I was beautifully surprised when I walked into the packed Dennison Theatre and was warmly moved by the standing ovation after the talk. I remember it was a rainy night. People were waiting outside to get my book – that was the day my first book was released. One of the highlights of the night was when several Chinese students came up after everyone left, asking me questions with confusion and trust.

I have been through a lot in life ever since, especially in the past three years like everyone else. When I was struggling in darkness, that image of Montanans in the shared space of Dennison was one of my sources for strength.

UM News: The President's Lecture Series is intended to stir public conversation. What do you hope audience members are still discussing after the lecture ends?

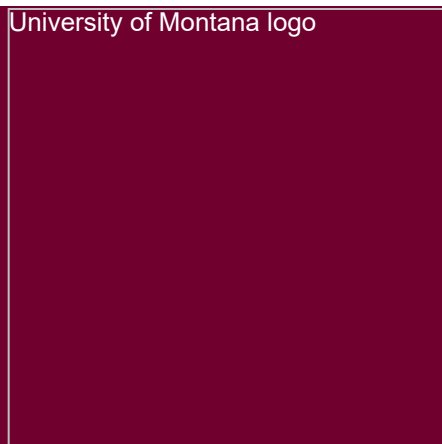
I think the beauty of engagement and teaching is that we collectively walk through the journey together. It is not a one-way traffic. I am looking forward to having dialogues with folks in Montana again on April 13.

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GRIZZLY INDOOR PRACTICE FACILITY



A rendering of the Grizzly Indoor Practice Facility.

MISSOULA – The University of Montana will break ground this month on a new on-campus, state-of-the-art indoor practice facility.

In addition to serving student-athletes of every sport, the Grizzly Indoor Practice Facility will provide recreational opportunities to all UM students and members of the Missoula community.

“The need for an indoor athletic facility in Missoula is long overdue,” said UM Athletic Director Kent Haslam. “This facility will benefit every Grizzly student-athlete for years to come, as well as provide new opportunities for athletes of all ages in our community to use a safe, indoor space to practice, play and compete during the winter months.”

The \$10.2 million indoor practice facility will be located on the south end of the River Bowl fields and is completely privately funded, meaning no student tuition or Montana taxpayer dollars are being spent on the project.

The 110,000-square-foot Grizzly Indoor Practice Facility will be covered with an inflatable roof that will be the first of its kind in the Big Sky Conference. In total, the facility will include a regulation-size synthetic football field, four 150-yard sprint lanes for track athletes and two long-jump pits, two pole vault bars and a hammer, javelin, discus and shot-put area for field athletes. The facility also will house winter practices for Grizzly soccer and softball teams.

As part of the project, UM also will construct a permanent structure that will connect to the indoor practice facility to house a lobby, restrooms, storage rooms and mechanical space.

Staging for construction begun in early April, and large-scale work will begin on April 17. The estimated completion of the facility is fall 2023.

During the duration of construction, parking lots M and M-1 adjacent to the River Bowl fields will be partially impacted.

Grizzly Athletics will host a groundbreaking ceremony for the indoor practice facility in the near future.

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UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

UM GRIZZLY ESPORTS GROWS GAMING ACROSS MONTANA

04 APRIL 2023

By Kyle Spurr, UM News Service

UM's Grizzly Esports team is the largest program in Montana.

MISSOULA – High school freshman Freddy Jimenez showed off his video games skills last weekend against the



University of Montana's Grizzly Esports team. Jimenez and three teammates from Heart Butte High School on the Blackfoot Indian Reservation beat UM in the first game of an in-person Big Sky State Games tournament hosted by Grizzly Esports in the University Center Ballroom.

Jimenez and his classmates cheered and high-fived each other after victoriously playing Rocket League, a video game that uses cars to play soccer. The experience at the tournament gave Jimenez a taste of university life and a reminder that he could one day earn a scholarship to play esports in college.

"It opens up doors," he said. "Ten years ago this wouldn't even be possible."

