

# MONTANA KAIMIN LOOKING FOR A LEAD DIER



STORY BY SAV CHAVEZ

PHOTOS BY JACKSON MAILEY



As the search for a new president passes two months, the hiring timeline remains unknown and faculty continue to feel left in the dark.

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The Montana Kaimin is a weekly independent student newspaper at the University of Montana. The Kaimin office and the University of Montana are located on land originally inhabited by the Salish People. Kaimin is a derivative of a Salish language word, "Qe'ymin," that is pronounced kay-MEEN and means "book," "message" or "paper that brings news."

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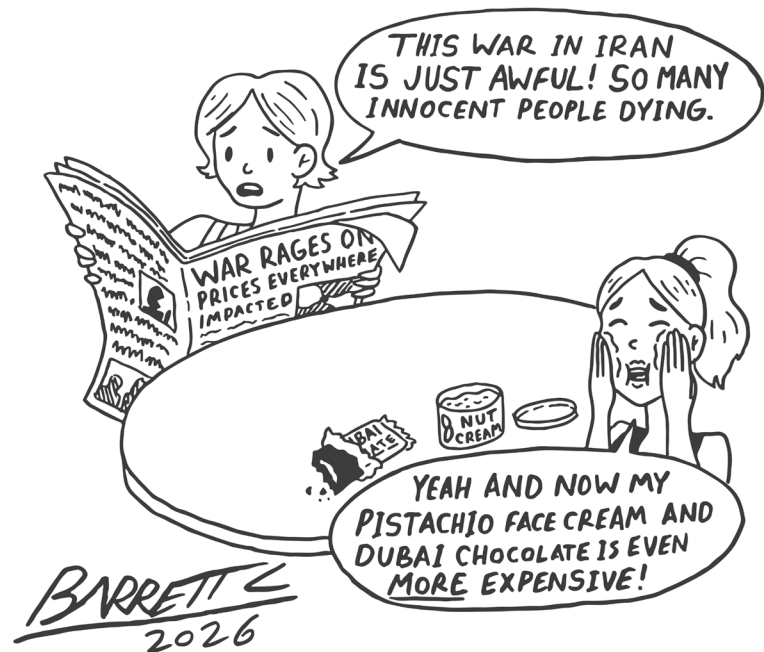
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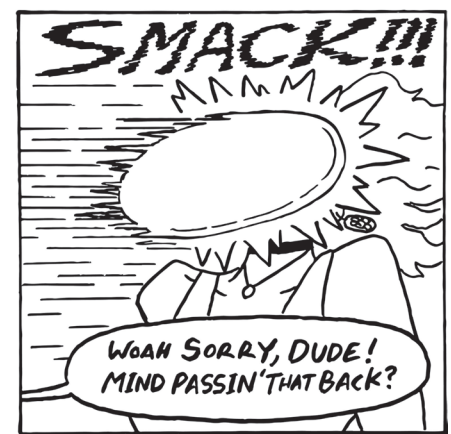
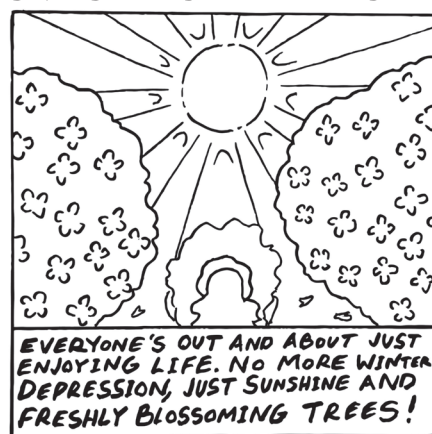
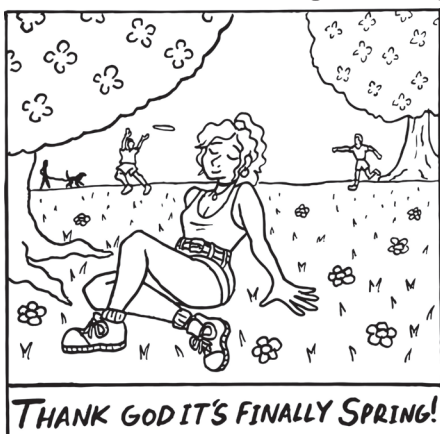
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## POLITICAL CARTOON



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# This is not transparency

This week's issue of the Kaimin features an all-too common theme: a campus population kept in the dark.

There will always be times in which the student population at the University of Montana can't be in the know. Moments in which, whether it be to protect personal information or maintain fair hiring processes, we as a collective have to live with the limited information we're given.

But lately, leadership on a student and administrative level at UM has let that mentality spread like poison in the well. As a result, important sections of campus continue to be uninformed about its vacant presidential office and nearly \$28,000 in mismanaged student tuition fees.

UM hasn't had a president since Seth Bodnar stepped down at the beginning of the year, an abrupt transition that set the tone for a semester's worth of miscommunication.

Since then, critical questions remain unanswered. There's still no clear

timeline of the presidential hiring process, or the deadline for hiring the new leader for the University. The student body and faculty alike only have generalized updates and no consistent information. In one day alone, a Kaimin reporter received multiple different answers regarding application numbers from presidential hiring committee members.

Dates for selecting finalists have no clear answer. According to Galen Hollenbaugh, the spokesperson for the Office for the Commissioner of Higher Education, a goal was set to select a finalist by the end of March, but updates from Commissioner Clayton Christian now state a campus tour for one candidate will take place on April 6-7.

The reality of this process stands in sharp contrast against a string of positive updates from Christian, who repeatedly stated that the hiring process continues to go smoothly.

When leadership on the highest level can't be consistent or clear, that sets

an example that bleeds down through campus to its student leadership.

Main Hall might be the beating heart of UM, but the students are its life blood. They pay thousands of dollars in tuition, money that fuels many organizations on campus, the Kaimin included. When that money is mismanaged, it's the right of the students footing the bill to know what happened and how it's going to be resolved.

When ASUM discovered the discrepancy between tuition fees and the actual amounts allotted to ASUM-funded organizations — nearly \$28,000 of student fees since 2022 — the student body should've been alerted right away. Instead, they've been left out of the conversation completely as ASUM quietly requested thousands of dollars back from student organizations.

Students vote on where their fees go. ASUM elections are right around the corner. Incoming candidates and incumbent Senators alike should be

aware when they throw around the word transparency, this is not what it looks like.

On a larger, cross-campus scale, University administrators failed to inform faculty and students of the wave of cuts that threatened many humanities and language programs this semester. Faculty members, such as associate professor Zhen Cao, found out too little too late that their classes were being cut, a departure from the typical proposals.

It's the job of press organizations like the Kaimin to keep students and Missoulians informed on what's going on, but it shouldn't take pressure from the media to get answers that inherently should be available. Instead, faculty, staff and students must continue to carry uncertainty on campus.

- Elle Daniel, editor-in-chief  
Like it? Hate it? Let us know.  
Email us your opinions at  
elle.daniel@umontana.edu

## SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

	5		2	4				
					7			
	1	6					7	
9							5	
				5		1		
4	2		3					
3			6					
			9		3			4
	4						8	3

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Edited by Margie E. Burke

### HOW TO SOLVE:

Each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9; each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each set of 3 by 3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

6	3	7	9	8	5	2	4	1
2	9	8	1	4	6	7	3	5
4	1	5	7	2	3	9	6	8
7	8	1	3	6	9	5	2	4
3	6	4	2	5	7	8	1	9
9	5	2	8	1	4	3	7	6
8	4	9	6	7	2	1	5	3
5	2	3	4	9	1	6	8	7
1	7	6	5	3	8	4	9	2

## International House of horse



University of Montana student Kodai Yamamoto, right, pets Tuna, Tamara Zaugg's 10-year-old rodeo horse, at an event hosted by the International House on March 27. TORI KUEHL | MONTANA KAIMIN

# In local news...

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## NEW SEELY LAKE TRAIL SYSTEM MAKES PROGRESS

A potential new trail system near Seeley Lake looks to help boost the local economy by attracting visitors following the recent closure of Pyramid Mountain Lumber.

