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SCHOOL OF LAW

UM Pre-Law Program Boasts 91% Placement Rate

28 DECEMBER 2023



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UM Alumni Keep Health Care Local in Small-Town Montana

27 DECEMBER 2023

COLLEGE OF FORESTRY AND



CONSERVATION

Yellowstone Project: UM Student Takes 3D Odyssey Through the Wolf Skull Archives

26 DECEMBER 2023



RESEARCH

\$4M Award Funds UM Biomedical Entrepreneurship and Innovation Hub

22 DECEMBER 2023



**COLLEGE OF FORESTRY AND
CONSERVATION**

UM Study Reveals Stark Decline in Mammal Diversity With Urbanization

21 DECEMBER 2023



UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

If You're Gonna Play in Texas: UM Fundraising to Send Band to Championship Game

19 DECEMBER 2023



UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

UM Launches Webpage for Griz Fans Traveling to National Championship in Texas

16 DECEMBER 2023



UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

UM Announces Fall 2023 Candidates for Graduation

14 DECEMBER 2023



UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

UM Grant to Boost Digital Connections With Tribal College Partners

13 DECEMBER 2023



UM FOUNDATION

New Terry Payne Catalyst Award To Recognize Leadership in Service

11 DECEMBER 2023



UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

UM to Celebrate Graduates at Dec. 15 Fall Commencement Ceremony

11 DECEMBER 2023



**COLLEGE OF FORESTRY AND
CONSERVATION**

UM Montana Climate Office, CSKT Digital Story Collection Honored With TEK Award

08 DECEMBER 2023



SCHOOL OF LAW

UM Law Student Seeks to Improve Preventative Care in Social Work with Joint Degree

07 DECEMBER 2023



**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND
SCIENCES**

Acclaimed Author to Join UM as Kittredge Distinguished Writer

06 DECEMBER 2023



UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

Bugs in a Rug: UM and New Missoula Butterfly House Share Close Connection

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Accessibility

A to Z

Directory

Campus Map

Campus Safety

Employment

Refer A Griz



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SCHOOL OF LAW

UM PRE-LAW PROGRAM BOASTS 91% PLACEMENT RATE

28 DECEMBER 2023

Lawyer Alyssa Campbell, left, got her start in the legal profession with the help of UM's Pre-Law Program Director Dr. Soazig Le Bihan

By Phil Stempin, UM News Service

MISSOULA – The road to law school is more often a winding road than superhighway – with the occasional pot hole thrown in along the way.

For University of Montana law student Alyssa Campbell, the path to becoming a lawyer started with an overheated car on a backroad near Canyon Ferry. The mechanic she called for help drove the car in this broken state and blew the engine. This led to another bumpy road: small claims court.

Despite her lack of legal training, Campbell meticulously researched case law and presented a compelling argument. Impressed, the judge assumed she was a law student.

“I said no, and he said, ‘Well, you should be,’ and that moment changed everything,” said Campbell, who bounced from wildlife biology to pre-pharmacy as an undergrad. “I knew this was what I wanted to do with my life.”

Campbell was a junior when she was inspired by this courtroom encounter, putting her on the road to UM’s Pre-Law Program. The hands-on attention given to students in the program has led to an impressive placement rate, with 91% of its students successfully entering law schools, surpassing the national average of 69%. Many enroll in UM’s [Alexander Blewett III School of Law](#), while some enroll in other prestigious law schools around the country.

She was hooked after attending a meet-and-greet put on by Dr. Soazig Le Bihan, director of UM’s [Pre-Law Program](#).

“Soazig and I talked about needing to raise my GPA to get into Montana’s law school. After that, it was straight As for me,” Campbell said. “At that point I became focused and started applying myself.”

UM's pre-law program offers advice on the classes and experiential learning opportunities students should pursue to cultivate the skills necessary for legal thinking and the Law School Admission Test. The pre-law program is open to all majors.

“While we have our fair share of political science majors enrolling in pre-law,” Le Bihan said, “we’ve also had some come from forestry, health, math and music.

“Many times, these students plan to combine their original majors with law to eventually practice in the fields they care about, she added. “For example, an environmental studies major may work toward a career in environmental law.”

Campbell now works as an attorney focusing on civil litigation at Milodragovich, Dale & Steinbrenner PC in Missoula and has recently accepted a shareholder offer.

“Pre-law made going to law school seem more realistic,” said Campbell. “It’s not just a pipe dream, you can do it.”

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Contact: Phil Stempin, director of events, marketing and communications, UM Alexander Blewett III School of Law, 406-243-6509, phil.stempin@umontana.edu.

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A to Z

Directory

Campus Map

Campus Safety

Employment

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*UM alums and lifelong best friends Stacy Conrow-Ververis, left, and Laurel Chambers are the CFO and CEO, respectively, of Mineral Community Hospital in their hometown of Superior.
(UM photo by LeAnn Layton)*

By Kelly Mulcaire, UM News Service

Superior, MT – Working every day with your best friend would be a dream come true for some

people. Getting to work with your best friend to provide a vital service to your hometown community would make it even more special.

For University of Montana alums Stacy Conrow-Ververis and Laurel Chambers that dream is a reality.

The lifelong best friends are the CFO and CEO, respectively, of Mineral Community Hospital in **Superior**, where they were born and raised. The hospital is the main provider of health care in Mineral County and offers a 24-hour emergency room for rural residents. The next closest option is about an hour away in Missoula, so the duo knows how important their hospital is to the community.

“It’s our parents, it’s our friends’ parents, it’s our family,” Chambers said of the patients they serve. “If you had to run your parents to the ER in Missoula, that would be terrible.”

Considering they both agree that getting to work side by side is a rewarding part of their job, it’s not so surprising, then, that they both decided to attend UM for college.

Chambers studied athletic training with plans to pursue a career in physical therapy. Conrow-Ververis earned her degree in elementary education while commuting from Superior each day. Even as busy full-time students, the friends still made time to catch up.

“We knew each other’s schedules, so we always had our time to meet up,” said Chambers.

After graduating, Chambers decided to continue her education at Rocky Mountain College and become a physician’s assistant. Within a few years, she and Conrow-Ververis were back living and working in their hometown.

A human resources position opened up at the hospital, and Chambers encouraged her friend to apply. Conrow-Ververis was working at the town’s school at the time and wasn’t sure about working in a health care environment.

“I would have seen a job in a hospital and thought ‘that’s not me,’” she explains.

But she followed her friend’s advice and applied anyway. She got the job, to Chamber’s delight.

After several years in their roles at the hospital, leadership changes led them to take on the CEO and CFO positions. They knew the hospital needed to find someone who was willing to live long-term in Superior. After months spent searching, they realized they may be the best options to lead the hospital.