UM's Grizzly Esports team started as a student club in 2012 and became an official University sport in 2019, complete with maroon jerseys and scholarships for 50 of the more than 100 players. The team has since become a leader across Montana in the world of competitive video games, competing in League of Legends, Overwatch, Rocket League and other online arenas.

The tournament last weekend was a huge milestone for the team, said Cale Patenaude, assistant director of Grizzly Esports. The tournament featured other collegiate teams from the region including Washington State University and Carroll College. But it also was the first time UM invited area high school teams.

"We wanted to create an experience that brings high schoolers from esports to the University of Montana," Patenaude said.

Esports is a booming business at the professional level, with players competing for millions in cash prizes. And it is growing at universities, with UM competing in the National Association of Collegiate Esports, which includes more than 170 schools and 5,000 student-athletes. Now the sport is gaining popularity in high schools.

About a dozen Montana high schools started teams within the past two years and paid to compete in national online leagues because the Montana High School Association does not officially recognize esports.

As more Montana high schools became interested and fees to play in the online leagues became more expensive, UM Grizzly Esports decided to step in and create a league for the high schools.

Last fall, UM Grizzly Esports formed the Montana High School Championship Series, which now features 15 schools from all over Montana including Sidney, Cut Bank, Great Falls and East Helena. The teams play each other in Rocket League, Overwatch and Super Smash Bros.

“We thought we could stand something up that could be just for Montana schools,” Patenaude said. “Now we have 150 high schoolers competing across Montana.”

The top high school teams will come to UM’s Gaming Den on Saturday, May 6, for a state championship tournament.

Marne Bender, an esports coach for East Helena High School, brought some of her players to last weekend’s tournament at UM and expects her team to qualify for the May 6 state tournament.

East Helena High started an esports team in 2021 and now has nearly 30 players. Besides learning teamwork and competition, Bender sees the social and academic benefits for the students, which include a few middle schoolers who are allowed to play on the high school team.

“I was kind of an anti-gamer and now I’m a coach,” Bender said. “You just have to show people the benefits and that it’s not this anti-social thing. It’s actually super social.”

Esports also can be a pathway to college for high school students, Bender said. She makes sure her team maintains their grades and shows them the various careers that relate to esports such as information technology work, game design and event management.

“I have kids who when I tell them they can get a scholarship to college with this, their jaws drop,” Bender said.

Blake Heintzelman, captain of UM's Rocket League team, wants to pursue esports operations as a career.

Many players on UM's esports team felt the same surprise when they discovered playing competitive video games in college. The team prides itself on building a strong sense of community and a support system that helps each other study for tests and handle any other stresses.



“I feel like college didn't really start for me until I found out about the esports program,” said Blake Heintzelman, captain of UM Esports' Rocket League team. “I feel like I found a place where there's a lot of people with similar interests.”

Heintzelman graduated last year with an undergraduate business degree and is now enrolled in UM's Master of Business Administration program. Heintzelman's experience on the esports team made him realize he wants to pursue a career in esports operations including tournament organization and player management.

“It really helped me find out what I want to do with my life,” he said. “It's the perfect fit for me.”

Heintzelman believes any high schooler interested in esports at UM will want to join for the community that has been built.

“I couldn't imagine it being better somewhere else,” he said. “The team is so helpful and so inclusive. Come for the community first and play your game second.”

Colten Dahl, a senior at Sidney High School, plays on his school's esports team which formed two years ago. The team didn't participate in last weekend's tournament, but they plan to make the 10-hour drive to Missoula for the May 6 state championship.

Dahl, who will attend UM in the fall, can't wait to get to campus in May to compete against other high schools and meet some of UM's esports players. Dahl isn't sure if he will try to play esports while in college, but for now he's enjoying the comradery that comes with the sport.

"It brings so many people together who otherwise wouldn't have anything to connect them," Dahl said. "That's really powerful. There's very few things that can do that."