Scenic Montana Trails received \$250,000 in funding from Missoula County last week to create 30 miles of trails in Lolo National Forest, according to Missoula Current. It's estimated that the project will require \$1.2 million in funding, and will connect to existing trails in the Seeley Creek Nordic Trails system.

"This is a big deal for Seeley Lake and for me, personally," said Cathy Kahnle, the bike chair for Scenic Montana Trails. "We've got an amazing team put together here. The ranger district has been working with us from day one. We've got a pretty big group of people working on this."

The first phase of the project's funding package has gained \$295,000 in volunteer labor value, \$90,000 from the Forest Service and \$75,000 in private funding, along with other sources.

Kahnle said the first phase began last fall to create a foundation for the new system. The second phase of the project will create trail loops, while the third will include options for more experienced hikers.

"We've been fortunate in our funding so far that we're starting to collapse these phases a little bit," Kahnle said. "We currently have funding and volunteers to complete the entire upper perimeter loop at this time. All the downhill trails will flow off that loop."

The project hopes to solve some of the issues that have arisen from the shutdown of Pyramid Mountain Lumber, a mill that contributed to the local economy.

"With the mill going down, it's really wrecked town," said Kevin Doherty, the district ranger for Seeley Lake. "But business owners see the value of what this new system is going to bring. If you get a real, purpose-built system, there's not a lot of them around here. Once you get a full system, people will drive."

## GENDER AND SEX REDEFINITION BILL SIGNED BY MONTANA GOVERNOR

A bill that defines sex as binary was signed by Gov. Greg Gianforte last Tuesday, almost a year after it passed the Legislature.

Senate Bill 437 amends many existing sections of Montana law to include new definitions for "male," "female," "sex" and "gender." It's similar to a 2023 law that was later declared unconstitutional, according to Montana Free Press.

The legislation defines whether someone is male or female based on their reproductive system. Broadly speaking, it defines a female as a person who naturally has, had, will have or would have a reproductive system which uses egg cells for fertilization.

It defines a male in similar terms as a person who has a reproductive system which uses sperm for fertilization.

These definitions are similar to the 2023 law, but notably remove mention of sex markers based on chromosomes.

The new definitions change over 60 sections of Montana law, applying anywhere that mentions the words sex, gender, male, female, man, woman, father or mother. The bill impacts laws that govern driver's licenses, marriage licenses and the state's anti-discrimination protections, alongside laws that govern the representation of men and women on state boards, commissions and committees.

Senate Bill 437 was passed by both chambers of the Legislature in April 2025, but political obstacles prevented it from reaching Gianforte until March 24.

It garnered support from Republican lawmakers, and opposition from Democrats. In the Montana Senate and House, all Republicans voted in favor of the bill, while all Democrats voted against it.

According to House Republicans, the delay was by design.

"Leadership has chosen to hold the bill to prevent it from being immediately tied up with ongoing litigation over a similar measure passed last session," said Joey Grewell, spokesperson for Montana House Republicans, in a press release.



## Next week on the Kaimin Cast ...

The Oval is a literary magazine written, edited and published by students. Students of all majors can submit writing or artwork in the spring semester to be considered for publication.

Those interested in helping the publication process can take part in it in the spring, where they will decide on submissions to publish and help the literary magazine come to life.

The Oval is an opportunity that can be a stepping stone for the careers of those in the class creating it, as well as those who get their work submitted.

"Once we have all the submissions, we have our boards. We have fiction, visual art, poetry and non-fiction. And then the boards, which are made up of several people each, will read every single work that we get and take the time to consider them," said Dante Terrio, The Oval's treasurer this semester.

To learn more about UM's literary magazine, check out our latest podcast "The Oval: A stepping stone" by heading to our website at [montanakaimin.com](http://montanakaimin.com).

- Chaytan Reid,  
audio reporter



New Kaimin Cast  
episode out this  
week. Stay tuned.  
Scan for the latest



## ISRAELI BATTALION PULLED FROM WEST BANK AFTER TENSIONS WITH NEWS TEAM

A reserve battalion of the Israeli military has been suspended from active duty in the West Bank after Israeli soldiers detained a group of CNN journalists, and one soldier said on camera that troops were carrying out "revenge" on the Palestinians.

One of CNN's cameramen was put in a chokehold and detained for about two hours alongside several of his colleagues, according to The New York Times.

During this detention, which took place last Thursday, an Israeli soldier was recorded saying that the West Bank was "for the Jews," and that the soldiers wanted revenge for the death of an Israeli teen who was killed in a car collision with a Palestinian on March 21.

The Israeli military announced on Monday that the soldier's reserve battalion was being pulled out of the West Bank for additional training.

In the statement, the military said that soldiers must "maintain composure, statesmanship and respect for the uniform they wear and the military they represent."

## AMERICAN AIRCRAFT DESTROYED BY IRAN

A U.S. radar aircraft was destroyed on Friday at an American airbase in Saudi Arabia, during an Iranian strike.

Several service members were also injured in the strike, which took place at Prince Sultan Air Base, roughly 80 miles southeast of Riyadh, according to NBC.

The struck aircraft was designed for warning and control purposes, and its destruction marks a theme in Iranian attacks.

"Iran is gradually eating away at the network of early warning systems that the U.S. has built over decades in the region," said Andreas Krieg, a senior lecturer at Kings College London's School of Security Studies, in written comments to NBC News on Monday.

Retired U.S. Army Lt. Col. Daniel Davis said he believes the problem stems from military misunderstandings in the U.S. government.

"There were too many in the administration that thought this was going to be a quick and easy thing," he said, adding that the "Iranian side still has plenty of missiles to keep going at a sustained rate."



# Anti-war display defaced by former University employee

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A former University of Montana employee was caught defacing placards protesting U.S. military action in Iran at a residence near campus on March 10.

Mehrdad Mostafavi, an Iranian immigrant who has lived in the U.S. for over 20 years alongside his wife Jennipha Nielsen, a fifth generation Montanan and Missoula local, captured footage of their sandwich board, calling for peace in the conflict, being vandalized. The footage was submitted to the UM Police Department following several reports from the couple of repeated harassment and destruction of property. The perpetrator in the footage was later identified through license plate information by the UMPD as 47-year-old Luke Armstrong, a former campus dining facilities manager.

"I don't know why," Mostafavi said. "Maybe because the sign says Iran, but I am against war, war with Iran, war with Europe, war with Israel, war with anyone. I just don't understand the problem with the banner."

The incident with the sandwich board is only one of four instances of harassment the family has faced over the last

month involving the large display of placards outside their home.

Prior to the incident with the sandwich board, the largest banner outside the couple's home stating "no war with Iran" had been hit with a paint balloon from the street by an unknown assailant. Additional footage provided by the couple also documented passersby screaming expletives at Mostafavi from their vehicles.

