

MONTANA KAIMIN



More than a survivor

After the end of a 10-year relationship, one single mom finds the balance between taking care of her children and getting her degree.

Story by Emily Messer | Photos by Rachel Yeager



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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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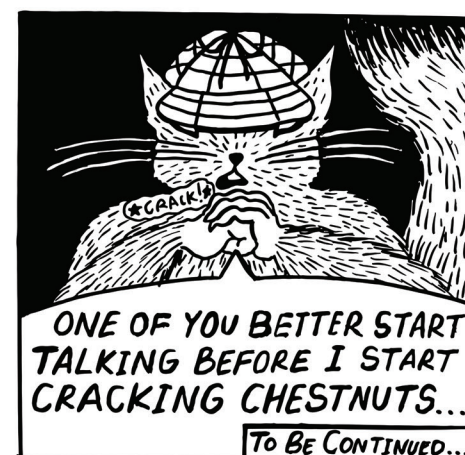
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DETECTIVE SQUIRREL: SE 2 EP 9



BARRETT CLEMENT | MONTANA KAIMIN

BARRETT

Removing DEI will affect students more than we think

On Jan. 20, President Donald Trump and his administration signed the first of many executive orders targeting diversity, equity and inclusion.

While the first order sought to end federal DEI initiatives, later directives looked to rescind affirmative actions and deter DEI activities in the private sector.

As students of the University of Montana, regulations on private and federal programs might not seem like they affect us. But as a federally funded institution, the executive orders will impact all students at the University for the worse.

DEI is more than just a buzzword — it stems from the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned employment discrimination based on race, color, sex and religion. Since 1964, other policies sought to improve fairness in the workplace and protect individuals from discrimination. In recent years, the idea of DEI has expanded to include age, disability, sexual orientation and more.

The loss of DEI programs could affect a widespread range of students on the

University’s campus. In fall 2024, veterans made up 3% of total enrollment, Indigenous Americans accounted for 7% of the student population and students with disabilities made up 13% of enrollment.

And those are just the demographics tracked in the census. The University also has hundreds of queer students, people of color and older, non-traditional students. When Trump rescinds DEI programs, he isn’t just screwing over those working for the federal government, he’s hurting the people you sit next to in class.

One of Trump’s boldest executive orders rescinded an executive order from former President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965, which incorporated civil rights into the federal contracting process. This included the creation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, a federal agency that enforces employment discrimination laws.

Colleges are also considered contractors of the federal government, so Trump’s executive order to rescind affirmative action

extends to UM.

Additionally, according to Inside Higher Ed, the Department of Education is required under the new order to choose up to nine colleges with endowments worth more than \$1 billion to be investigated as part of deterring “DEI programs or principles.”

That doesn’t mean just removing inclusive language. It could hurt scholarship opportunities. It could eliminate important campus offices like the Gender Equity Resource Center and the Office of Equal Opportunity. It could eviscerate certain classes and degrees.

We’ve seen the consequences of removing DEI before.

In 2023 the U.S. Supreme Court struck down affirmative action for colleges in a controversial court decision. A year later, enrollment of Black students decreased across elite colleges, according to Forbes. The effects, even on a smaller scale, were instantaneous.

It’s clear the administration is targeting

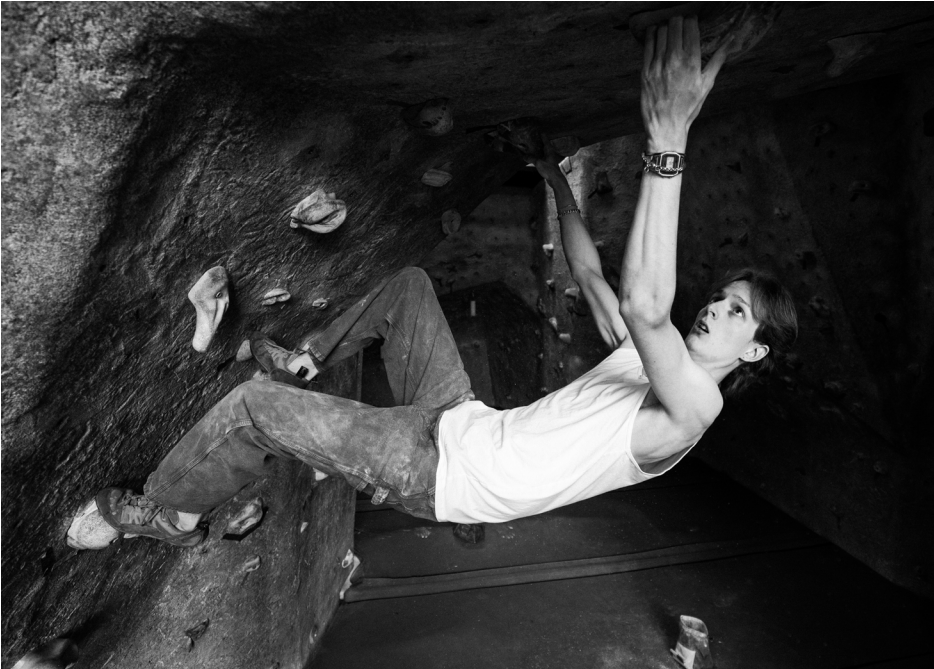
higher education, and it’s not surprising. One of the first steps to eliminate socioeconomic or cultural barriers is to improve access to education, including college. By getting rid of the measures that help provide equal education, students who have every right to pursue a college degree miss out on crucial opportunities.

Even if the presidential administration is telling students not to care about creating more diverse, inclusive and equitable spaces, we don’t have to listen. We can speak out against discrimination when we witness it, we can create student groups that further DEI initiatives and we can push back on administrative policies that seem unfair.

We can continue to progress toward a campus that feels safe for everyone and offers an equal opportunity and an education to all.

Like it? Hate it? Let us know.
Email us your opinions at
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Pebble wrestling



Jake Boner, a freshman from Minnesota studying marketing and biology, warms up on a boulder problem in the Fitness and Recreation Center on Jan. 30. **HENRY DOELLINGER | MONTANA KAIMIN**

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

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

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:

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

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In this week's briefs ...

CORBIN VANDERBY
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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION TO REMAIN INDEPENDENT AMID RESTRUCTURE

The Provost's Office announced in an email on Friday that the Phylliss J. Washington College of Education will not merge with the College of Humanities and Sciences as originally planned in the upcoming college restructure.

Announced in October 2024, the college restructure initially planned to separate the sciences programs into their own college and merge humanities, education and social sciences into another.

According to previous Kaimin reporting, John DeBoer, vice provost for academic affairs, said the goal of the plan is to "align with how we are defining our strengths on campus right now." The restructure would also help the University maintain its Research I status by providing scientists with more space.

After the request to plan the merge was approved by the Board of Regents, the Provost's Office assigned each college a task force to begin discussion about how the restructure will look. During these discussions, the College of Education requested to stay independent. According to Dave Kuntz, spokesperson for the University of Montana, this decision was made to preserve the identity of the college.

"As the process was playing out, it became apparent that keeping the identity of each college was very important," Kuntz said.