“It kept going on and we kept thinking of people and it didn’t work out,” said Chambers. “Ultimately I did it because we could do it with each other.”

Together they helped the hospital through the COVID-19 pandemic, partnering with the health department to provide vaccinations. They were able to use CARES Act funding to make much-needed improvements to the hospital’s facilities and equipment. Today the hospital is a Level IV Trauma Receiving Facility, which means it can provide life-saving stabilization for trauma patients and also treat heart attacks and strokes along with everyday care for the people of Mineral County.

“UM’s College of Health prepares our graduates to succeed throughout their careers,” said Reed Humphrey, dean of the College of Health. “Delivering quality health care in rural areas requires an understanding of rural life, and it is inspiring to see graduates like Stacy and Laurel return home to provide critical leadership at Mineral Community Hospital.”

The hospital provides a livelihood for a large portion of the county. With close to 90 employees, it’s now the county’s largest employer. Besides providing jobs for specialists and trained nurses and doctors, the hospital has opportunities for entry-level employment and training for students.

“We get to help people grow and mentor them in their jobs,” Chambers said. “We hire a lot of people who this is their first real job with benefits. And it’s fun to watch people grow.”

“Our hospital employees are our family, and we’re very tight-knit and we take care of each other,” added Conrow-Ververis.

Both feel that the work they do for the hospital is a way to give back to the place they grew up. And the support they get from the Mineral County community makes it all worthwhile.

“I have nothing but positives to say about coming back to your hometown,” said Chambers.

###

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Accessibility

A to Z

Directory

Campus Map

Campus Safety

Employment

Refer A Griz





COLLEGE OF FORESTRY AND CONSERVATION

YELLOWSTONE PROJECT: UM STUDENT TAKES 3D ODYSSEY THROUGH THE WOLF SKULL ARCHIVES

26 DECEMBER 2023

UM graduate student Maddy Jackson works to digitize wolf skull specimens from Yellowstone National Park. (UM photo by Ryan Brennecke)

By Elizabeth Harrison, UM News Service

MISSOULA – If not for its small size, distinguishing between the 3D-printed replica of Wolf 302M's skull and the actual animal it imitates would be nearly impossible.

The near-perfect printed artifact is part of a passion project spearheaded by Maddy Jackson, a wildlife biology graduate student at the University of Montana, who is casting new light on the treasures hidden within a special wolf skull collection in Yellowstone National Park.

"This is the first time that anyone has digitized three-dimensional museum specimens from Yellowstone to make them available to the public online," Jackson said.

She envisions a future where researchers, students and wolf enthusiasts can explore the digital repository without having to travel or knock on the doors of Yellowstone's Heritage and Research Center, where the collection is held.

Jackson's journey into wildlife biology began after graduating from the University of Minnesota with a degree in ecology in 2017. She ventured into the untamed expanses of northern Minnesota, central Idaho, eastern Montana and iconic Yellowstone, working as a wildlife research technician. It was during her tenure with the Yellowstone Wolf Project that she stumbled upon the wildlife biology program at UM.

As part of the project's road crew, Jackson observed wolf pack behaviors, monitored their interactions with humans and helped ensure a harmonious coexistence between park visitors and the beloved wolves. This is where the seed of an idea took root: Jackson envisioned a repository of 3D digital copies of Yellowstone's wolf skulls – a portal accessible to researchers and enthusiasts around the globe.

The archived wolf skulls hold the genetic blueprints, disease diaries and behavioral novellas of a scientifically and culturally significant wolf population. They are a testament to the triumphant return of wolves to Yellowstone in the mid-1990s, a conservation saga that continues to echo today.

With funding secured from Conservation Nation and expertise from her collaborator, Jonathan Keller at the University of New Mexico, Jackson began the laborious task of digitizing the historic wolf skull collection. Each skull is rotated on a Bluetooth turntable and meticulously

captured through the lens of photogrammetry. Jackson sends the images to Glenn Kneebone, program manager for the UM Mansfield Library, 3D Lab, Studios, & Innovative Spaces. Kneebone then transforms the digital copies into physical replicas.

Jackson's endeavor to unravel the secrets within the skulls extends beyond herself and the confines of Yellowstone.

"I can't possibly look into all of them, so making skulls available makes it possible for other people to ask their own questions about the collection," she said.

###

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A to Z

Directory

Campus Map

Campus Safety

Employment

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RESEARCH

\$4M AWARD FUNDS UM BIOMEDICAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION HUB

22 DECEMBER 2023



Researchers Erica Woodahl (left) and Karen Brown will help boost biomedical innovation across a four-state region with UM's new research evaluation and commercialization hub.

MISSOULA – The University of Montana recently earned a four-year, \$4 million Research Evaluation and Commercialization Hub (REACH) award from the National Institutes of Health. The award will establish the **L.S. Skaggs Institute for Health Innovation–Research Evaluation and Commercialization Hub (SIHI-REACH)**.

The UM-based hub will accelerate commercialization of biomedical innovation across Montana, Alaska, Idaho, and Wyoming, as well as help academic innovators develop medical products that address unmet medical needs across the U.S.

Only five such hubs were funded across the country. It will partner with a diverse set of academic institutions – including universities and community, technical and tribal colleges – across the four-state region to train the next generation of biomedical innovators in entrepreneurship and product development.

“UM is focused on addressing equity in access to research for rural and tribal communities, and

supporting biomedical research initiatives within Montana,” said Scott Whittenburg, UM vice president for research and creative scholarship. “The hub will help capture and commercialize our University intellectual property, attract biotech partners and investors, and ultimately grow the biomedical product development sector in the region.”

“The path for biomedical innovators to commercialize their technology is challenging to navigate, especially in an under-resourced area,” said Dr. Karen Brown, a co-principal investigator of the grant. “Advancing academic research and innovation from bench to bedside and into the hands of patients often includes really talented scientists and entrepreneurs leaving the region to pursue better access to expertise and funding. We want to keep them here.”

Proof-of-concept funding of up to \$100,000 will be available to innovators to support business and product testing activities. SIHI-REACH will collaborate with leaders at the University of Washington to connect biomedical product development capabilities from the resource-rich center of the Puget Sound across the region. Cohorts of academic innovators will also gain access to mentorship from experienced entrepreneurs and inventors, and project management support from hub team members.

“Western Montana is emerging as a biomedical entrepreneurship and innovation corridor,” said Paul Gladen, UM associate vice president of research and economic development and co-investigator of the REACH award. “We are committed to fostering a community of early-stage entrepreneurs, connecting them to expertise and mentoring and building an ecosystem of resources for the region.”

The award is the latest program to be added to the new **L.S. Skaggs Institute for Health Innovation (SIHI)**, a UM institute dedicated to improving access to health care and emerging health innovation for rural and tribal populations. SIHI is poised to become a leader in developing partnerships to promote access to biomedical innovation in resource-limited areas.