Following the prior three instances, the large display on the couple's front porch was torn down on March 23, not only ruining the sign, but causing what Nielson claims to have been over \$1,000 in damages.

The assailant of the display has not been identified by UMPD, according to the couple.

While Armstrong admitted to destroying the sandwich board, he denied participating in any of the additional incidents. Following his interrogation, UMPD required Armstrong to provide a written apology to the couple.

In the letter, delivered on March 13, Armstrong denied attacking the sign based on ideals or religion, claiming the action to have been "stupid" and "foolish" while denying involvement in any other incidents the couple had faced, and



Mehrdad Mostafavi, left, and Jennipha Nielsen pose on their front step on March 26.

WESTON FUDGE | MONTANA KAIMIN

blaming the action on "situational and psychological" reasoning.

"I am only all the more sorry that my foolishness has added more stress and malady to your lives," Armstrong stated in the letter.

According to the University campus directory, alongside Armstrong's portfolio, his tenure as facilities manager with Campus Dining began in 2016 and ended sometime last year. Armstrong could not be reached for a statement on his departure. UM Dining declined to comment on Armstrong's employment.

The couple feels as though the jurisdiction of campus officers, along with their reaction to the incident, carries the potential to place their safety in check.

"It really changes one's feeling of safety," Nielsen said. "That's nothing against campus police, but it's a different type of authority."

The UMPD, while having primary jurisdiction over campus students, has a jurisdiction of roughly a mile radius surrounding the University. While enforcing campus policy on top of legal code, campus police carry the same training and enforcing power of a state officer, including the ability to press both state and felony charges. Despite this, the couple has felt concerned about the officer's response to the incident.

According to the couple, following the instance with the sandwich board, UMPD became less and less involved

with each report submitted. Additionally, the lack of investigation into Armstrong's connection to the other instances despite evidence and costly damages has put the couple's faith in UMPD's ability to protect them in question.

"If this was a college student, or some local teenager I might feel a little differently, but he's 47 years old," Nielsen said. "I know 47-year-olds with grandchildren, people need to know they can't be acting like that."

Nielsen further raised concerns over the University's connections to Armstrong due to his prior employment, claiming the University has created a precedent in the past to prioritize "covering its own ass" over holding others to account.

UMPD could not be reached for comment on the case or policy surrounding defacement of property.

The incidents have created further stress for the couple. Mostafavi, who has numerous family members in Iran, recently lost contact with many of them due to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

This change in political environment, in addition to these incidents have made locals like Mostafavi fearful of what further tensions may not only bring, a reminder that conflict afar, whether in Washington D.C. or the Middle East, can still impact small towns.



A Haft-Sin arrangement sits on the table in Nielsen and Mostafavi's home, displaying their family in Iran, with whom they have recently lost contact. A Haft-Sin arrangement is an array of seven items displayed for the Iranian New Year, meant to symbolize renewal and harmony with nature.

WESTON FUDGE | MONTANA KAIMIN

# AI data center proposition at historic Bonner Mill site

IZZY SLAUGHTER | ARTS REPORTER

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A proposal from a company called Krambu has come through for an artificial intelligence data center at the historic mill site in Bonner, with the building left unoccupied by United Forest Products in the fall.

A public discussion was held last Friday about Krambu's interest in the mill site building.

"I hate it, it'd be too close and there's not anything good to come out of that," said Riley Hoggatt, a 21-year-old second-year psychology student at the University of Montana. "I think there are very few fields where it is actually required, I think it has the capability of being a tool, but I really don't think generative AI should exist."

This proposal still requires approval, and there are regulations that the company has to follow in order to gain it. For an AI data center like this, it must be located in an industrial zone, recycle all of its electronic waste and go through special exceptions because it is in a residential area. The company would also have to show that they provide renewable energy with their operations.

"Our jobs are to review project proposals and determine if they comply with the regulations," said Jennie Dixon, the planner for Missoula County Planning, Development and Sustainability. "If they don't, we look to see how to modify the plan so that it does meet the regulations or go through a review process that might be required by the regulations."

Dixon said that data centers fall under the same zoning regulations as cryptocurrency mining, and this project would be the first data center to have gotten this far in Montana. Dixon said that the reason for the two falling under the same zoning regulations is because two years after regulations were created, data centers started to become what they are today. The state has passed a law tying the two together as far as zoning regulations go.

Dixon explained that if this project continues, she would be the case plan-



The Bonner Mill Industrial Park, located between Bonner School District 14 and the Blackfoot River, is under consideration to be the site for a new artificial intelligence data center. **WESTON FUDGE | MONTANA KAIMIN**

ner for it and it would then go through the Missoula County Consolidated Land Use Board for review. The center would be close to a residential area, which would have to be very heavily considered during designing.

"We attended the community meeting and listened to people's concerns," Dixon said. "There's a vast array of concerns focused around energy and water and noise and lights and all the things that you would expect, right? But our job in reviewing a permit is not a public opinion kind of a process. Do they meet the regulations or do they not?"

Although the data center could be approved without community support, there has been a lot of pushback from the public. Parker Duncan, a 35-year-old writer originally from Whitefish, attended the public discussion held

Friday and said there were many questions going unanswered during it.

"It's pretty broad right now, and one of the problems is not knowing, if they do get approved for it, what the AI data center is going to be used for," Duncan said.

Krambu CEO Steven Wood said at the public discussion in Bonner that he wants to turn the mill site into an AI data center with a sustainable environmental footprint. Krambu plans to do that by implementing a closed loop system that would trap heat, thermals and liquids in a constant cycle.

There is a lack of trust from some within the Missoula and Bonner communities that this data center will stay within regulations, and stay at a certain level of energy usage.

"We can't, in good faith as community members, rely that people with

these — as they called it themselves — insatiable appetite, are going to limit themselves to that 10 megawatt range. Especially if the cities granting them range up to 100 megawatts," Duncan said.

The top concerns from those in the Bonner area include the potential energy use, water use and disturbance within the area due to the data center's proposed position across from an elementary school and residential area.

"I know that data centers cause a lot of noise pollution, for one," said Natalie Buehner, a fourth-year education major at UM. "I kind of like the little bubble that we live in."

Krambu has plans to start with a three megawatt facility, and expand in the future.

# LOOKING FOR A LEADER

As the search for a new president passes two months, the hiring timeline remains unknown and faculty continue to feel left in the dark.

STORY BY SAV CHAVEZ | PHOTOS BY JACKSON MAILEY

**M**ore than 70 applications have been submitted for the position of president of the University of Montana, but when the next leader will be hired remains unknown.

As the presidential search balances candidate confidentiality and an accelerated, changing timeline, some faculty begin to question the transparency of the process during the search for a full-time president who will stay with the University despite increasing administrative turnover rates.

For the past two months, the Commissioner of Higher Education, Clayton Christian, alongside the seven others members of the president search “working team,” have reviewed applications for the position that, according to the application, will remain “opened until filled,” meaning anyone can apply until they’ve officially hired a new UM president.

“We are hopeful that we can have the position filled or announced by the end of March, that’s a goal that was set,” Galen Hollenbaugh, the deputy commissioner for government relations and communications for the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, said on March 24.

However, conflicting reports from UM administrators and Montana University System officials have added to the confusion among faculty on campus. For instance, multiple administrators

gave different timelines for the hiring process. In addition, it seems no two officials know how many applications have come in.

In an update released on March 26, the commissioner announced the candidate visit would take place April 6 and 7, though the name of the candidate has not been released. There is currently no clear timeline for when the next president, or even presidential candidates, will be announced.