Although the College of Education will be unchanged, the College of Humanities and Sciences still plans on splitting into a College of Science and a College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

The plan for the College of Science will be submitted for review at the Montana Faculty Senate meeting on Feb. 6 at 3 p.m.

Kuntz said these changes are largely just reorganizations in administration and students will go unaffected.

"I can basically almost guarantee that students will not notice a difference at all," Kuntz said. "It doesn't impact anything at the classroom level, the department level — it's largely just a shuffle in the administrative organization of the University."

Kuntz also said funding for the colleges will not change. The same formulas, based on criteria like number of majors, student credit hours and research produced, will be used to calculate funding. According to Kuntz, the change will not cost the school more money. Interim deans will be put into position in 2026.

The search for permanent deans begins in 2027.

A final outline of the plan will be submitted to the Board of Regents for approval in May, and if approved, the changes will take place over the next academic year.

UM DEMOCRACY PROGRAM RECIEVES GRANT

The University of Montana received a \$500,000 grant from the Mellon Foundation to create a democracy studies program and support faculty research in humanities.

"Fostering deep understanding of democracy and the development of civic knowledge are core to our mission at the University of Montana and one of the most important ways we prepare students to become informed, engaged citizens," Andrea Lawrence, provost and vice president for academic affairs, said to UM News.

The new program began this fall as a minor in interdisciplinary democracy studies run by history professor Kyle Volk and political science professor Robert Saldin. The program hosts courses from history, philosophy, political science, journalism and sociology, among others. Next year, the program will have a First-Year Civics Initiative, inviting students across majors to learn about good citizenship and the history of American democracy.

"I hope we're able to show students that essential themes of democracy — from leadership, citizenship and ethics to governance, public policy and dissent — matter to so many pursuits," Volk said to UM News. "I can't think of anything more important right now than preparing students to be good citizens."

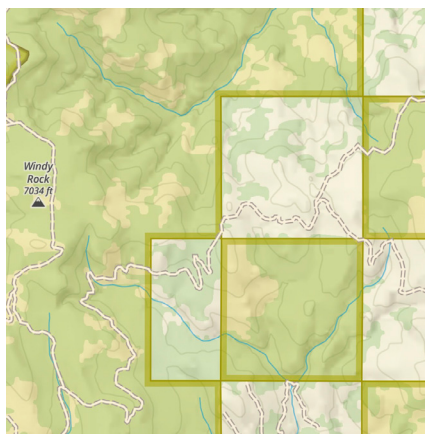
The program plans to offer a certificate and bachelor's degree in democracy studies. It will also hire a two-year post-doctoral fellow to teach in the history program and support five faculty research projects.

The faculty projects all relate to different aspects of democracy such as personal liberty, religious pluralism, multiracial democracy and the Declaration of Independence.

"We are all tremendously excited to receive this grant and get started on the work supported by this grant, which will have far reaching impacts on campus as well as across the state and region," Claire Arcenas, history professor and project leader said to UM News. "This will help establish UM as the top regional destination for students interested in studying democracy — past, present and future."

Corbin Vanderby is the news editor for the Montana Kaimin and can be contacted at corbin.vanderby@umontana.edu. For more stories from Vanderby and other reporters, visit online at montanakaimin.com

The crossing: A legal loophole or trespassing?



A screenshot shows corner crossings near Old Baldy Mountain. CONTRIBUTED | ONX

Listen to this week's Kaimin Cast where Maddie Pandis talks about Montana's public lands. Montana boasts over 30 million acres of public and protected lands, but the public is not legally granted access to 5% of it. Around 1.56 million acres of Montana's public lands are blocked from use because they are surrounded by private land, in other words, the public land is privately locked. This is also called corner-locked land. Accessing these spaces is called corner crossing, an illegal practice, closing off Montana's recreationists from a piece of land roughly the size of Rhode Island and Delaware combined.

"This corner crossing ordeal has been really great for public perception and public knowledge of issues that do occur on our public lands," wildlife biology major Claire McAtee said. "So if anything, this was like a wake-up call to everybody. There's still a lot of work to be done in accessibility."



New episodes out every other Monday. Scan for the latest.

POLICE BLOTTER

ABBY WILLIAMS
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Guys, please accept my apology for last week's blotter. I was too harsh, and I may have scared the thieves and vandals into their deep, dark caves. This week's crimes were mundane, sad and frankly? Boring. It seems student life at the University of Montana has returned to the dark ages.

JAN. 24 – YAWN

Let's start off with one of the most iconic (but yawn-inducing) crimes. A bike was stolen from the Lodge somewhere between Dec. 15 and Jan. 24. Because of this big tear in space and time, no suspects are to be found. This is why we should put our bikes in our rooms over break. Or, if you want to be in the "Guinness Book of World Records," ride your bike to your home state. Ride, Forrest, ride!

JAN. 25 – SHARE A BEER

It seems like Craig Hall was close to completing dry January, but a student in the dorm got a minor in possession charge just six days away from victory. The minor had alcohol and the report came from the student's resident assistant. It seems to be a swing and a miss with what kind of RA you get. Next time, maybe offer your RA a swig. Then you'll both get in trouble!

JAN. 26 – MILITARY ROUTINE

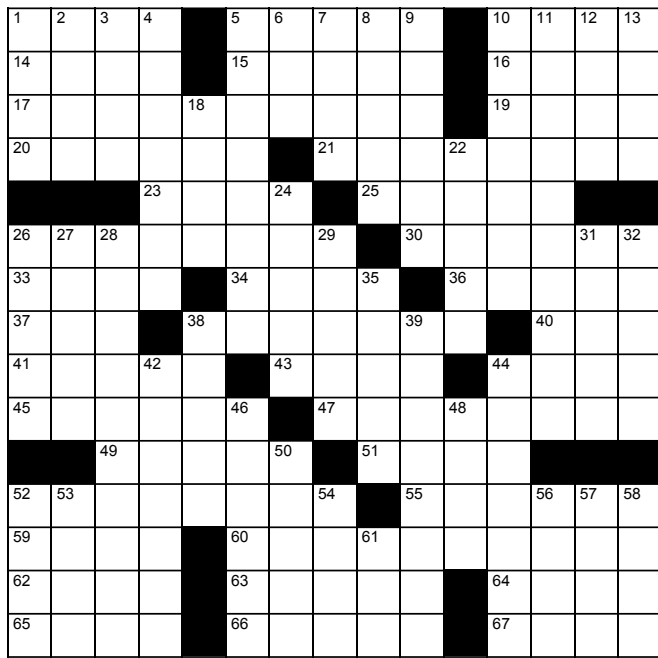
The University of Montana Police Department received a call at 5:30 a.m. for disorderly conduct at family housing. It turns out it was just a family making a little too much noise getting their kids ready for school. Those kids are better than me. Getting up at 5:30 in the morning? Wow. Talk about discipline and routine. I'm over here ordering a Chipotle bowl on a Wednesday night because I felt my eyes droop in one of my classes.