“SIHI-REACH aims to reduce the barriers and bridge the resource gap facing academic innovators across the region,” said Dr. Erica Woodahl, director of SIHI and a co-principal investigator of SIHI-REACH. “The needs among rural and tribal areas that have largely been left out of investment in commercialization are different than metropolitan areas with academic medical centers. We are excited to create opportunities in early-stage biomedical product development that benefit from these diverse perspectives.”

Along with SIHI-REACH, the other four new REACH hubs are:

- Chicago Biomedical Consortium Hub of Innovative Technologies for Entrepreneurship and Science, led by Northwestern University.
- University of Maryland, Baltimore Life Science Discovery Accelerator.
- Gulf Coast Consortia led by Texas A&M Health.
- Mid-South REACH Hub led by Vanderbilt University.

###

Dr. Karen Brown, principal scientist, UM L.S. Skaggs Institute for Health Innovation, karen.brown@mso.umt.edu; Dr. Erica Woodahl, professor and director, UM L.S. Skaggs Institute for Health Innovation, erica.woodahl@mso.umt.edu.

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Accessibility

A to Z

[Directory](#)

[Campus Map](#)

[Campus Safety](#)

[Employment](#)

[Refer A Griz](#)



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COLLEGE OF FORESTRY AND CONSERVATION

UM STUDY REVEALS STARK DECLINE IN MAMMAL DIVERSITY WITH URBANIZATION

21 DECEMBER 2023

Postdoctoral researcher Chris Hansen installs a trail camera in the high country above Missoula to study the effects of urbanization on mammal diversity.

Some trail-camera images captured by Chris Hansen's research near Missoula.



By Elizabeth Harrison,
UM News Service

MISSOULA

– An elk pauses to gaze into the valley; a red fox playfully pounces into the snow; a mountain lion carries a white-tailed deer in its clamped jaws. These scenes, typically associated with remote wilderness areas, unfold surprisingly just above our rooftops, around the corner from our backyard garden and up the trail from our bustling







neighborhoods.

Through the lens of Chris Hansen's trail cameras, such snapshots not only capture these remarkable moments but also convey a critical call for the preservation of wild spaces.

Hansen is a postdoctoral researcher in the Boone and Crockett Wildlife Conservation Program at the University of Montana. His team deployed 178 motion-activated trail cameras at random sites across urban, suburban, exurban, rural and wild regions during a comprehensive study spanning from May to October 2019-2020.

The research aimed to identify how the number of houses in an area affects where animals live, how many of them there are, how many different types of species are present, how common they are and when they are most active during the day.

The findings, **recently published in the Journal of Mammalogy**, revealed that as cities get more crowded, there are fewer types of mammals around. Larger animals, in particular, are less common in urban areas.

While many species avoided developed areas, this research also demonstrated that some mammals, such as black bears and white-tailed deer, were able to survive and thrive in suburbia by becoming more active at night to avoid human contact.

“To me, one of the coolest findings is that nearly every camera I set photographed a wild mammal, which suggests that whether you're in your backyard or the backcountry around Missoula, you are surrounded by wildlife, even if you don't see it,” Hansen said. “I think that is an encouraging result when considering coexistence between humans and wildlife in a developing world.”

Hansen earned his Ph.D. from UM in December 2021. He has been at the forefront of wildlife research, focusing on the impact of urbanization and grazing on mammal communities.

“Chris’s work brings vital insights into the complex relationship between urbanization and mammalian biodiversity,” said Joshua Millspaugh, Hansen’s mentor and the Boone and Crockett Professor of Wildlife Conservation at UM. “His research not only highlights the importance of preserving wild spaces but also contributes valuable data to the ongoing dialogue surrounding urban planning and wildlife conservation.”

Hansen's interest in the subject stemmed from collaborative work with Roland Kays, a research professor at North Carolina State University and director of the Biodiversity & Earth Observation Lab at the NC Museum of Natural Sciences. The work focused on urban wildlife and the effects of urbanization on mammals in eastern regions. Motivated to explore regional differences, Hansen’s study in Missoula challenged assumptions and provided a nuanced perspective on the impact of urbanization in less developed areas.

“I think it’s great in that it demonstrates how important these wild spaces are,” Hansen said. “As places like Missoula continue to grow, and we think about urban planning, it demonstrates that we don’t want to develop outward into wild areas, showing that wild spaces are important to maintaining a diverse mammal community.”

Hansen’s research contributes significantly to the understanding of wildlife conservation in the face of urbanization, emphasizing the need for thoughtful planning to balance human development with the preservation of crucial habitats.

[Learn more about Hansen and his work in this video.](#)

###

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[Accessibility](#)

[A to Z](#)

[Directory](#)

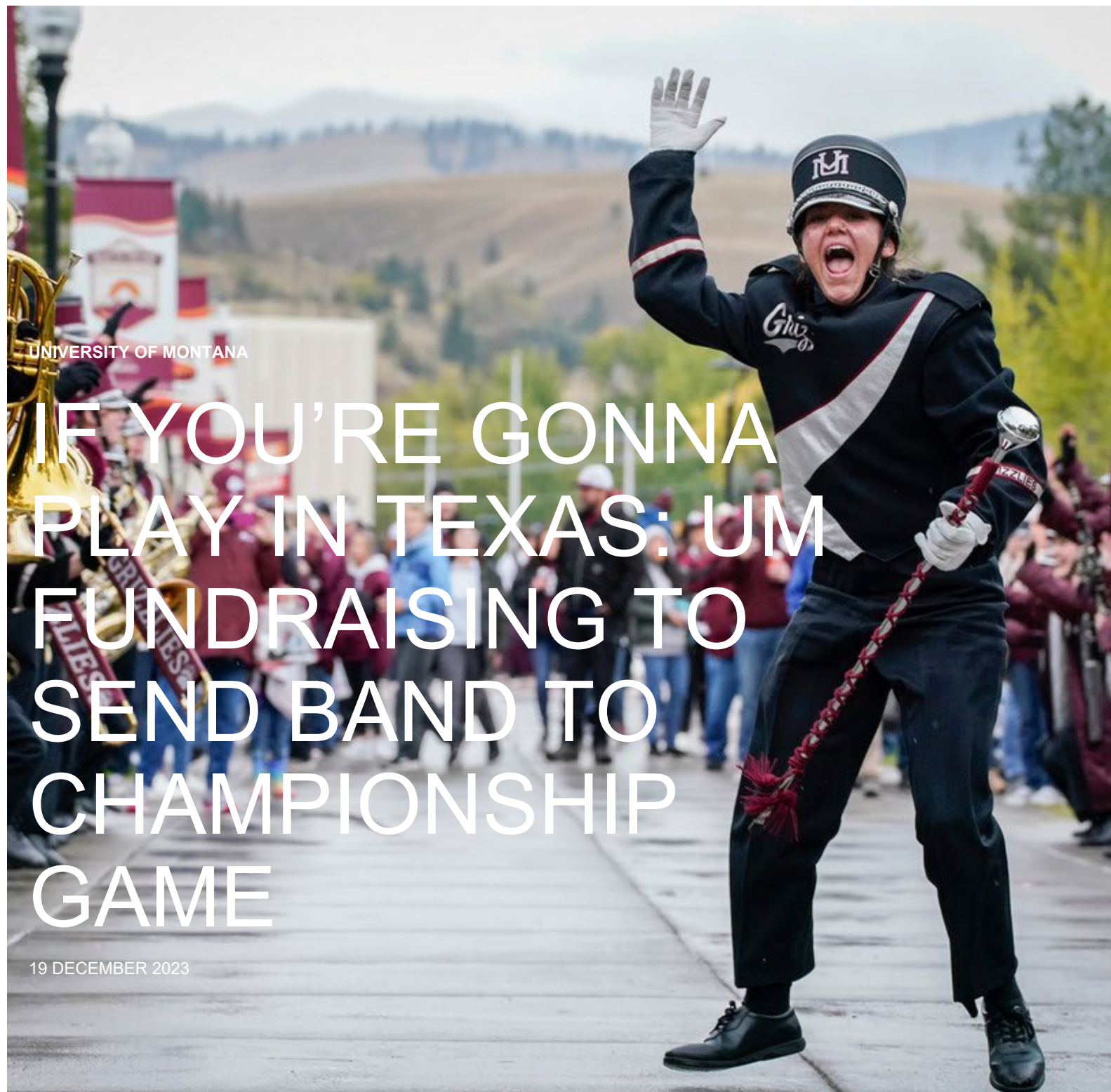
[Campus Map](#)