Due to former UM president Seth Bodnar’s abrupt departure, the search has been on an accelerated timeline, unlike the Montana State University and Montana Technological University presidential searches that took place during the 2024-25 academic year.

The last time the University was without a president during the academic year was in 1958, when UM was without a president for over a year before Harry K. Newburn stepped into the position in July 1959. The University has functioned without a president four times before this, according to the UM website.

With the shortened hiring timeline, Hollenbaugh described this search as “a lot more agile” as the working group is not looking to select an interim president, but an official president who is fit for all of UM’s needs.

Christian posted the first update on the president search on Jan. 22, a day after Bodnar’s resignation, stating his

confidence in the current leadership team at UM to maintain the “momentum of the University.” Since then, the commissioner has published an update every Thursday on the University of Montana website, in an effort to provide the most transparency possible during this process.

“Just like any job application process, typically the applicants themselves are not disclosed until you get to the finalist phase, and that is when the campus visit happens,” Hollenbaugh said. “Because we are still accepting applications, we want to be sensitive to the release of any information that would have any undue influence on the application process.”

Though these updates are being released weekly, faculty remain confused about where the timeline actually is. When asked, several members of the working group were unable to give a clear timeline of what to expect moving forward or any consistent update on where the process is.

With applications continuing to roll in even as the working group plans to bring a candidate to UM for a campus visit on April 6 and 7, understanding the numbers of applications, interviewees and candidates is not an easy task.

When asked, University Director of Strategic Communication Dave Kuntz said in a statement on March 23 that the University had received 67 applications based on the update

released by the commissioner, but Hollenbaugh on the same day said there were 65 applications. Buddy Wilson, the president of the Associated Students of the University of Montana and student representative on the working group, said the working group had reviewed 73 applications as of March 25.

On March 5, commissioner Christian released an online update stating that more than 65 applications were received, but the exact number was not specified.

While Kuntz was only told the working group had got the number of interviews down to “single digits” as of March 24, Hollenbaugh on the same day said there had been “six to 10” interviews, and Wilson said nine interviews on March 25.

From a University administrative standpoint, Kuntz said they have not had many people reach out with confusion.

“There have been very few people reaching out, which we have interpreted as, to date, the process has gone smooth,” Kuntz said. “From the very beginning, the commissioner made it clear that this was going to be an expedited search given that it was the middle of the [academic] year and we got very little notice from President Bodnar when he decided to step away ... we want to limit the amount of time without a full time permanent president, it’s been going fast.”

While weekly updates are released in an attempt to keep students, staff, faculty and community members updated to the best of the commissioner's ability, many still feel they are not being told the full story.

## LOST IN THE PROCESS

As the weeks continue to pass with only limited information accessible outside the working group, questions rise about the way the hiring process is being handled, decreasing trust from faculty.

"The Commissioner and his staff have embarked on a selection process that is a significant departure from past practice," University of Montana Faculty Union President Tobin Shearer stated in an email to the Kaimin. "Weekly updates have been helpful, but as Faculty Union president, I am hearing a good deal of disquiet and distrust about the process simply because it is such a significant change."

Shearer declined to comment on which faculty spoke to him, stating they came to him in confidence as the president of the Faculty Union.

In previous presidential searches, including at Montana State University in 2024-25 to replace Waded Cruzado, two candidates would be brought to campus to visit with boards, faculty, students and host an open forum for questions and interviews, according to Hollenbaugh.

For this search, it is unclear how many candidates will ultimately visit campus.

"The model being implemented at this time will bring only one candidate as the top choice. If their visit goes well, they get the job. If not, a second-choice candidate is brought to campus," Shearer stated. "Past practice has been to bring multiple candidates to campus for interviews and then select one of them based on their performance during the visit."

Whispers of confusion and concern have spread as the days roll by without a president. Some feel as though the process lacks transparency altogether, while others believe the updates are too broad to gather solid information. Though the expression of distaste has been wide, many faculty declined to comment about the ongoing search out of fear of jeopardizing their employment at UM.

When asked by the Kaimin for comment, one faculty member said, "I am employed by the president's office and don't feel comfortable talking about the search."

Others stated they were not willing to go on the record, either for lack of knowledge on what is happening in the

search or worry of repercussions.

Wilena Old Person, a former pharmacy program coordinator and 15-year employee at the University of Montana, was not worried about sharing her thoughts.

Last year, Old Person stepped away from the University and now hopes the next president does not make the same mistakes as the former.

According to a Facebook post, Old Person experienced "workplace harm including gaslighting, racial trauma and institutional betrayal," and publicly shared strong negative opinions of former President Bodnar and how he ran UM, despite having been one of the voices that ultimately led to his selection.

While Old Person has since departed from the University and is no longer in a position of wondering what the future of her workplace will look like, others look back on Bodnar's time at the University and hope for change that will benefit the faculty as well as the students. Associate professor in English Katie Kane hopes the next president will be more present with the faculty of the University.

"I remember President Bodnar visiting our department in the first year of his tenure, and thereafter seeing him most frequently in the gym or in his ceremonial function at events," Kane

stated in an email to the Kaimin. "I would hope that the new president would be more open in their connection with faculty than President Bodnar was, and would also be more cognizant of the ways in which R1 status is contingent upon support for faculty research and degree programs."

Kane was hired at the University in 1999 during the tenure of UM president George Dennison, who served one of the longest tenures at the University of Montana, serving as president from 1990-2010. Though she did not always agree with Dennison, she admired his leadership and his frequent contact with his faculty, meeting yearly with departments and holding open office hours on Fridays.

Kane hoped that faculty would be more involved in the current search, despite its rapid timeline. As of now, faculty members can only send comments on the search via an online survey and are not directly involved in the interviews, which has made the process feel removed from the faculty and campus population.

"While there is a committee of faculty, ASUM reps, staff reps and a regent, Joyce Dombrowski, who sit on the presidential selection [working group], in general, I feel as though faculty should be more generally and centrally

involved," Kane stated. "At the Faculty Senate, some senior and important faculty colleagues asked if and how faculty at large could participate in the campus visits. Christian spoke again about the need for speed because of competition from other schools."

While faculty and former faculty feel the process has been less than clear and exclusive, the working group believes they are being as transparent as possible despite the need for confidentiality through the search.

Working to provide all the information they can, the group has spent the past month reviewing all 73 applications received and have had several meetings discussing their top candidates in an effort to select the best next president for the University of Montana.

## INSIDE THE SEARCH

Alongside the Montana Commissioner of Higher Education Clayton Christian is a group of seven others, including Wilson and Valerie Moody, UM Faculty Senate chair.

These people make up what is called the "working group" to review all applications submitted for the position, as well as interview a select number of candidates and send the Board of Regents, which oversees and coordinates the public higher education institutions in Montana, their final picks for further interviewing.

According to Wilson, the group interviewed nine candidates, spending an hour on each interview, and sent the working group's four final candidate names to the Board of Regents for further discussion.

The working group was selected because of their official capacities to represent several groups across campus, according to Hollenbaugh, but it does not currently have the voice of an Indigenous faculty member on campus.

"We truly value the perspectives of all members of our community. While every group may not have a seat on the working group itself, everyone is invited to share their input throughout the search," Hollenbaugh stated in an email.

Students, faculty, staff and community members can submit comments through a survey on the University of Montana website and will reportedly be able to engage with the candidate during the upcoming campus visit. The survey includes questions about leadership traits and challenges or opportunities facing the next president.