JAN. 26 – A DM FROM UMPD

There was a threat sent to someone over social media at 8 p.m. Think about just scrolling on your phone and getting inspired to send someone a threat at 8 at night. The person who sent the threat was contacted by campus police and there has been no criminal charge. Imagine getting a DM from the cops. That shit is HILARIOUS. Does UMPD even have an Instagram? If they don't, I volunteer to be the social media manager! Who wants to see campus cops griddy?

The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke



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ACROSS

- 1 Wagon part
- 5 Give lessons
- 10 Full of energy
- 14 Chowder chunk
- 15 Like some trigger fingers
- 16 Small combo
- 17 Top tunes listings
- 19 Piece next to a knight
- 20 1995 film, "Waiting to ____"
- 21 Walkman insert
- 23 Midterm, e.g.
- 25 Babel, for one
- 26 Window-opening rope
- 30 Blossom bits
- 33 Mouse, to an owl
- 34 Castle defense
- 36 Knotted neck-wear
- 37 NYC rep. in "The Squad"
- 38 Successful show
- 40 Bunion's place
- 41 Mirrors' partner
- 43 Croquet area
- 44 Got to one's feet
- 45 Kind of space flight
- 47 Type of light
- 49 Audition tapes
- 51 Mentioned
- 52 Brought in
- 55 SWAT specialist
- 59 Ballet move
- 60 Like innovative art
- 62 Animal rights org.
- 63 "Walk Away ____" (1966 hit)

- 64 Robe for Caesar
- 65 Kind of dog
- 66 Closed, as curtains
- 67 Fancy pitcher

DOWN

- 1 Tooth trouble
- 2 Nero's 49
- 3 Wood strip
- 4 "I feel your pain" feeling
- 5 Humdrum
- 6 SFO posting
- 7 Aussie rockers
- 8 Deal from the bottom
- 9 Mint-family herb
- 10 Bourbon and Beale
- 11 Math student's purchase
- 12 Wild time
- 13 Oxen linkage
- 18 Smart-__
- 22 Worry beads?
- 24 Online menace
- 26 Muscle twitch
- 27 Coffeehouse draw
- 28 Inferior
- 29 ____ Lama
- 31 Relaxed
- 32 Mighty mount
- 35 Criers' places
- 38 Has the earmarks of
- 39 Disconnect
- 42 Skateboarder's accessory
- 44 Give off, as heat
- 46 Aged one
- 48 One year in a trunk
- 50 Make the cut?
- 52 View in northern Italy
- 53 Projector load
- 54 Comedian
- 56 Ship's forward facer
- 57 Periphery
- 58 Caboose's spot
- 61 Without precedent

Answers to Previous Crossword:

C	H	O	P			P	L	O	W		A	F	R	O
L	E	V	I	S		H	O	U	R		N	E	A	R
E	R	E	C	T		I	N	T	E	S	T	A	T	E
W	O	R	K	A	B	L	E		S	T	E	R	E	O
		M	U	T	E	D		S	T	A	R			
S	C	A	P	E	G	O	A	T		R	O	S	E	S
H	A	S		D	I	N	G	O		R	O	M	E	O
A	R	T	S		N	A	A	C	P		M	A	R	L
K	E	E	P	S		H	I	K	E	R		L	I	E
E	Y	R	I	E		U	N	B	R	I	D	L	E	D
			N	A	M	E		R	I	V	E	T		
A	L	G	O	R	E		S	O	L	E	C	I	S	M
B	E	E	F	S	T	E	A	K		R	A	M	I	E
R	E	E	F				A	N	N	E		S	M	E
A	S	K	S			L	E	E	R			P	R	O

Horoscope

Lord of the Griz-o-scope

ELLE DANIEL

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Three rings for the Davidson-Honors-College-kings under the sky, seven for the UM Dining lords in their halls of stone, nine for mortal J-school professors, one for the dark lord Bodnar on his throne. One Monte to rule them all and one Monte to find them in the land of Missoula where the Grizzlies lie.

AQUARIUS (JAN. 20-FEB. 18): Everyone knows the fellowship isn't complete until a dwarf joins the party, and who better than you, the most iconic dwarf of all. As Gimli, son of Gloin, you bring a "battle first, ask questions later" assertiveness to the party. But being an oddball doesn't mean you aren't open to making friends with mortal men and elves on your journey. We all know that behind that armored, bearded exterior, there's a heart of dwarvish gold, straight from the mines of Moria.

PISCES (FEB. 19-MARCH 20): You are Gandalf,

and Gandalf means you! The wisest of the wizarding confidantes, you keep it classic in your grey robe and hat. Nobody understands better than you that the best way to kick back after a long quest is a solid smoke-sesh and hobbit party in the Shire. But don't let anyone take you for a conjurer of cheap tricks, there's so much more to you hiding underneath the surface.

ARIES (MARCH 21-APRIL 19): Aries, your relentless determination burns so bright it's blinding! Oh wait, it's actually because you're a giant, flaming evil eye. Nothing stops you from getting what you want, oh great and powerful dark lord, Sauron. Well, nothing except for a couple of hobbits with good intentions — some people can get past the barriers you put up. But that doesn't diminish the fiery shine of your aggressive enthusiasm when achieving your goals.

TAURUS (APRIL 20-MAY 20): Boil 'em, mash 'em, stick that Taurus in a stew! Everybody needs a friend like you, Samwise Gamgee. Loyal and hardworking, you carry your besties when they're carrying their toughest burdens. However, you can be stubborn and hot-headed, especially when that asshole Gollum decides to bust his way into your squad!

GEMINI (MAY 21-JUNE 20): Oh boy, there is a whole lot going on with you, preeeecious — I mean, Gemini. Represented by the twins, you're Smeagol and his saucy second personality, Gollum. When you're not running around Middle Earth having conversations with yourself or covetting a ring, you're working on schemes to send your new friends into a giant spider's lair. Those sick, nasty hobbitises had it coming, preeeecious.

CANCER (JUNE 21-JULY 22): Oh, Cancer. Sweet, emotional, Cancer. Nobody is going through it more than you, Frodo Baggins. You're empathetic, loyal and protective, which makes you particularly up to the most difficult of tasks. That empathy also makes you prone to many a mental breakdown, though, like that one in the

Dead Marshes, and Osgiliath, and Mordor ... and just generally all over Middle Earth.

LEO (JULY 23-AUG. 22): Who's that sexy stranger sitting across from me in the Prancing Pony? It can only be Leo, pretending to be Strider when we all know you're really Aragorn, heir to the throne of Gondor. With all your bravery and ambition, you're a natural born leader, capable of raising an army of the dead to go to war for you. For Frodo!

VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEP. 22): Do you know one thing I love about you, Virgo? You resist even the most powerful of temptations. Sure, you could've taken the ring from Frodo, and in place of a dark lord, there could've been a queen, but you're Galadriel! You're too hot and too smart to go to fantasy's dark side. It takes thousands of years of immortal elf experience and a mind like yours to rule over Lothlórien.

LIBRA (SEP. 23-OCT. 22): Just like the scales of Libra, you need both members of this dynamic duo to balance each other out. As Merry and Pippin, you can make friends everywhere you go, whether you're stealing a wizard's fireworks or riding around on that creaky old Treebeard. Sometimes you flap those social butterfly wings too far and get into trouble, particularly with orcs. But you're charming and lucky, so you'll stumble on the goofiest possible way to get out of it.