[Campus Safety](#)

[Employment](#)

[Refer A Griz](#)





UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

IF YOU'RE GONNA PLAY IN TEXAS: UM FUNDRAISING TO SEND BAND TO CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

19 DECEMBER 2023

MISSOULA – The University of Montana today launched an online fundraising campaign to send the Grizzly Marching Band to the Football Championship Subdivision National Championship in Frisco, Texas.

“The Grizzly Marching Band is thrilled to have the opportunity to perform on the national stage,” said Grizzly Marching Band Director Kevin Griggs. “The NCAA does not allocate any resources for marching band travel. The University has committed key support to cover numerous costs, but we know there are thousands of supporters of the Grizzly Marching Band across the country who want to be part of the movement to get the band to Texas.”

Donations can be made through a webpage hosted by the UM Foundation at SupportUM.org/Grizzly-Marching-Band.

UM has committed key support to fund the effort, and is now seeking public support to close the gap on the \$200,000 needed to send the band to Texas. It is estimated to cost nearly \$2,000 per student to send 100 band members to the national championship game. These funds are needed to cover the cost of air travel, bus rentals, hotel accommodations and meals.

“Students in the Grizzly Marching Band have invested hundreds of hours this fall to ensure Washington-Grizzly Stadium has the best gameday atmosphere in the nation,” said UM President Seth Bodnar. “The University is excited to showcase the band and all of their hard work, and we are grateful for the support they continue to receive.”

In addition to the football game, the Grizzly Marching Band will perform at Griz Fest – a [Saturday night pregame party hosted at Riders Field in Frisco for Griz fans](#). The band also will perform at the UM Alumni Association tailgate prior to the game.

###

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[Accessibility](#)

[A to Z](#)

[Directory](#)

[Campus Map](#)

[Campus Safety](#)

[Employment](#)

[Refer A Griz](#)



UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

UM LAUNCHES WEBPAGE FOR GRIZ FANS TRAVELING TO NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP IN TEXAS

16 DECEMBER 2023

MISSOULA – The University of Montana today launched a one-stop-shop webpage for all Griz fans planning to travel to Frisco, Texas for the Football Championship Subdivision National Championship on Jan. 7, 2024.

Griz fans are encouraged to visit the “[Road to Frisco](#)” webpage, hosted by the UM Alumni Association, for all information regarding the championship game, pre-game parties, tailgating and travel.

To purchase tickets, Griz fans will need to visit the [NCAA’s FCS Championship website](#) or use a trusted third-party vendor. The ticket allotment to UM is very limited.

Charter plane packages are scheduled to depart Missoula, Billings and Great Falls. All charter packages are expected to sell out quickly.

Additionally, the UMAA will host “Griz Fest” from 5 to 10 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 6, at the Frisco RoughRiders Ballpark. This will be the official pre-game rally for all Griz fans traveling to Texas for the game.

The UMAA also will host a pre-game tailgate prior to the national championship on Sunday, Jan. 7, adjacent to Toyota Stadium in Frisco.

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

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Accessibility

A to Z

Directory

Campus Map

Campus Safety

Employment

Refer A Griz



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About 800 students will graduate from UM on Friday, Dec. 15.

MISSOULA – The University of Montana has over 800 students who are degree candidates for fall semester 2023.

The students listed in the links below are UM degree candidates or have been awarded their degrees.

Students with “cum laude” after their name indicate a GPA of 3.40 to 3.69. “Magna cum laude” indicates a 3.70 to 3.89 GPA, and “summa cum laude” is 3.90 and above.

Official awarding of a degree and any official designation of graduation with honors or graduation with high honors is not made until students have completed their final term of enrollment and have met all requirements.

- [View a full list of Montana in-state candidates for graduation.](#) (Listed by hometown.)
- [View a full list of out-of-state candidates for graduation.](#) (Listed by state or country.)
- [View a full list of all candidates for graduation.](#) (Alphabetized by first name.)

All lists also are available online on the [UM Dean’s List and Degree Candidates page](#).

The [UM Fall Commencement Ceremony](#) will be held at 2 p.m. Friday, Dec. 15, in the Adams Center. [Mae Nan Ellingson](#), a delegate to Montana’s 1972 Constitutional Convention, will be the featured speaker.

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Contact: UM Registrar’s Office, graduation@umontana.edu.

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Accessibility

A to Z

Directory

Campus Map

Campus Safety

Employment

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UM GRANT TO BOOST DIGITAL CONNECTIONS WITH TRIBAL COLLEGE PARTNERS

13 DECEMBER 2023

Karla Bird, UM tribal outreach specialist, and Zach Rossmiller, UM chief information officer, have announced a grant that will work toward boosting digital network connections with tribal colleges across Montana. (UM photo by Ryan Brennecke)

MISSOULA – In a groundbreaking effort to bridge the digital divide across Big Sky Country, the University of Montana has earned a \$200,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to

plan how to boost digital network connections with its tribal college partners.