"To keep the working group small enough for thoughtful and productive discussion, we recognize that not every constituency could have direct representation," Hollenbaugh stated.



ASUM President Buddy Wilson sits on the couch in his office in the UC on March 27.



Valerie Moody, program director for masters in athletic training, sits in her office on March 27.

Comments submitted through the survey are taken into consideration during the application review process.

Wilson, a senior studying environmental science with minors in international development and climate change studies, said this search has been unlike the former faculty search he was on as a student.

“It’s a different level of intensity,” Wilson said. When looking for a faculty member, he said, someone who knows how to teach and has experience in the field is important to the selection process. “With a university president, you want all kinds of things. There’s more we can kind of give and take.”

When discussing former president Bodnar, Wilson pointed out that though he was an “exceptional leader,” he had little academic experience. “That

probably wasn’t what folks expected going into that hiring process.”

The group is focusing on factors such as how the next president will look out for student success, how to include students in the work the president does, and topics of research, athletics, fundraising and how the candidate will work with faculty, staff and other stakeholders.

Wilson said that though the process has been accelerated, he does not feel that any transparency has been lost.

“The Commissioner has done a great job communicating where we’re at in the process,” he said. “There are aspects of the process that have to be confidential because people have applied who are currently sitting presidents of other universities. They are in high-level roles, and it would be

damaging to their careers if they were to get outed as applicants to this job.”

Applications for the president position at UM have been received from across the nation. To protect their current employment, whatever it may be, their names have remained confidential in order to not jeopardize their job at another university if not selected. For example, current MSU president Brock Tessman was the president of Northern Michigan University while interviewing for the position as president of Montana State University, and the release of his name as an applicant could’ve affected his job.

This sentiment is shared by other working group members, including Valerie Moody, the Faculty Senate chair representative on the working group.

For Moody, while the process has

been a lot of work considering its timeline, she is impressed by the group’s dedication to finding the right fit and by the experience represented across the applications received.

“It is inspiring to see high-quality and highly qualified candidates in the pool who are excited to lead UM as our next president,” Moody stated in an email to the Kaimin. “The only ‘hard’ part is that it is a time-intensive process and everyone on the working group has dedicated substantial time and commitment to ensure we are keeping campus and community needs of our future leader at the forefront.”

Moody has been employed at the University for 20 years, but she was not directly involved in the search that hired Bodnar.

“It has been a positive experience. I have appreciated Commissioner Christian’s communication and transparency with campus throughout the process,” she said.

The working group is not the only party involved in this selection. Aiding the working group is AGB Search, a subsidiary of the Association of Governing Boards, to help advertise the position and bring in applicants. This is not the University’s first time using AGB Search, as the firm was hired in 2017 to aid in the search that resulted in the selection of former president Bodnar, according to Hollenbaugh, though the governing board was not used to assist the Montana State University search.

The governing board set out in the early weeks of the search to get input from campus, which included a discussion with ASUM, about what they are looking for in the next president. From those responses, the board developed the job description that was published and helped the working group understand what factors needed to be kept in mind while reviewing applications, according to Hollenbaugh.

After aiding in community engagement, the board helped to make sure the working group received all applications in order to review them.

The process of hiring a president is tedious and has several moving parts in order to find the right fit for the University — one that will stay amid the increasing national higher education administrative turnover rates.

## LINE OF CHANGE

The Montana University System has not experienced a change of presidents and chancellors of this size since an increase in higher education administration turnover rates.

According to a 2023 study done by Higher Education Publications, Inc, presidents and chancellors changed at a rate of 23.5% during a two year span, an increase from the approximately 20% experienced from 2017-2019. According to the publication, the trends could potentially be influenced by “external factors,” including economic changes, political protest, diversity, equity and inclusion bans and other policy changes.

While nationwide there has been turnover in presidents and chancellors, Hollenbaugh said he was not worried about the search group’s ability to find the right fit for president at the University, as residency requirements are not a part of the process. Despite being the third search MUS has conducted in the past two years, Christian and Hollenbaugh believe the timing of a turnover is “a testament to how well the Montana University System is functioning.”

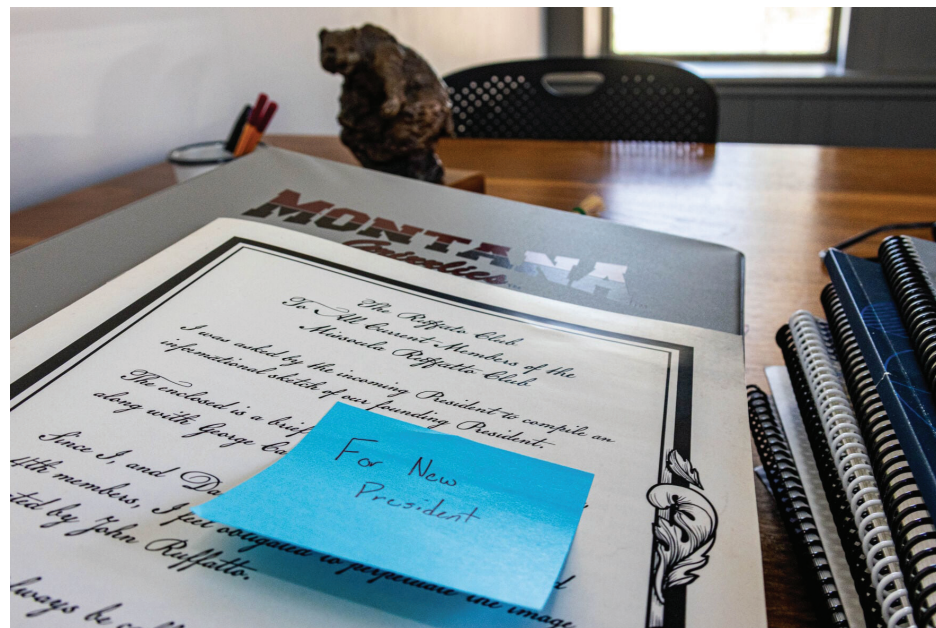
“President Cruzado was president [of Montana State University] for 15 years. Seth, in his tenure, was around nine [years]. The national average for university presidents is four years, so that’s a real testament to the strength of our campuses,” Hollenbaugh said.

## A LOOK FORWARD

With the upcoming candidate visit approaching, people on the outside of the search can only hope that transparency will grow and a president will soon be announced.

The survey for faculty, students, staff and community members to provide input and the option to apply or nominate someone for the position is available on the University of Montana website. This remains to be the system for the working group to incorporate the viewpoints of people not involved in the process in the hiring of the next president.

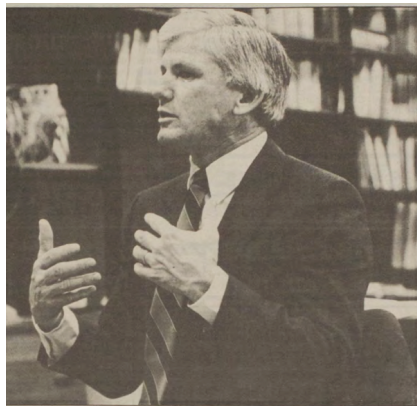
The Montana Kaimin will continue to follow the hiring of the next UM President.



A sticky note labeled “For New President” sits on top of unidentified books, letters and folders in the unoccupied UM president’s office on March 27.