SCORPIO (OCT. 23-NOV. 21): You are messy, dramatic and secretive, Scorpio, and there's only one Middle Earth diva as mystical as you: Saruman. You're at your peak when you're stirring the pot, pondering your orb and combing your

beautiful hair. You're no stranger to dragging your friends in the group chat and across the floor of your dark tower in Isengard. Seriously though, Scorpio, why did you have to turn Gandalf into a Swiffer Sweeper like that?

SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21): They're taking the hobbits to Isengard! Sagittarius, you're just the type to be caught in pointy ears, brooding and roaming the woods, bow and arrow in hand. Like Legolas, you've always been independent, walking across campus on top of the snow while the rest of your fellowship suffers through the snowdrifts and ice. But you're also intensely passionate, so you'd book it across Middle Earth hot-elf-style to save your besties if they got kidnapped by orcs.

CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 19): Capricorn, you're a downright mischievous little delight. Descended from the quiet Baggins families but also the adventurous Took, you're in tune with both your sensitive side and your ambitions. Just like Bilbo Baggins, you're practical and materialistic, which makes you an excellent burglar and a true fashion, food and clothing connoisseur in the Shire. Just maybe avoid stealing jewelry from cave-dwelling weirdos on your journey to the Lonely Mountain.



BARRETT CLEMENT | MONTANA KAIMIN

Students voice concerns over Trump's executive orders

EMILY MESSER

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Students from across the University of Montana are concerned how executive orders implemented by President Donald Trump aimed at reversing diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives will affect them now and in the future.

Trump signed 35 executive orders during his first couple weeks in the White House regarding education, immigration and birthright citizenship.

Josiah Begay, an enrolled citizen of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe from Columbia Falls, became uneasy as he heard community members worry about their safety. After Begay, a junior at UM, and a handful of Indigenous students came back from a trip to India, a core group of them decided it was time to reach out to University President Seth Bodnar.

Starting an email chain on Jan. 27, Begay and his friend Millie Bearleggings reached out to Bodnar to address their concerns.

"I know it's probably a bit out of the ordinary for you to meet with students, but considering these dire circumstances where people's education, employment and safety are completely up in the air, I think it's absolutely warranted," Begay stated in the email to Bodnar.

One executive order of concern for Begay is Order 14160, signed on Jan. 20, which would end birthright citizenship. Indigenous Americans were granted citizenship in 1924. If this order is implemented, it could revoke citizenship from children who are born in the United States whose parents are on a visa, Indigenous or not U.S. citizens.

"What really sounded my alarm was birthright citizenship," Begay said. "Maybe the birthright citizenship thing is catching people's attention, Native students being like 'Whoa, they can actually do that.' Up until that, maybe it didn't feel real, then that feels very real. 'I can't be a citizen?'"

However, the District of Columbia and attorney generals from 22 states filed lawsuits against the action on Jan. 21, stating that citizenship is protected under the 14th Amendment. The amendment states all individuals born or naturalized in the United States are under legal authority of the government and are therefore citizens. A federal judge blocked Trump's order from Jan. 23 to Feb. 6.

Begay also referred to three specific executive orders which were signed by President Biden in the fall of 2021 which are now being repealed by Trump. These orders focus on ed-

ucational inequalities for Hispanic, Black and Indigenous students. Each order addresses the systemic obstacles and disparities students of these racial groups have experienced in public education.

"I would imagine if I was some sort of higher level official in University, and I had students that would be affected by this, we should address it," Begay said.

One of Biden's orders that focused on Hispanic Americans states only 40% of Latino children attend preschool compared to the 53% of white children who attend.

The order regarding Black Americans states, "Black students remain more likely to attend high-poverty and racially segregated schools than white students." These students are also unfairly disciplined and suspended at disproportionate rates compared to white students, according to the order.

The order discussing Indigenous students recognized these students experiencing the largest decline in undergraduate enrollment during 2020 and 2021.

"It is the policy of my Administration to advance equity, excellence and justice in our Nation's education system and to further Tribal self-governance, including by supporting activities that expand educational opportunities and improve educational outcomes for all Native American students," Biden's order stated.

These were just three of the 78 Biden era executive orders that President Trump rescinded on Jan. 20 with Executive Order 14148.

This left Begay, a double major in Native American studies and philosophy, wondering, "What does that mean? How far does that reach? In the best case scenario, maybe it doesn't really mean anything. Maybe it's just a statement on a wall, and now that gets taken down," he said.

The executive order that repealed the previous 78 stated the previous administration embedded "deeply unpopular, inflationary, illegal and radical practices" into every office of the federal government. It further stated this input of diversity, equity and inclusion, otherwise known as DEI, has corrupted institutions by removing hard work, quality and equality.

"It is the policy of the United States to restore common sense to the federal government and unleash the potential of the American citizen," the Trump order stated.

This order calls for the end of DEI programs, policies and mandates within the federal government. This includes a review and revision to federal employment, contracts and training programs.

On Jan. 29, Begay decided to take action with other Indigenous students and organized a protest at the Missoula Courthouse. Begay and Bearleggings were able to gather about 40 members of the community to support each other.

But DEI isn't only on Begay's mind. Oliver Hughes, a junior in astrophysics, is concerned for the diverse staff and students at UM.

Feeling more seen by diverse individuals on campus, he wonders what these orders could change.

"The diversity that comes from being in college is incredible. You go and meet people from all walks of life and you change and evolve," Hughes said. "It's, like, such a changing time in your life."

Hughes is also worried about the rights of transgender people. One of the orders determines the federal government would only recognize two unchanging sexes, male and female. The definition is based on if people are born with eggs or sperm and not their chromosomes.

"I transitioned medically in 2020, and socially before," Hughes said. "All these really intense things are not only an attack on transgender individuals, but on science."

This could potentially mean federal funding could not be allocated to transition services, leaving Hughes wondering if their right to healthcare could become compromised.

As the election geared up and executive orders came down, Hughes has felt a significant mental weight.

"I can't sleep very well because you just sit there and think, 'Oh my god, how's this gonna affect me?' But you can't directly change what's happening," they said. "Some days I'm sitting there just doom scrolling through all of it."

With Trump in office, Begay feels, regard-

less if people think Trump is racist, racist comments have increased.

"The fact that there are people that do feel emboldened to confront you based on the color of your skin. And threaten your life and tell you, 'You don't belong here,' and it's like, 'I'm Native, I'm not an illegal that you think I am,'" Begay said.

According to the Pew Research Center, in 2017, almost a year into Trump's first term, 60% of Americans reported worse race relations, which are the interactions and dynamics between different racial groups.

While the effects of DEI executive orders start to change policies on the federal level, there will be no changes at the University level until the Department of Education Commissioner or the Board of Regents says to cut programs and policies, according to University spokesperson Dave Kuntz.

While waiting for Bodnar's response, Begay said he was shocked the University had not yet addressed the Indigenous population, especially because "[UM] seems to be very proud of Native Americans in the student population."