UM's Chief Information Officer Zach Rossmiller will oversee the grant, which he said will revolutionize digital access for Montana's tribal colleges and universities.

"Digital equity, the cornerstone of this transformative initiative, strives to ensure that every individual, regardless of their geographical location, enjoys equal access to online resources," Rossmiller said. "In today's increasingly interconnected world, high-speed network connections are paramount for academic programs, research endeavors, collaboration opportunities and remote learning."

He said a high level of digital access is not universally available with UM's tribal college and university partners, "and it's imperative that we address and rectify this issue."

Montana's digital equity gap is characterized by stark disparities in internet access and connectivity. Rossmiller said that while urban areas may benefit from robust infrastructure, many rural and tribal communities in the state still grapple with limited internet access, hindering their ability to participate in the digital age effectively.

"This digital divide disproportionately affects students, researchers and community members in these underserved regions," he said, "limiting their access to educational opportunities, job prospects and vital online resources."

Dr. Karla Bird, UM's tribal outreach specialist, underscores the pressing need for infrastructure improvements. Located in rural communities, Montana's tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) offer quality academic degree programs, conduct pioneering research and enhance workforce opportunities.

"Improving internet connections not only strengthens TCU's ability to continue this vital work but also expands their potential for academic and scientific collaboration and enables them to better serve their communities," Bird said.

The NSF planning grant is called "CC* CIRA: ICARE+: Addressing Montana's Digital Equity Gap." It will fund a collaborative effort that brings together a skilled team of IT professionals and researchers from UM, TCUs and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium.

Their mission: to comprehensively assess the cyberinfrastructure requirements unique to each Montana TCU. The culmination of their findings will be presented at an upcoming “Bridge the Digital Equity Gap” workshop, attended by key representatives from the Montana University System, Internet2 officials and other infrastructure experts. The workshop’s objective is to blueprint a networking infrastructure that guarantees robust, high-speed and sustainable connections at every TCU site.

“The ultimate result of this collective endeavor will be a meticulously crafted plan, leveraged to secure additional funding dedicated to closing Montana's digital equity gap,” Rossmiller said.

UM’s receipt of this NSF grant signals a transformative step towards achieving digital equity, fostering educational access and bolstering research and collaboration opportunities for TCUs across Montana, Bird said.

###

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[Accessibility](#)

[A to Z](#)

[Directory](#)

[Campus Map](#)

[Campus Safety](#)

[Employment](#)

[Refer A Griz](#)



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UM FOUNDATION

NEW TERRY PAYNE CATALYST AWARD TO RECOGNIZE LEADERSHIP IN SERVICE

11 DECEMBER 2023

*Terry
Payne
(center)
is
pictured
with*



Montana Commissioner of Higher Education Clayton Christian (left) and UM President Seth Bodnar at a Nov. 16 event. UM unveiled a portrait of Payne by Mike Hamblin of Butte that will hang in the new Montana Museum of Art and Culture.

MISSOULA – Terry Payne built his career around the “three Cs” of Clients, Colleagues and Communities. Now, the 1963 University of Montana alumnus and founder of PayneWest Insurance is being honored for his deep commitment to supporting and serving those around him.

The University’s new Terry Payne Catalyst Award recognizes Payne’s extraordinary contributions to UM and the communities of Montana and the region. The award was announced at a Montana University System Board of Regents event on Nov. 16.

“With this prestigious award we acknowledge that leadership in service to others is one of society’s most important pillars and that leaders who, like Terry, take action to build up people and communities should be held in our highest esteem,” UM President Seth Bodnar said.

“We are deeply humbled and forever grateful for the transformational impact Terry has had not just at UM, but also throughout the Montana University System and in communities across the

state and region.”

UM will bestow the award upon leaders who demonstrate Payne’s level of commitment to community and business leadership, volunteerism and philanthropy, and who inspire others to improve lives and serve communities. The award will be conferred by UM periodically as worthy candidates are identified.

“I am deeply grateful for this award. However, in the words of my friend, Tom Scott, ‘It is “We,” not “Me,”’ that deserves recognition,” Payne said.

Payne got his start in 1972, when he launched a Missoula-based insurance agency that evolved into PayneWest Insurance, which became the largest privately owned insurance broker in the Western U.S. and one of the top 10 employee-owned insurance brokers in the country until it was acquired by Marsh McLennan Agency in 2021.

Operating as Marsh McLennan Agency’s Northwest regional hub, more than 750 PayneWest employees continue to provide insurance services through offices across Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington.

Throughout his career, Payne has maintained that it’s the employees who have made his enterprises a success.

“While I might come up with ideas and spur initiatives, it is our colleagues that perform the service and do the work that has made our companies successful,” Payne said. “Throughout my life, I have been blessed with family, colleagues, clients and friends who are behind whatever success I have enjoyed. Plus, we all have had the joy and benefit of being based in the State of Montana, while also serving the great states of Idaho, Oregon and Washington.”

Payne’s contributions as a business leader reach far beyond the insurance industry. He previously served on the UM Foundation Board of Trustees and on the board as a director for several large corporations, including the Washington Companies and the First Interstate BancSystem Inc.

Terry, his wife, Patt, and their family also are generous philanthropists whose contributions have created opportunity and access in communities throughout Montana and the region. They are passionate supporters of higher education, having given significant gifts to the University of Montana, Montana State University, Gonzaga University and Carroll College.

At UM the Payne family's contributions have reached every corner of campus. Their giving has included investments in the Payne Family Native American Center, which since 2010 has been a gathering place and second home to Native students and their families, as well as tribal visitors and scholars from across the state and across the nation; a number of student scholarships, including the Payne Family Impact Scholarships that have allowed Montana high school students who are not Pell-eligible but face significant financial need to pursue higher education; and the newly opened Montana Museum of Art and Culture building – the museum's first permanent home – which was supported by a lead gift from the Payne family.

“Terry's leadership and remarkable commitment to elevating opportunity and quality of life for all Montanans is what makes him such a force for positive change,” said Cindy Williams, president and CEO of the UM Foundation.

The Payne family's numerous gifts to other Montana organizations reflect their deep care for community. Their giving has included contributions to the City of Missoula, Missoula Public Library, Partners Hope Foundation, Mountain Home Montana, Shodair Children's Hospital, Watsons Children's Shelter and many more.

A respected and admired leader, Payne's honors have included UM's Distinguished Alumni Award in 2006 and an honorary doctorate in 2014. He is a 2008 recipient of the UM Foundation's Neil S. Bucklew Presidential Service Award and a 2015 recipient of the Order of the Grizzly Award. He was inducted into the Montana Business Hall of Fame in 2016 and received MSU's Presidential Medallion in 2019. In addition, Payne received an honorary doctorate from Gonzaga University in 2022.