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[A video on UM's Grizzly Esports team is available on YouTube.](#)

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Shayde St. Goddard (right), a freshman esports player at Heart Butte High School, plays a video game with a teammate during a tournament at UM.

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COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES

FORMER FIRE LOOKOUT WINS PRESTIGIOUS UM WRITING AWARD

04 APRIL 2023

Austin Hagwood, a UM graduate student, used his experiences as a fire lookout to inspire the manuscript that won him the Merriam-Frontier Award. (UM photo by Tommy Martino)

MISSOULA – Austin Hagwood, a creative writing graduate student at the University of Montana, spent five seasons staffing fire lookouts in the Bitterroot National Forest. His mountaintop adventures inspired him to

start a book, which recently earned him one of UM's most prestigious writing honors, the **Merriam-Frontier Award**.

Hagwood's winning submission consisted of four chapters from his book in progress, "Fire Finder: Life as a Lookout in the Northern Rockies." The work gives readers a window into the solitude and excitement of the job, as well as resulting reflections by the writer.

Hagwood will read from his manuscript at 5 p.m. Friday, April 7, at UM's Mansfield Library. The reading is free and open to the public.

The judges chose Hagwood's manuscript from a robust field of fiction, poetry and nonfiction submissions from UM students. They wrote in their statement, "Austin Hagwood delighted us with his exceptionally thoughtful and skillful nonfiction work 'Fire Finder: Life as a Lookout in the Northern Rockies.' Austin took us into the lookout and made us want to stay and learn more. We saw it, smelled it and felt the anxiety of wildfire appearing on the landscape and strangers showing up on the lookout steps.

"But his memoir goes deeper. He shows his readers who he is now and who he has been, digesting his past while grounded very much in his present. He deftly avoids Western outdoors cliches and doesn't romanticize his experiences. He also avoids anxious environmental writing, instead showing us why we love the Western outdoors and landscape. He leads his readers to want more, and we encourage him to keep writing."

Hagwood is a second-year Master of Fine Arts student in Creative Writing. He grew up in the



mountain town of Quincy in the Sierra Nevada mountains, where he hiked to abandoned fire lookouts. He earned an undergraduate degree in English at the University of Notre Dame and a master's degree in anthropology from the University of Cambridge in England.

In 2017, Hagwood learned accidentally that staffing fire lookouts could be a real job and applied to 100 lookout posts in five states.

"I just showed up in the Bitterroot, wide-eyed," he said. "I fell in love with the land."

Hagwood worked five seasons in the southern Bitterroot National Forest. During winters from 2016 to 2018, he also worked several stints in Papua New Guinea, doing research in anthropology and botany with Fulbright and National Geographic grants.

For Hagwood, who said a beautifully constructed sentence can reflect the beauty of a place, UM's Creative Writing program was a natural next step.

"I couldn't ask for a more stellar group of peers and incredible mentors," he said. "I am so thankful for the program, and the award means so much to me."

Christopher Dombrowski, assistant director of the Creative Writing Program, calls Hagwood "an exemplary citizen, an exemplary writer and an exemplary human." Hagwood is "always the smartest person in the room," he said, "but he's also the most humble person," and he raises the quality of the classroom. His stories show us the importance of fire in the landscape and "the importance of silence in a world that is increasingly noisy."

The Merriam-Frontier Award has honored student writers since 1982. It was established by the late H.G. Merriam, a UM English professor. Merriam arrived at UM in 1919 after being a member of the first class of American Rhodes Scholars. He began teaching creative writing in 1920 with five students and with them founded the literary magazine Frontier. Merriam spent his career nurturing Western writers and encouraging the Western voice in writing. He created the undergraduate degree in creative writing, the second of its kind in the United States after Harvard University.

UM began offering the MFA in Creative Writing in 1964. For more about the award, visit <https://www.umt.edu/creative-writing/scholarships/merriam-frontier.php> .

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