"It doesn't need to be this political statement, you don't need to be condemning Trump. You don't need to do anything," he said. "At a bare minimum, a statement of some sort, that's just, like, the bare minimum."

On Jan. 30, Bodnar responded to the email chain and agreed to meet with the students voicing their concerns, but a meeting time has yet to be scheduled.

Emily Messer is a news reporter for the Montana Kaimin and can be contacted at emily.messer@umontana.edu. For more stories from Messer and other reporters, visit online at montanakaimin.com



How positive psychology may help education in Montana

SAMUEL KOWAL

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Teachers in Montana are experiencing a feeling of diminishing appreciation along with a struggle in financial security, leading to a worsening sense of well-being.

A recent gift of \$9.4 million from the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation to the University of Montana's College of Education provides a potential solution for teachers by offering financial incentives and courses tailored to improve happiness.

Over the last few years, 177 teachers from across the state have completed the "Happiness for Teachers" course offered at UM. The class aims to equip teachers with strategies to improve their emotional, physical and mental health.

Before the class begins, the participants have their feelings evaluated and compiled into statistics based on their levels of depression, hope, physical health and mindfulness.

Thirty-two percent of the teachers scored in the clinically depressed range, according to John Sommers-Flannagan, the counseling professor who teaches the course. "That's not good for them, it's not good for their students, it's not good for the schools," Sommers-Flannagan said. Of those 177 teachers, 12% scored in the clinically depressed range at the end."

The goal is the teachers then apply the strategies they learned to promote positivity in their classrooms.

On top of the course, the donation offers tuition reimbursement for education and counseling graduates at UM. Awarded applicants will get their tuition reimbursed after three years, getting a third of it for every year worked in Montana.

Recently, Montana has seen a shortage of public school teachers, ranking in the top eight of states with 22 teacher vacancies per 10,000 students in 2024, according to a study from World Population Review.

Along with the tuition incentive, the Washington Foundation's gift will go toward hiring five individuals who will work to integrate positive psychology and education into the education and counseling curricula over the next four years.

"The initiative is part of Phyllis J. Washington's vision. She's the one who wanted to do something that would help young people's behavioral and emotional health," Sommers-Flannagan said. "She wanted to try to make a difference, and what we've been doing is consistent with her hopes."

In a research paper from 2000, written by psychologists Martin Seligman and Mihaly

Csikszentmihalyi, they wrote that studying positive psychology would foster an understanding of the aspects required for an individual or community to flourish.

The research paper, titled "Positive Psychology: An Introduction," is what the course for teachers is based on.

Historically, psychology tended to focus on what's wrong with people and provided a precise diagnosis. Sommers-Flannagan advocates for a more developmental-based approach.

"If we focus on problems, they're hard to shrink, like when kids have anxiety or trauma, it's hard to make them go away," Sommers-Flannagan said. "We're much better at teaching skills and growing strengths that help kids and adults deal with their problems."

This psychology is what Sommers-Flannagan course was based on and helped his students carry it on in their classes.

Thomas Redmon, a math teacher at Daly Elementary in Hamilton, learned about the Happiness for Teachers course from his wife, who encouraged him to take it after working with Sommers-Flannagan.

Through the course, Redmon said he feels he can better positively impact the mood of his students and help them build skills they can use to navigate through challenges independently.

"I have really taken and applied the content from the course to my students and even to my role outside of the classroom," Redmon said. "With colleagues and my family, raising my kids. I've found it all to be very meaningful."

Allison Bristow, a high school counselor at Florence-Carlton High School and doctoral student in the counseling and supervision department at UM, said she learned a lot through her work at the University. What stands out to her the most are the lasting effects of teaching positive psychology.

"As educators, you notice this sort of ripple effect," Bristow said, "and it's incredibly powerful to see how these small things can make such big changes. I notice it not just in students but within myself, my family, friends and colleagues. I can't even imagine the huge potential effect that it could have on more of a larger scale. Considering everything we struggle with in schools, something like this could make such a huge wave of change."

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Allison Bristow, a high school counselor at Florence-Carlton High School and a PhD student in the UM Counseling and Supervision program, poses in the elementary wing of Florence-Carlton High school on Jan. 31. **DIEGO HERNANDEZ | MONTANA KAIMIN**



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More than a survivor

Stephanie Schneider spent a decade being mistreated by her partner. Now, she's pursuing the future on her own terms.



Story by Emily Messer | Photos by Rachel Yeager

Stephanie Schneider squeezes in as much homework as she can before her kids get home from school. After they're back it's almost impossible to get work done.

It was a moment 10 years in the making. But with three young children, it was also sudden, uncertain and terrifying. Stephanie Schneider dialed the University of Montana Housing office — as a Missoula College student, she hoped someone on the other end of the line could provide her with a safe space.

It was February 2023, and Schneider's

decade-long relationship with an abusive partner had ended. Now, Schneider no longer had a home, and neither did her children. As a non-traditional student, she didn't know if housing would even have somewhere for her to go or how much it would cost up-front. Maybe her financial aid refund from UM wouldn't come in time.

Thoughts raced through her mind as she waited for someone to answer the phone.

Schneider contemplated staying at the local women's shelter, a frightening option with three kids under the age of six, the oldest of whom was neurodivergent and tended to wander.

Schneider held the phone to her ear with shaking hands and contemplated what to say. "How can I express to this complete stranger such an intimate situation and just basically plead for mercy?" Schneider said

she remembered thinking at the time.

According to an order of protection filed by the Missoula County District Court on March 3, 2023, Schneider experienced assault, threats and intimidation from her ex-partner. But instead of focusing on the specifics of her relationship, Schneider put energy toward moving forward from the situation.

Schneider is one of the 4,053 Montanans



Above Schneider's desk is a reminder from her daughter Lily telling her to keep her spirits up. The notes serve as a reminder for why she stays in school.

who experienced a form of intimate partner violence in 2023, according to the Montana Board of Crime Control.

Since then, it's taken a combination of UM resources, perseverance and the Missoula community for her to succeed as a single mother, full-time student and recovering survivor. In Missoula and on campus, Schneider connected with various resources to get her needs met.

On that day in February, calling UM Housing was the first step. The phone line trilled. Then, a University Villages office manager picked up the phone. Through tears, Schneider conveyed the situation as best as she could through her emotions.

"I told her I didn't know where else we were going to go. I felt really lost and vulnerable," Schneider said. "I was trying to figure out what I was gonna do with three kids while I was a stay-at-home wife."

After her phone call with UM Housing, it took five days for Schneider and her kids to move into a two-bedroom University apartment in the Xs.

"They literally changed mine and the kids' lives," Schneider said.

For the first time in 10 years, Schneider had a place to herself, one free of fear and abuse. The apartment may have been empty, but the newfound freedom was liberating.

"It was pretty great to lay there with my

kids, even though it was bare as shit in here," she said. "It was just that potential of 'Oh shit, now we can have a loving home where we don't feel scared.' And especially the kids not having to feel scared. That was pretty great."

With almost nothing in their new apartment, Schneider spent the first couple of nights on an air mattress. There, she slept on the living room floor with her two oldest laying next to her and the youngest in her portable crib.