###

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UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

UM TO CELEBRATE GRADUATES AT DEC. 15 FALL COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY

11 DECEMBER 2023

MISSOULA – The University of Montana will celebrate over 200 degree candidates who make up the fall class of 2023 during its Commencement celebration on Friday, Dec. 15.

The University will host the on-campus ceremony at 2 p.m. in the Adams Center.

“We are thrilled to close out the semester by celebrating our fall graduates,” said UM President Seth Bodnar. “These students have worked hard to earn this great achievement, and our entire UM community is excited to honor their efforts. It has been a tremendous fall on our campus, and that is in large part due to our students who keep persevering to reach their full potential.”

During the ceremony, UM will present an honorary doctorate to Mae Nan Ellingson. Ellingson was a delegate to the 1972 Montana Constitutional Convention, where she led proposals for the state’s Declaration of Rights, which includes equal rights for women and the right to privacy for every Montanan.

Guests attending the ceremony do not need tickets. Parking will be free, and [UDASH buses will run as part of their regular Friday schedule.](#)

UM will provide additional ADA parking spaces and seating areas for the ceremony. Other accessible accommodations are available on a first-come basis. Please arrive early if accessible accommodations are needed. Attendees in need of other accessibility accommodations can email Brandon Kress in the Adams Center at brandon.kress@mso.umt.edu or call 406-243-5357. Visit the [Accessibility and Special Accommodations page](#) for more information.

The public also can livestream the event on the [Fall 2023 Commencement website.](#)

For more information visit [2023 Fall Commencement](#) or email questions to commencement@umontana.edu.

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UM / News / UM Montana Climate Office, CSKT Digital Story Collection Honored With TEK Award

COLLEGE OF FORESTRY AND CONSERVATION

UM MONTANA CLIMATE OFFICE, CSKT DIGITAL STORY COLLECTION HONORED WITH TEK AWARD

08 DECEMBER 2023

A bald eagle flies before the Mission Mountains on the Flathead Indian Reservation. (Photo by Tommy Martino)



MISSOULA – A groundbreaking digital story collection, “[Explore Climate Actions on the CSKT Flathead Reservation](#),” recently clinched the prestigious Esri Native Nations Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) Award in the 2023 ArcGIS StoryMaps Competition.

The collection was created by the [Montana Climate Office](#) at the University of Montana and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation.

This project is a central component of the [Native Drought Resilience Project](#), a collaborative effort between CSKT, Salish Kootenai College, the UM climate office and the Wilderness Society. The effort was led by Kyle Bocinsky, Montana Climate Office director of climate

extension.

“We are honored to receive the Esri Native Nations TEK Award,” Bocinsky said. “This recognition is a testament to CSKT’s commitment to leveraging technology to convey the profound impacts of climate change on the reservation and to engage the community in solutions.”

Esri, A global leader in geographic information system (GIS) software, location intelligence and mapping, presented the award in recognition of the exceptional efforts made by CSKT to use technology to convey vital information about climate actions on the Flathead Reservation.

Authored by Mike Durglo Jr., the CSKT climate change coordinator, and developed by Annika Mayer, the Native Drought Project story map developer and a Montana Climate Office staff member, the story collection aims to enhance communication about CSKT's climate plan among tribal members.

The web-first format provides an interactive and accessible experience, highlighting the impacts of drought and climate change on various sectors, including forestry, water, wildlife and fisheries. Each chapter concludes with proposed solutions, transforming a static document into a dynamic resource.

CSKT leaders will present the StoryMap to communities on the Flathead Reservation in an effort to empower tribal members with knowledge and actionable insights to address the challenges posed by climate change.

The Native Drought Resilience project was funded by the [National Integrated Drought Information System](#). It secured funding through the FY 2022 Coping with Drought Competition – Building Tribal Drought Resilience. A portion of the grant was allocated to develop a series of Esri StoryMaps based on the [CSKT Climate Change Strategic Plan](#). Mayer collaborated with Durglo, engaging with CSKT tribal members and staff to create the first StoryMap.

StoryMaps will serve the dual purpose of enhancing the impact of CSKT’s strategic plan and spotlighting the goals and actions undertaken by the tribes. The project would not have been possible without contributors Kari Kingery, Casey Ryan, ShiNaasha Pete, Les Evarts, Erin Clinkenbeard, Cody Goklish, Blair Libby and Martin Zobel.

“Their collective dedication and expertise have significantly enriched the story collection,

creating a comprehensive resource for the CSKT community,” Bocinsky said. “The University of Montana’s pivotal role in this collaboration underscores its commitment to advancing climate resilience and empowering Indigenous communities.”

[Read more about the Esri ArcGIS StoryMaps Competition in this blog post by Esri.](#)

###

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Directory

Campus Map

Campus Safety

Employment

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SCHOOL OF LAW

UM LAW STUDENT SEEKS TO IMPROVE PREVENTATIVE CARE IN SOCIAL WORK WITH JOINT DEGREE

07 DECEMBER 2023

Breanna Belgarde, shown here with daughter Emery, is enrolled in UM's joint-degree program, which allows her to pursue a law degree in tandem with a Master of Social Work. (UM photo by Coral Scoles-Coburn)

By Lily Soper, UM News Service

MISSOULA – Breanna Belgarde first applied for law school in 2017 but ultimately deferred a few years for an even better opportunity.

“I wanted to focus on being a mom,” said Belgarde, who learned she was pregnant between the application process and her acceptance to the University of Montana’s **Alexander Blewett III School of Law**.

While Belgarde already knew she wanted to become a lawyer, it was during this interim period when she discovered her passion for social work as well.

“Having my daughter inspired me to learn about child development, which led me to learn about adverse childhood experiences and the cycle of family violence,” Belgarde said. “I got really interested in what preventative measures could be implemented in prenatal education.

“When I was pregnant, they tested to ensure I didn’t have any serious medical issues every time I went to the doctor,” she said, “but nobody told me how my baby was going to develop after it’s born, or what support systems were available or just how hard it’s going to be to be a parent. It was a real firsthand experience for me to see how little support there is for new expecting parents.”

Using her bachelor’s degree in English literature from UM Western, Belgarde began work for a small domestic violence shelter writing and managing grants between having her daughter and reapplying for law school.

“I got to do some hands-on advocacy work there, which taught me even more about how our system operates and where we can improve preventative care for new families,” said Belgarde. “Once I saw how social work and the legal system interact with each other, the joint-degree program was a no-brainer for me.”

The University’s **joint-degree program** allows law students to pursue a law degree in tandem with a Master of Social Work, expediting their education and tailoring it to their specific career goals. The law school offers four different joint degree programs. Each allows students to obtain the two degrees in a shorter time frame. The time-saving aspect can be crucial for

students like Belgarde, with a clear-cut plan for post-graduation.