## TIMELINE OF LAST SIX PRESIDENTS AT UM

NEIL S. BUCKLEW



JULY 1981 - JUNE 1986

OCT. 2010 - DEC. 2016



ROYCE C. ENGSTROM

JAMES V. KOCH



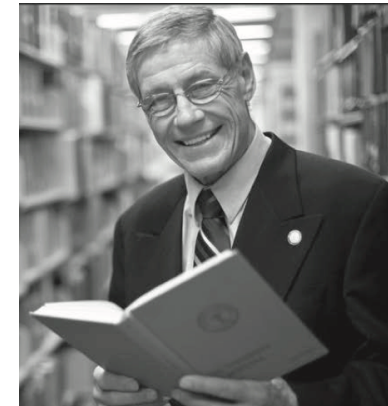
SEPT. 1986 - JUNE 1990

DEC. 2016 - JAN. 2018



SHEILA M. STEARNS

GEORGE M. DENNISON



AUG. 1990 - OCT. 2010

JAN. 2018 - JAN. 2026



SETH BODNAR

# Peace without quiet: Finding calm at Ritual Yoga's sound baths

NIAMH O'FARRELL | ARTS REPORTER  
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I laid my yoga mat on the ground and sat cross-legged on it. I was nervous — a sound bath isn't something I ever thought I would do.

Ritual Yoga, located in the heart of Missoula, offers sound baths on Wednesdays at 7 p.m. for 30 minutes, and they only cost \$10. Normally, a sound bath in Missoula would cost around \$30-\$45, but sound healer, meditation guide and founder of Further North Wellness, Gregory Matarazzo, wanted to bring sound baths more widely to Missoula. "I want to make it affordable and accessible for folks," Matarazzo, 40, said.

I was intimidated by it. The idea of lying on my back around strangers with my eyes closed seemed scary and a little pointless. I didn't know what to expect.

Despite my nerves, I laid down and closed my eyes as the sound began. The studio was dimly lit, and the faint smell of essential oils hung in the air. My brain ran through everything I'd done over the past few weeks. I thought of assignments I've been dragging my feet on and moments where I had let people down or embarrassed myself.

I thought about a friend of mine from back home who I always mean to call back but never remember to and how guilty I'd been feeling about it.

The sounds coming out of the bowl are very loud vibrations. They can be high-pitched, but it doesn't hurt your ears. Once I heard the sound, it felt like they were being absorbed into my body.

As the sounds went on, I started to feel lighter. It felt as if any guilt or shame I had been storing inside my brain was squeezed out like a sponge. It was like I had been given the permission to let those feelings go.

Ritual Yoga started offering these sound baths as a way for people who are beginners to sound baths to try them out in an affordable way with others also trying it for the first time.

"This is for people who have never tried a sound bath before. Try something new, you might like it," Matarazzo said.

Each individual can have a different experience of a sound bath. According to Mindful Earth, neuroscientists have found that certain frequencies can



Gregory Matarazzo plays singing bowls to demonstrate the music heard in a sound bath meditation class at Ritual Yoga in Missoula on March 25. Each bowl represents one of the seven main chakras in the body. **TORI KUEHL | MONTANA KAIMIN**

influence brain activity, lower stress hormones and promote relaxation. Some people fall asleep during sound baths, as I almost did when I experienced mine. But some people have had lucid or trippy experiences.

Matarazzo talked to me about how sound baths have changed him. He spoke about the experience of his first sound bath on the Hualalai Volcano on Hawaii's Big Island. "I could hear the birds talking to me," Matarazzo said when talking about the lucid experience he had during his first sound bath.

I'd somewhat known what a sound bath was. I'd seen pictures of sound bowls on Pinterest and played around with them when I was at Rockin Rudy's, but I'd never experienced them being used in the proper way or even fully understood the impact they can have on you emotionally.

I learned from being in the class that some people enjoy them so much that they become a part of their weekly routine. "I feel more grounded and able to reconnect with my body and process the day," said Kat Egan, a 29-year-old who works in construction.

Ritual Yoga offers more than just sound baths, it also has yoga and movement classes for prices as low as \$10-\$20 throughout the week that you can drop in on without having to pay for a full subscription.

I walked out of the studio feeling free. At first, when the sound bath started, I felt very vulnerable and exposed. Throughout the experience, I still felt vulnerable because I was being faced with feelings I forgot I had.

It was like I had taken a breath for the first time in a while. I had a mental clar-

ity that I had been missing. It was as if everything I had been upset or stressed about over the past few weeks had finally been put into perspective for me.

This definitely isn't the solution to fixing any problems I might have, but it finally gave me a clear head to feel like I can confidently tackle them.

Being in college is hard on people emotionally, physically and financially. So much pressure is being hurled at you from all different directions, and sometimes it can be too much. In the midst of all the pressure and things that need to be done, it can be easy to forget to take care of your mental health, especially when you're on a budget. Sound baths are just one way students can experience a moment of calm in an otherwise busy life.

# Missoula Makers Collective showcases local artists

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Opening the door to the Missoula Makers Collective, located in downtown Missoula on Front Street, customers are immediately met with an explosion of colorful clothing, household items, jewelry, decorations and more.

All items come from over 100 Missoula creators, mostly women, all of which are made with vibrant colors, unique designs and Missoula pride.

The store is co-owned by Bailey Durnell and Rachel Cowan, who originally met while bartending during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Cowan, it was “more yapping, less pouring drinks,” and it was during this period that they came up with the idea for the Missoula Makers Collective.

According to Durnell, the mission of the store is to create a space for makers in Missoula to advertise their passions and educate the Missoula community on the importance of handmade goods.

“We want to elevate handmade products, create opportunities for makers to grow and develop their businesses,” Durnell said. “We want to help educate the community on the value of handmade, of makers, of artists and the way that the makers and creators of our community can kind of build it up and make it what it is.”

The collective provided a space for community makers to share their passion, and eventually evolved into a storefront when Durnell and Cowan were given the space by a friend. Motivation for the project came from a noticeable gap in accessibility for selling during winter days, according to Durnell.

“There’s a lot of summer markets, and so we started off actually by hosting winter markets to fill that gap,” Durnell said. “The winter markets were really successful. We were very surprised by how many people showed up and how excited people were to shop homemade.”

After the success of the winter markets, the pair started hosting summer markets. Then a friend approached them with interest in opening a shop together to cut costs on renting costs for businesses.

Durnell and Cowan said the store works by artists filling out an application on their website, and based on a set of values and requirements from Durnell and Cowan, they select makers to be featured in the store.

They said their store is branded very intentionally, meaning most of the products sold in the store have attached information so customers can connect with the makers.

“Not everyone who makes something gets into the store,” Durnell said. “We curate on color, we love really really colorful products. So when you walk in, obviously, there’s so much color, and that’s kind of one of our focuses, is bright, colorful, cheery. Also, just kind of like alternative handmade products, things that look elevated, and things that look like something you’d find in a store, not necessarily always at a craft fair.”

One of the makers that made it into the store is Marika Marx, a multimedia artist from Missoula who runs Bird Brain Creations. Specializing in block printing and hand-drawn butterfly wing earrings, she has been with Missoula Makers since their first pop-up markets at the parking lot of the Kettlehouse Amphitheater.

“The main thing is I hand-carve all of my own blocks and use revamped clothing, or I sell revamped clothing,” Marx said. “That’s kind of the main thing. I do a lot of bring-your-own clothing events so people can choose the print that they want, and we can collaborate on the design or where they want it placed, and all those different things.”

Marx said being a part of Missoula Makers was a determining factor in her finally pursuing her art and helped her understand how she can pursue her talent. She said being surrounded by the group of people in Missoula Makers has helped her to be supported and grow through her art.