Regardless of what may be going on at home, securing housing was just the first step. Still to come were the challenges of securing basic household items, passing her classes and taking care of her children, all while working to overcome her own trauma.

Making a home

A month before she lost her home, Schneider began her first semester of pre-nursing classes. Suddenly, she found herself juggling the breakdown of her personal life on top of the pressures of school.

Now, in 2025, the 38-year-old is taking the next step in her long-standing interest in the medical field, aiming for a highly competitive registered nurse program. Applications open in February, and while her acceptance — or rejection — to the

program creates uncertainty for her future, it's an unpredictability Schneider is choosing on her own terms.

Funding herself and her family's little home was not easy. But with hard work, financial aid refunds from the University and Medicaid funding for providing home services to her oldest child, Shiloh, Schneider pieced together a paycheck.

According to the Center for American Progress, a public policy research and advocacy organization, the 2022 poverty rate of single mothers was 28%, with the supplemental poverty rate at 26%. Supplemental poverty measures account for those relying on government assistance to afford basic needs.

Schneider charges rent to her tuition bill, which costs \$1,170 a month, \$325 less than the median cost of a two-bedroom in Missoula. While UM Housing usually increases the rent prices every two years by a small amount, it maintains lower prices than the private housing market in town, according to John Nugent, executive director of UM Housing.

Campus housing administrators said the department can prioritize students in a crisis situation. However, that affects students who have already applied for housing, causing a longer waitlist.

"We work hard to help students while also running an equitable application and

placement process," Nugent stated in an email to the Kaimin.

According to UM housing, 311 units in the University Villages have dependents living with residents. A dependent can include anyone from children to extended family members like grandparents.

For weeks, Schneider and her family had only the air mattress, a folding table and a television. With a little bit of extra financial aid money, she purchased a discounted couch for about \$600. From there, she slowly upgraded their living space.

"I bought the kids two little toddler beds that they barely fit in, because that's all I could afford," Schneider said.

Creating a sense of safety in this new apartment was important, not only for her, but for Shiloh, who is now 8 years old. Diagnosed with autism at two, Shiloh was nonverbal for the first four years of his life. During those years, he relied on a communication device to articulate himself and attended speech and occupational therapy.

"I think Shiloh was reluctant to open up because we were in an unsafe environment, and that kind of forces anybody to internalize themselves," Schneider said. But after a short period in their new home, he began to put words together.

"I just really supported him in that, and he's evolved now to where he'll actually have a conversation with you or express his own organic thoughts and opinions," she said. "It's something really special. I waited for Shiloh to say mom or talk to me at all."

Shiloh learned to express himself openly in his new home. Schneider felt every word.

"You get to know him on such a different level when you can actually hear what's going on in his brain," Schneider said. "He's such a funny kid. I had no idea he was so humorous until he started talking."

Housing played a key role in adding extra security to the apartment, due to Shiloh's elopement — a common characteristic in autism where individuals wander out of their home. Being tall enough to reach the door handle, Schneider was concerned Shiloh would leave the apartment at night.

When she reached out to UM Housing for help, maintenance workers installed top locks out of Shiloh's reach to stop him from leaving the apartment. It gave Schneider an extra sense of security. With the locks installed, she could sleep knowing no one could leave — or enter — their home.

Soon the apartment took shape. "Everybody else thinks it's just a really shitty-looking outside of the building, but when you come in here I hope you feel the home vibes," Schneider said.

But adding all the necessary furniture to the apartment didn't make it a home just yet. It took a special touch from her kids to change it.

"The biggest way I feel like I've made the house into a home is my children's art," Schneider said. "That really reminds me

how blessed I am to still have my children with me, and it made it through almost losing them.”

Reaching out for help

Celedina Coss, manager for the Missoula division of the Criminal Victim Advocate program, said she’s seen a drastic increase in awareness surrounding domestic abuse.

“There’s still so much stigma and lack of understanding that it doesn’t matter who you are,” Coss said. “It can happen to anybody, regardless of race, class, gender, social-economic status, all of those things.”

There was no easy way for Schneider to overcome the isolation her ex-partner created. The aftermath of domestic abuse causes survivors to suffer from physical and mental effects, linked to an increased risk of post traumatic stress disorder, according

to Coss.

Building community in school could be one avenue to cope with the disorders, Coss said.

A trauma response can set off a slew of unwanted physical and mental responses. For Schneider, that looks like flashbacks to difficult memories and full-body trembles.

But even when Schneider’s mental health dipped, it didn’t stop her from working as hard as possible to achieve her goals. For her best chance at getting into the registered nursing program, she aimed to get a 4.0 GPA every semester — not an easy task when single-handedly taking care of three young children.

Schneider’s professor of human anatomy and physiology, Lucas Whitcher, said she is an exceptional student with a great work ethic. It’s clear to him that she not only heavily prepares outside of the classroom,

but clearly communicates her needs, which allows him to adjust for missed classes.

“Despite anything that might be going on, she always presents herself with a can-do attitude,” Whitcher said. “That is definitely a strength of hers, and has allowed her to not only withstand but just excel in everything that she does.”

Kins Loree, her former professor at Missoula College, agreed with Whitcher, saying Schneider is an inspiration to her classmates.

“She’s gregarious, she’s warm, authentic. She had a lot of enthusiasm, had a lot of curiosity for the material and that’s something you can’t teach,” said Loree, who taught Schneider anatomy and physiology lab classes. “Nothing got in her way.”

However, the effects of her trauma hangs around outside the classroom. That fear still lingers from the past assaults,

intimidations and threats stated in the protection order. To hold on to a sense of safety, she rolls her fold-out bed out of the closet and into the living room to sleep every night.

Elizabeth Hubble, the director of women’s, gender and sexuality studies, said domestic abuse isn’t just physical. It can also take the form of controlling someone’s money or phone, along with threatening their children or pets. Isolation from family and friends makes it even harder to rebuild connections after abuse, Hubble said.

In Missoula there were 499 reported assault offenses committed by an intimate partner in 2023, according to the Montana Board of Crime Control.

To overcome the aftermath of the decade-long relationship, Schneider attends weekly trauma therapy, which is covered under her healthcare. “I do a lot of personal



Signs of life and love are hung all over the walls in Schneider’s apartment, from drawings to pictures made by her kids.

work to build back my resilience, self worth, all those things,” she said.

After the abusive relationship ended, Schneider reached out to start the process of healing. She contacted local resources, including the Student Advocacy Resource Center, which led her to the phone call with UM Housing.

The campus resource center aims to support students impacted by gender-based violence such as domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking, including discrimination and bias. Numbers vary per semester, but in the fall of 2024, the center had approximately 50 walk-in visits, according to Aislinn Addington, the director of the center.

When Schneider first called the center, she was met with a familiar voice: her psychology professor.

“She helped talk me through it and expressed a lot of support and understanding and comfort, letting me know, don’t worry about assignments for her class,” Schneider said.

The center put Schneider in touch with an advocate, who handled all communication between professors to adjust her assignments. Following that first connection, Schneider was able to reach her advocate in just one phone call or text. The contact made her feel heard and seen after spending years isolated and alone.