As an enrolled member of the Little Shell Tribe, Belgarde foresees bringing her education to Little Shell's management base in Great Falls to aid in building their family court system. The tribe received federal recognition in 2019 and is currently building its governmental administration.

"Little Shell children already fell under Indian Child Welfare Act protection but they have more sovereignty and power as a federally recognized tribe," Belgarde said. "This provides a lot of opportunity for progress if there is a legal body there to facilitate it. I'm hoping to help them build their own court system."

While the process of building a governmental administration takes years, Belgarde looks forward to finishing both degrees so she is available to be on the ground floor of this growth.

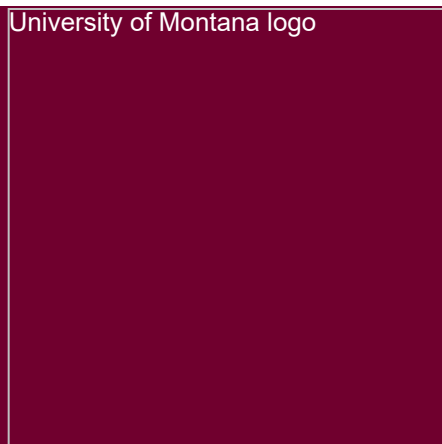
"I knew coming in that I wanted both a J.D. and a Master of Social Work whether or not I got into the programs at the same time," she said. "It just so happens that I could do both faster at UM."

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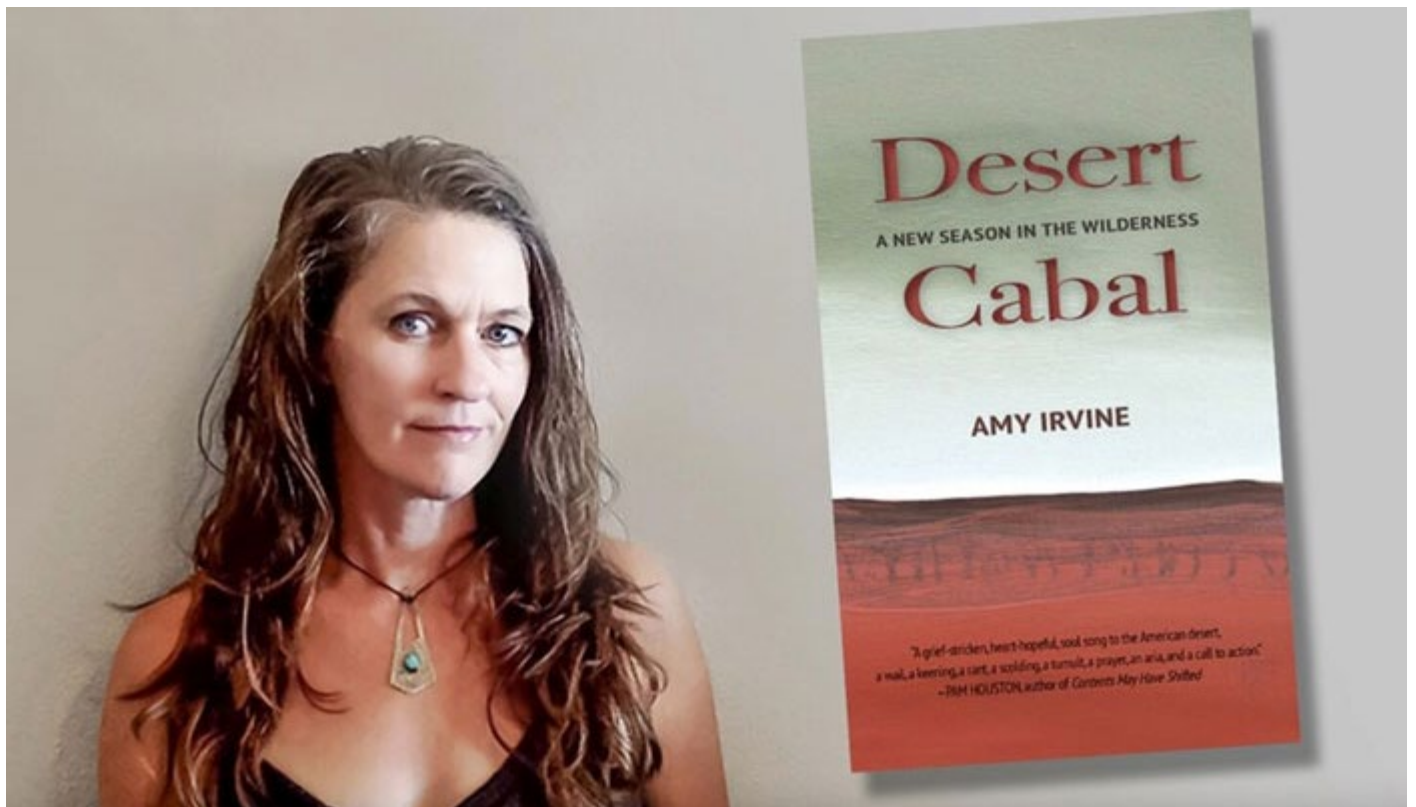
UM / News / Acclaimed Author to Join UM as Kittredge Distinguished Writer

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES

ACCLAIMED AUTHOR TO JOIN UM AS KITTRIDGE DISTINGUISHED WRITER

06 DECEMBER 2023

Award-winning author Amy Irvine was named the next Kittredge Distinguished Visiting Writer at UM. (Photo by Susie Grant)



MISSOULA – Amy Irvine, winner of the Orion Book Award, will serve as the 2024 Kittredge Distinguished Visiting Writer in Environmental Studies at the University of Montana.

Her nonfiction book, “Desert Cabal,” is a fierce and provocative, feminist response to Edward Abbey’s “Desert Solitaire,” the canonical book about the American desert.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of its publication, Irvine names and questions the “lone male narrative” – white and privileged as it is – that still has its boots planted firmly at the center of today’s wilderness movement, even as she celebrates the lens through which Abbey taught so many to love the wild remains of the nation.

“The natural world is changing at breakneck speed,” said Irvine. “The human IQ is in measurable decline. So what stories do we tell now? How do we tell them – and to whom? More than ever, writers are tasked with rousing readers from profound levels of intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical lethargy – the heft of this task can overwhelm.”

“Irvine is asking all the right questions,” said Mark Sundeen, UM assistant professor of Environmental Studies. “Finally someone has the guts to wrassle Abbey off the pedestal back down to the red dirt where he belongs. Her combination of memoir, criticism and reportage breathes new life into writing about the natural world.”

At UM, Irvine will teach a graduate workshop in environmental writing next spring.

“To teach writing in this moment that too often feels apocalyptic but also brims with wondrous possibility – and to teach it in a program I’ve long admired – is both an honor and act of devotion,” she said.