“When I first started out, I wasn’t really sure what I wanted to do, and then I was introduced into this cohort of awesome people,” Marx said. “They kind of showed me the different ways that it can be done. They’ve been really supportive the whole way, and so it’s been wonderful to learn and grow with them.”

Durnell and Cowan also noted their nonprofit spinoff of the collective, Making Missoula, which supports makers “through education, business development, grants and mutual aid,” according to their website.

They said it is through this nonprofit they have grants and conferences, and their goal is to continue to grow their conference, the first of which is happening this year.

The importance of shopping local is highlighted through Missoula Makers, who say shopping locally is a way to build connections and find a way to support those you want to see succeed.

“It makes all the difference for the makers that sell with us,” Cowan said, explaining the importance of shopping locally. “It’s electricity bills, it’s groceries, it’s portions of rent. It single-handedly changes makers’ lives. It’s not like you’re donating to Walmart.”



ABOVE: Sara Bigelow, left, and Marika Marx shop at the Missoula Makers Collective on March 26.

TORI KUEHL | MONTANA KAIMIN



LEFT: A bin of handmade stuffed animals sits in the Missoula Makers Collective store on March 26.

TORI KUEHL | MONTANA KAIMIN



Locally made goods sit on a table in the Missoula Makers Collective store on March 26.

TORI KUEHL | MONTANA KAIMIN

# New Griz soccer coach hopes to keep UM winning

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The University of Montana's soccer team will be under new leadership for the 2026 season after hiring Stuart Gore as head coach, but even though things may look different on the pitch, the team still believes it can win.

Gore, who was hired by UM in February following the departure of Chris Citowicki, grew up in Dunstable, England and played soccer professionally before starting his coaching career at the University of Northwestern Ohio, where he led the team to a 100-15-6 record over five seasons, including a National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics national championship in 2016.

Gore said his coaching style isn't set in stone, rather it changes based on the players.

"There's one of me and there's 28 of them," Gore said. "Ultimately for me it's trying to get the best out of them to be the best players they can be and the best people they can be."

The decision to come to Missoula was easy, according to Gore.

"Obviously the team's had so much success, not just in the past eight years, but even before the previous coach," Gore said. "Then you come to Missoula and it's fantastic. From a student-athlete perspective it's got everything you want."

While the program was an obvious draw for Gore, he was surprised by the passion that Griz fans bring.

"Everybody told me about Griz nation, and it is actually a thing," he said. "You go downtown and everybody's super pumped. My first couple of days, anywhere I went everybody knew I was coaching, that kind of caught me off guard."

Gore said even though he wasn't the coach last year, he knows that defending the Big Sky Conference title is important.

"I still have to put that crown on," he said. "The problem is at UM, when you've been as successful as they have, everybody in the conference still wants to come and get you, so we can't shy away from that."

As with any coaching change, fans will see a different style of play, but Gore said there will still be similarities to previous teams.

"We're probably going to be a bit more of a possession team," he said. "We're still going to be defensively sound like they were before and very organized and you'll see the same Griz grind. We'll work really hard for each other, but I'd like to see us possess the ball a bit more."

Alongside returning associate head coach J. Landham, Gore is hiring James Madison University alumni Amanda Attanasi as an assistant coach.

Gore will have to replace the nine starters that graduated or transferred following the 2025 season, but he said it isn't something to worry about.

"It happens in every program," he said. "People keep telling me we're a rebuilding team. I would say champions reload, they don't rebuild. The good thing about reloading is players want to come to you because you're a champion."

One of the returning starters is redshirt junior Lucie Rokos, who said she's been loving Gore as a head coach.

"It's definitely a new style of play, so it's a little bit of an adjustment, but I've been having a lot of fun with his drills and his practices," Rokos said. "I think his coaching's really meaningful and I'm reading to apply it to games when we have a full squad."

As of March 26, Montana only has 13 players on the team, with 22 committed for 2026 in total. Gore said that he hopes to get to 25 or 26 players to leave space for the class of 2027.

Rokos said that despite many of UM's players leaving, she had a lot of reasons to stay.

"I'm very established here academically, I work, I'm a [teachers assistant] in the anatomy lab and I work in the biomech lab, and academics are really important to me," she said. "Missoula is just an environment that I love, and I thrive here, and that's really important to me as well."

When comparing the previous coach to Gore, Rokos said there are differences, but there are also similarities, one of which is very obvious.

"They both want to win, that's for sure," Rokos said. "They both did a really good job of making us believe in ourselves and encouraging us to do better and try new things and push ourselves even further so that we can be the best players that we can."

The other returning starter, Liv Thorne-Thomsen, agreed with Rokos on the drive to win, but also on both coaches' focus on community.

"They both care about everybody, and they want everybody to stick together and have a family on the team," Thorne-Thomsen said.

A graduate of Hellgate High School, Thorne-Thomsen said her reason for staying was not only that she wanted to stay home, but also because of the people at UM.

"I love them so much, and I would never want to leave them," she said.

Gore said that because of the hunger of the players, the team is in a great place for the 2026 season.

"I feel really good right now with where we're sitting," Gore said. "Everybody thinks we're this poor little wounded animal that's only going to have like 14 players on the team, but we're far from it."



Griz Soccer head coach Stuart Gore speaks to players in the Grizzly Indoor Training Facility in Missoula on Feb. 20. CONTRIBUTED | NOAH EPPS

PRESIDENT'S LECTURE SERIES PRESENTS  
The 2026 Dean Stone Lecture &  
Democracy Summit Keynote Event

## AN EVENING WITH JAD ABUMRAD

7:30 P.M. MONDAY, APRIL 13  
University Center Ballroom

THIS EVENT IS FREE AND OPEN TO THE COMMUNITY.  
ASL interpretation will be provided for this event.

A portrait of Jad Abumrad, a man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a dark button-down shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a brick building.

# Billiards classes expand on campus

ABIGAIL STENKAMP | SPORTS REPORTER  
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In a tucked away campus corner called the Gaming Den, students can earn a credit for strategically tapping balls into pockets.

It might sound arbitrary, but those balls are full of history. At the University of Montana, that history is put to use to teach the complexity of billiards.

Often referred to as pool, billiards refers to all cue sports. A cue sport is one that involves using a stick to hit balls on a cloth-covered table. Pool is a style of billiards play that involves pockets and numbered balls. The term pool comes from the concept of betting and playing for money. The class teaches a wide variety of billiards, mostly including pool games.

Cale Patenaude, the professor for both the intermediate and advanced classes, said, “there’s a good amount of popularity behind it because over the last couple years of classes have grown pretty substantially.”

This success has translated specifically to the amount of classes the University offers. From increased interest in the program, there are a couple of beginning classes available at different times this semester.

“I was initially going to teach just one class and they asked me to teach another because we got enough people signed up for another,” said Carson Drews, a beginning billiards professor at UM from Portland, Oregon.

The classes are structured around working on a certain skill within the game each unit and then learning to be consistent within that skill. The class consists mostly of free play where students get to mingle and partner up with different people. There are different levels a student can take, including beginning, intermediate, advanced and moonlight billiards. Moonlight billiards is the same as a beginning course but it occurs past 5 p.m.

Depending on sign up times and if extra classes are added, class sizes can range from six to 14 people. The cap is 14 to ensure all students get ample playing time because the gaming den only has seven tables. The smaller class sizes offer a unique opportunity to create a small community within the class.

“I don’t know anyone that signed up for the class and regretted it,” Drews said.