Filing protection orders during the 2023 spring semester, Schneider connected with the Missoula Crime Victim Advocate Program, a city organization that provides crisis counseling, advocates, safety planning and assistance. A protection order typically sets requirements for the perpetrator to stay away from the survivor, and can also be used for relief requests for child support or temporary custody.

CVA division manager Coss said the department saw an increase in domestic abuse cases since the COVID-19 pandemic, but said that could be a combination of the department’s prevalence in the community and an increase in reporting by survivors.

Alongside taking care of herself, Schneider is adjusting to parenting on her own.

Being a single mother requires Schneider to schedule her life around her kids. She works with her adviser to schedule classes during the times her kids are at daycare and school. But she worries what that schedule might look like if she gets into the Missoula College registered nurse program.

“I’m definitely concerned about when I get into the RN program, what the clinical situation is going to look like,” she said.

The program requires 500 hands-on clinical hours, which can vary from early morning to overnight shifts, according to Linda Barnes, the nursing program director at Missoula College.

“Any RN program is challenging,” she stated in an email to the Kaimin. “There are many, many hours of reading and studying involved. We tell our applicants to treat our program like a full time job.”



Schneider speaks with a professor about a lab class. She looks forward to applying to the Missoula College registered nurse program.

Even with a flexible schedule and understanding mentors, no parent can plan for a sick kid. Schneider does her best to communicate when she misses classes and makes sure to ask for extended deadlines when her kids need care. She described her professors as accommodating without question, including Whitcher.

“First of all, I’m a person before I’m a professor,” Whitcher said. “I can relate to people and I’m certainly willing to help and accommodate it, especially if it’s the student dealing with legitimate things.”

In 2023 the Center for American Progress found that 7.3 million parents in 2023 were single mothers and 76% did not have a bachelor’s degree.

“Professors here tend to be more accommodating [at] meeting students where they are and meeting them with their particular needs,” Whitcher said. “In general, I think at Missoula College that’s very much the culture here.”

But there’s still the rigorous application process, including an interview, an exam and a long list of academic requirements. The ability to see them through would directly impact her future.

Up in the air

Schneider, who plans to apply to the nursing program once applications open

mid-February, invisions her future beyond the school.

“I didn’t get into nursing to just sling it at a hospital my whole career,” she said. “I have leadership characteristics about me, and I want to get into healthcare worker advocacy and change policies and institutions and develop programs to help nurses.”

After completing the nursing program, Schneider plans on switching to the Montana State University satellite campus in Missoula to pursue her bachelor’s and master’s degrees.

While she has had many other careers, the most appealing part of being a registered nurse is helping people. She also wants to learn First Aid skills to help her kids.

Excited about nursing as a diverse career path, Schneider hopes the program will not only provide her stability for the time being, but in the future as well.

If those plans don’t work out, Schneider plans to attend the medical assistant program at Missoula College to gain more skills and experience. This, she hopes, will give her a better chance the next time she applies. For Schneider, her acceptance into the program is not a matter of if, but when.

If she doesn’t get into the Missoula College program, Schneider hopes to try for the Montana State satellite campus RN

program instead. But these options and backup plans will only be hypothetical until fall, when Schneider gets her answer.

The uncertainty has been frightening. There are so many questions that can’t be answered yet: whether or not she’ll be accepted into the program, how she’ll reconfigure a new schedule around the kids and if she’ll keep her housing. But finding those answers would have to be another phone call for another time.

Emily Messer is a news reporter for the Montana Kaimin and can be contacted at emily.messer@umontana.edu. For more stories from Messer and other reporters, visit [online at montanakaimin.com](http://online.at.montanakaimin.com)

Domestic abuse can occur in any intimate partner relationship and can be present as physical, sexual, emotional, psychological or economic actions to control another person. If you think you are experiencing domestic abuse, reach out to SARC at (406) 243-4429, YWCA 24-hour crisis line at (406) 542-1944 or schedule an appointment with the Missoula Crime Advocate Program at (406) 258-3830.

Montana Museum of Art and Culture offers free membership to UM students

ELIZA CAREY

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The Montana Museum of Art and Culture on the University of Montana campus is offering students a free membership that includes eligibility for merch, such as tote bags, books and a newsletter sign-up. Whether the student is a total art geek or not, the museum is open to all.

Tracy Hall, program coordinator for the MMAC, said the museum has updated its membership tiers as of fall 2024 when it first debuted the ambassador membership fee for students. Now, students can bypass the original \$75 value with their 790 number or Griz card at the museum's front desk.

Julia McJunkin, a sophomore studying anthropology and art history, was one of the first students to take advantage of the opportunity. "I actually kinda stumbled on it through Instagram and thought it was interesting and went to the museum to ask about it," she said.

McJunkin said she definitely considers herself an art nerd. She is into impressionism artists, such as Van Gogh and Monet, and is thrilled to receive updates about exhibits and events from the newsletter. She was surprised but delighted to receive the free cream tote bag with an MMAC logo in dark green letters and two books with photos and writing about different collections.

"The front desk lady was really nice and helped me fill out my membership application," McJunkin said.

Behind that desk was Selisity Laursen, a creative writing major, working her work-study job as a desk attendant at the MMAC. "Sometimes we have students come in to become a member, but not terribly often," Laursen said.

Laursen said she hopes to see more students taking advantage of what can be a third space for them in the museum since the debut of the free membership.

Hall wants the same thing. "The museum has served as a student space in the past for things like students teaching student classes," she said.

The basement library will also serve as a study or hang-out space for students of any and all majors when the construction finishes mid-February. Finishing touches are still being made on the building, according to Hall.

The main floor holds the front desk, a couple classrooms and a rotating exhibit that changes every three months. The sec-

ond and top floor hold permanent collections that only switch up once a year, with everything from sculptures to paintings to artifacts. Many of the works are by students and alumni.

There are five tiers of membership prices. First and cheapest is the ambassador level, which is \$75, but free for UM students. Second is the enthusiast level, costing \$250, which includes all the benefits of the previous tier, plus an invitation to pre-exhibition openings, special viewings and a museum tour for up to 10 people.

Third is the benefactor membership for \$500, including all previous benefits, plus an invitation to pre- and post-event gatherings and an exclusive tour in the behind-the-scenes areas. The fourth is called the artist's circle, costing \$1,000 with all the above benefits and private art tours,

collection events and presentations. For the fifth and final tier, for \$2,500, there are two options: connoisseur's circle option A, with an exclusive reception and behind-the-scenes tour led by the MMAC director, or connoisseur's circle option B, with the same thing, plus an exclusive opportunity to join travel study tours with the director at the donor's expense.

The higher tier memberships aren't as cost friendly for most students, but are geared toward the community as a whole. Over 70% of each membership price is a charitable donation toward the MMAC. The noncharitable amount accounts for things such as merchandise and events.

The museum has student interns in work-friendly positions, such as Laursen's. It's also a resource for students to earn a museum studies certificate, and according

to Hall, it's the only certificate of its kind in Montana.