From Norwood, Colorado, Irvine is author of two memoirs: “Trespass,” which won the 2009 Orion Book Award, and “Almost Animal,” a widely anticipated story about motherhood and the climate crisis to be published by Spiegel and Grau in 2024.

Her nonfiction has appeared in Orion, Outside, High Country News, and Best American Science and Nature Writing. She has taught at the MountainView MFA program, Fishtrap, Orion Writing Workshops and many other venues.

Previous Kittredge Distinguished Visiting Writers in Environmental Studies include Terry Tempest Williams, Rebecca Solnit, Craig Childs and, most recently, Sierra Crane Murdoch.

UM graduate students interested in Irvine’s writing workshop can email mark.sundeen@umontana.edu.

###

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UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

BUGS IN A RUG: UM AND NEW MISSOULA BUTTERFLY HOUSE SHARE CLOSE CONNECTION

04 DECEMBER 2023

Jen and Glenn Marangelo worked closely with UM faculty on the development of the new Missoula Butterfly House & Insectarium.

By Raequel Roberts, UM News Service

MISSOULA – When you're the executive director of a live zoo with exhibits starring giant African millepedes and blue death feigning beetles, your expense receipts look as exotic as your star attraction – a Chilean rosehair tarantula named Rosie.

There are the raspberry leaves gathered by busy leafcutter ants and devoured by the Australian walking sticks, for starters. Then there are the costs of keeping hundreds of decidedly short-lived butterflies in flight.

“Our third-biggest cost right after utilities and personnel is actually butterfly pupae,” said Jen Marangelo, founder of the **Missoula Butterfly House & Insectarium**, which opens to the public Dec. 6. “At any one time we'll have 500 free-flying butterflies here, and that means buying 250 pupae a week. They are expensive.”

Marangelo is standing in the butterfly greenhouse, a key feature of the new Gerald W. Marks Exploration Center at the Missoula County Fairgrounds.

Under construction for three years, the insectarium includes interactive learning stations – get on a scale to learn how many ants it takes to equal your weight – a beehive replete with an exterior exit hole for residents to gather nectar in nearby neighborhoods and a nook for the youngest nature explorers to learn all there is to know about Madagascar hissing cockroaches.

“There is such a diversity of insects in the world, and if you pay attention to them, you can't help but be curious and in awe of their beauty and how they make their living,” Marangelo said. “If you have any curiosity at all, you can't help but be engaged.”

*Miriam Bayer, the
Butterfly House's
lead animal
keeper, tends to
insects housed at
UM during
construction.*

The idea to bring
an insectarium to
Missoula came to



Marangelo while running a lab at the University of Montana in 2003. She was working for **Regents**

Professor Doug Emlen, who's garnered international renown for research in animal weaponry – most notably the significant horns sprouted by male scarab beetles.

“I really didn't know much about bugs before I started working for Doug, and I was so lucky to learn from him,” Marangelo said of her seven years working for Emlen. “We would get a lot of requests from teachers to bring bugs into schools or take kids out into the school yard to look for bugs, and I learned really early on that this is a wonderful tool for teaching kids.

“Animals of any kind, actually, are wonderful teaching ambassadors,” she added, “but bugs in particular are so diverse that any concept you wanted to teach you could find a bug model.”

A trip to a butterfly house in Seattle was the ultimate spark for Marangelo's decision to start something similar in Missoula.

“I was just blown away from the experience and could see everyone else was as well,” she said. “I realized butterflies are a great way to get people interested in insects. As we say in the industry: Butterflies are the gateway bugs to other bugs.”

Knowing nothing about running a zoo and little about the bug business or nonprofit administration, Marangelo enrolled in the Masters of Interdisciplinary Studies program at UM.

The program allowed her to tailor her studies, and when completed she and husband, Glenn Marangelo, a veteran of nonprofit development work, decided it was time to launch the insectarium. Fundraising and forming a board ensued.

Their first facility opened downtown in 2015 and remained there four years until their lease expired. Without a permanent building, some of the museum's insects went to live in Emlen's lab, while others, along with staff, went to temporary offices at the Montana Natural History Center.

"The bugs in Doug's lab must be permitted by the United States Department of Agriculture, because they could at some point in their lifespan damage crops. Keeping them requires lots of conditions," Marangelo said. "The ones we took to the natural history center didn't need permits."

That includes Rosie, the centipede collection and roaches.

Marangelo describes their time at the MNHC as a "wonderful partnership" but not without an occasional hiccup. Like when a vinegaroon, also called whip scorpion, got loose.

"Their defense is to shoot acetic acid – vinegar – out their rear," Marangelo said. "When it got loose, we tore the office apart. I emailed the whole staff and told them not to be frightened. It's funny, but everyone dropped what they were doing and found it very quickly."

"It looks like an alien," recalled MNHC Executive Director Thurston Elfstrom with a chuckle when talking about the escapee. "We cornered it in the elevator and waited for the experts to come."

*The new facility
features teaching
exhibits for
children and
adults.*

Finding a new
home and raising
the capital to pay



for a new facility – with a pandemic thrown in for good measure – made for plenty of anxious moments for the Marangelos, their staff and board.

With support from former board member Bryce Christiaens, weed district manager for the Missoula County Department of Ecology & Extension, a conversation began in 2018 about incorporating the proposed butterfly house with the county’s new extension building on the fairgrounds.

“Bryce knew about this goal to build a bigger building as an education center and bring in other partners, so we said ‘Let’s do this,’ and we were invited into this beautiful building and given a home,” Marangelo said. “We would never be able to be on the fairgrounds without being in partnership with the county and this building.”

In addition to playing host to the insectarium’s bugs during construction, Emlen has been its champion: serving on the board, making calls to donors when needed and being a keynote speaker at the zoo’s Bugs and Brews lecture series. Larry Gianchetta, former dean of UM’s College of Business; Shawn Clouse, a professor in the College of Business; and Dale Woolhiser, a UM alum; also lent their expertise to fundraising.

Emlen said the museum will be a big enough attraction to “pull people off the interstate” and is the perfect example of the symbiotic relationship between UM and the community.

But it serves a deeper role as well.

“In the current state of our society, science and scientists are increasingly less trusted and that worries me,” Emlen said. “Science is a wonderful and clear way to process much of what happens in our world.

“This new facility can remind people of the excitement that comes from the natural world – from these amazing insects and butterflies,” he added. “It’s through that awe and wonder that we can actually begin to find solutions to some of the problems that face us.”

Marangelo, a consummate promoter of all things with six legs, encourages Missoulians of every age to participate in the museum’s diverse programming, but to also venture out and experience the many insects that thrive in Montana.

“You don’t have to go to the tropics,” she said. “Go out in your backyard.”



Visitors are invited to step on a scale to learn how many ants it would take to equal their

weight.

###

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