The beginning billiards course that is offered is focused on building the fundamentals of the game.

“I try to cater to each person,” Drews said. “Especially in beginning billiards people come in with different experience levels. I think initially a lot of people just sign up because they need a credit.”



Billiards instructor Carson Drews helps Jack Haffey aim during a billiards class in the UC March 30.

WILL LADYMAN | MONTANA KAIMIN

The extra credit is exactly why Thomas Krebs, a sophomore public health student from New Market, Maryland, joined the class.

“Some friends convinced me to take the class,” Krebs said. “They basically said it was a lot of fun and that I could get a free credit from it, so I thought ‘Why not?’ because I won’t be in college for long.”

The intermediate and advanced classes tend to be less catered and more just about playing the sport. Intermediate used the technique learned in the first class to then start thinking strategically and more about putting your opponent in a tough spot or thinking ahead a few moves.

Patenaude said, “Understanding how to play the game and put yourself into a position that lets you win when I say leading a ball you know like you’re hitting a ball but you’re also trying to place your cue ball into another spot.”

By the time you reach advanced, you’re playing a purely league based pool that consists of eight ball, nine ball and some doubles. In this class whoever comes out on top earns a little plaque with their name on it.

“It really gives them exposure to that tournament play, that’s the higher level of competition, but then also helps still keep guard rails up,” Patenaude said. “So it’s not like going to nine in the hole and walking in and playing against someone who’s played for like 40 years. It gives [students] kind of like, these are your classmates, you’re all gonna vary on skill level, but it’s a contained environment.”

Unlike a lot of the activity credits at the University, billiards don’t require anything extra or make students travel off campus. This accessibility adds to the appeal of the class.

“With other activity courses, for example, you’re gonna have to go all the way to the University golf course, or you’re gonna have to go off campus for the hunting course,” Drews said. “You’re gonna have to get swimming trunks to go swimming but with billiards, legitimately just show up. It’s very casual.”

Billiards is considered a low intensity sport, a sport that still requires skill and precision while not using a lot of physical exertion to play.

“It’s comparable to golf when you get to the social aspect, and it’s comparable to bowling cause you’re taking turns,” Drew said “Especially in doubles when there’s more people.

There are so many different ways that people play the sport and games within the game. The courses offered at UM also help teach these other games instead of just eight ball and nine ball.

“I learned a lot of new skills for billiards and how to actually play it since everyone tends to make up rules when they play,” Krebs said. “It was also cool to learn new types of games like cutthroat.”

University students who enroll in an activity course have free use of the gaming den on campus, sort of like a membership, otherwise it’s three dollars an hour. Students can register for the course in the fall of 2026 for one credit.

## SPORTS BRIEFS

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### BREAKING THE OUTDOORS

After finishing its indoor season with a bang, the Griz track and field team shifted toward its outdoors events.

The team started off hot with a match that brought home five new records.

In the Cat-Griz dual, the men’s team was able to bring down the Cats with a score of 99.67-93.33. Previously, the Griz weren’t able to beat the Cats in over a decade, however, in the last four seasons the Griz have secured a win over the Cats twice.

Alex Shields was the talk of the match-up after he was expected to redshirt this season due to health issues. However, he broke the UM school record in the men’s shot put.

Doug Fraley, the head coach of UM’s track and field team, said, “Alex is such a motivation to our entire program. He’s a local guy that came in and has done nothing but improve and work his way up the ladder by tremendous effort and leadership. There is nothing better than watching a great person get rewarded because of their efforts and today is a perfect example of that. To me, that was the highlight of our weekend.”

The men’s and women’s teams broke the 4x100 meter relay records with a time of 40.23 and 44.78.

### STARTING OFF STRONG

The University of Montana’s softball team is currently 6-0 after starting the Big Sky Conference schedule, the longest winning streak since 2019.

After the strong start, two UM players were named Big Sky Players of the Week.

Grace Lopez was named the Big Sky Co-Player of the week, and is Montana’s first since 2024.

Lopez has 42 hits, three home runs and a .438 batting average on the season.

Carah Sweet, who went 3-0 with a 0.82 earned runs average over four appearances and 17 innings, won the Big Sky Pitcher of the week, Montana’s first since 2022.

# On the road with Griz Lacrosse

WILL LADYMAN | PHOTOGRAPHER

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The University of Montana club lacrosse team loaded their bags and hopped on a bus on March 27 for a three-hour road trip to play the Bobcats in Bozeman.

For these players, the bus ride to any destination isn't just about getting from point A to point B, it's about growing relationships between one another.

The team has spent more than 80 hours on the bus this season. The 20-hour bus ride to Minnesota or the three-hour trip down south to Bozeman provides time for the team to bond.

"I'll never forget these bus rides. It's one of the greatest things about Griz lacrosse," Alex Heck, senior defenseman, said.

The ride is a time for players to mentally prepare for the game and chill out before the arrival. Upperclassmen seated in the back of the bus can be heard from the front, where most underclassmen sit playing games on their phones, reading a book or catching up on sleep.

"Being able to bond as a team, this is where all the magic happens. Loss or win. We all feel together in a loss, we all celebrate together in a win. This is really where we become a team," Heck said.

A Safeway stop before the game in Bozeman allowed the team to get their needed pregame snacks. The most popular spot? The deli counter.

"I like to have chicken to get some good protein in before the game, and of course, an energy drink," freshman Nate Gendreau said.

The team ultimately lost to Montana State 11-8, but currently sits at the number five position in the country.

On the trip back to Missoula, the chatter was less than normal. The buzz from the bus was present, while most players slept on the way home after eating the Jimmy John's sandwiches the team moms provided.

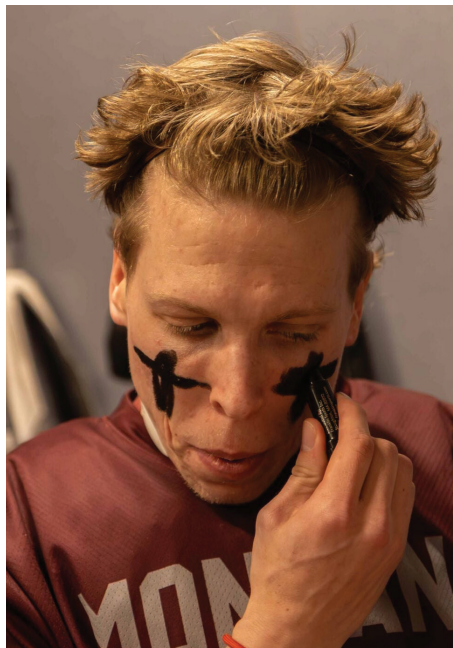
"Let it hurt. It sucks, but we need to come back. Tomorrow is a new day, let's get ready to move on. It starts Monday," said Tucker Sargent, the lacrosse team's head coach and associate director of club sports at UM.

The relationship these players have is more than just teammates. They become friends, they become roommates and they become a sort of family.

"When you're spending that much time with one group of guys on these long trips, you really get to know each other, and that's where the team's identity starts to form. It's great," Heck said.



Aksel Heimbach twirls his stick around while talking with teammates on the bus heading to Bozeman to play Montana State on March 27.



Captain Reese Baron prepares for the game against Montana State on March 27 by putting eye black on. Mostly used for aesthetic, eye black also reduces glare from lights on the field.



From left to right: KJ Gilman, Braxton MacAngus and Bo Sterling sit on the sidewalk eating their deli sandwiches from Safeway a few hours before the game against Montana State on March 27.