McJunkin said she plans to add that very certificate to her studies during her four years at UM.

"I know that people have this worry or assumption that art tends to be very prestigious, they don't think it's applicable for them, or they have to know a lot about art," McJunkin said. "I think a student membership is a great way to break that barrier down. Art should be accessible. So this is something I think people should look into, and who doesn't like free stuff?"

Eliza Carey is an arts reporter for the Montana Kaimin and can be contacted at eliza.carey@umontana.edu. For more stories from Carey and other reporters, visit online at montanakaimin.com



Selisity Laursen, a creative writing major, works the front desk at the Montana Museum of Art and Culture on Jan. 30. NOAH EPPS | MONTANA KAIMIN

'Say Gay Plays' bring theater activism to Missoula

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Before an audience of over two hundred people, actors and speakers performed plays about LGBTQIA+ love, struggle, acceptance and intolerance. Performers took their own experiences and turned the evening into a celebration of queer joy.

On Feb. 1, in the University of Montana's Montana Theatre, Missoula became the most recent city to host a production of the "Say Gay Plays," a series of short plays by queer playwrights designed to combat hate, bring communities together and raise money for The Center, a community center and nonprofit benefiting western Montana's LGBTQIA+ population.

Queer representation is a personal topic for many in the cast. Shadie Walette, a 20-year-old acting major from Billings, stars in two plays, one of which particularly resonates with them, "Two-Spirit F(l)ag" by Ty Defoe.

"I am Native American indigiqueer and it's really important to show that side of the tribe," Walette said. "Native American stuff is always pushed down and shoved to the side, and I think getting that out there is important, not only to the public, but to the kids that don't feel right."

Walette said they hope people understand the intent of the production. "These people's lives that are being shown on stage and being talked about, it's not just a story for you to listen to and then forget about. It's something you need to listen to and learn from, because it's happening all around you."

Walker Winterburn, a 21-year-old musical theatre major, knew he could bring something unique to the table: drag. Originally from Missoula, Winterburn has been performing in drag for around two years, and as he puts it, not a lot of other people in Missoula have that perspective.

The play "Diet Pride" offers a chance for a drag queen character and Winterburn knew his time as Miss Honey Doo would

bring some authenticity to the role. "It's funny while still having a message you can learn something from," Winterburn said.

The "Say Gay Plays" project began in 2024, sparked by an infamous piece of Florida legislation termed the "Don't Say Gay" law, which restricted classroom instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity. The vague terminology of the law left the definition of terms like "classroom instruction" and "age-appropriate" to the state of Florida and many LGBTQIA+ people raised concerns about the implications. The law isn't the only motivation for the project, as creators also cite rising violence against queer people and laws against gender-affirming care.

The creators believe harmful legislation is born from the impression that to be LGBTQIA+ is to inherently suffer, making celebrating queer joy activism in itself. The collection of 10 plays span across eras and genres, but all stress the idea that being queer is not a tragedy.

Beyond a celebration of queer joy, part

of the appeal of the "Say Gay Plays" is the fundraising. The plays are free to use, but to perform, the proceeds need to be donated to a relevant local nonprofit. Michael Legg, director of the Montana Repertory Theatre, selected The Center. 100% of the proceeds from the event went directly to The Center.

There's plenty to take away from the "Say Gay Plays." For Winterburn, the thing to focus on is community and joy.

"Right now, it's a scary time for a lot of people and the only way we can be of any help to each other is if we're there for each other," Winterburn said. "It's hard to fight the resistance all the time. You've got to do things that are fun as well as productive."

Keely Proebstel is an arts reporter for the Montana Kaimin and can be contacted at ekeely.proebstel@umontana.edu. For more stories from Proebstel and other reporters, visit online at montanakaimin.com

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Griz softball's own personal demon

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As the start of the softball season nears for the University of Montana, the Griz have a new pitcher in town: Siona Halwani, nicknamed "The Demon," a recent transfer from the College of San Mateo.

Halwani, originally from California, was born into a hardworking family. With her father immigrating from Israel to the U.S., the idea of never taking anything for granted was instilled in her from a young age.

"My family means everything to me. They influence every part of my life," Halwani said. "I was given everything I wanted, which is something I'm eternally grateful for. However, they made sure that I would never take it for granted."

One of the things her parents gave her was a love for softball. At the age of 5, Halwani was placed on the field and hasn't looked back since.

However, the position of pitcher was not the original idea. Halwani first started out as a catcher, a role she fulfilled until she was 10. But, when one of her youth coaches needed a new pitcher, Halwani's hand shot up.

"I would always throw the ball around and practice pitches," Halwani said. "I think it was just something that came naturally to me."

Softball isn't the only lifelong gift her parents gave her. The other is her love for the band KISS. With her admiration for the band's lead bassist, Gene Simmons — who is also from Israel and known as "The Demon," along with his signature eye black — an alter ego was born.

"My alter ego, 'The Demon,' comes from Gene Simmons," Halwani said. "I grew up listening to [KISS] with my father, who is a big KISS fan. I even walk out to a KISS song."

As the offseason started, the Griz were in the hunt for a new pitcher, contacting players in the transfer portal, trying to find that one player who could set the team apart from their competitors.

While they might have been looking for someone with Division I experience, they saw potential in a player from a small Division II team. Halwani was that player. Ending her sophomore season with an earned run average of 1.26, she felt ready for the next step.

Halwani helped San Mateo achieve 14 wins in 17 starts, with 66 strikeouts and only 24 walks.

"It's a hard position, the hardest in my opinion. You have to know what everyone on the field is doing, but I feel I thrive in those

situations," Halwani said.

Halwani isn't the only newcomer on the Griz team. It also introduced its new head coach, Stef Ewing.

Ewing, who previously coached for Division II California State University, San Marcos, has already received high praise from the team.

"She is a role model for me and is always there for me whenever I need her," Halwani said. "She lets me be myself. Many coaches want you to just be the perfect player and don't let you show your own personality."

It's expected that we'll see a lot of Halwani's personality on the field this season. "She'll get at least 20 starts. She's getting the ball a lot," Ewing said.

During the summer, Halwani worked with Team Israel at the U22 European Championship in Poland, where she was able to keep her earned run average to 3.91 in 28.2 innings.

"It's an honor to represent Israel. It means the world to me that I'm able to represent my heritage through the sport I love," Halwani said.

"Having someone with that type of experience is like having someone who has been playing for an extra year," Ewing said. "She knows what it's like playing against top talent and traveling long distances."

It was during Halwani's time in Poland that she got the call from UM. "After my first phone call with [Ewing], I knew I wanted to come here. I committed about two weeks before the start of the semester," Halwani said. "I wasn't even able to visit since I was busy traveling around Europe, but with [Ewing], the great facilities and the amazing academics, I knew I had to come."

As the preseason starts on Friday, the team has its goals in mind. As for Ewing, all she wants for this team is to "play our best and know our softball. We hope to empty our tanks completely."

But for Halwani, she has some big goals in sight. "For UM, I hope for us to win the Big Sky and make the playoffs. But for myself: Academic All-American, Big Sky Pitcher of the Year, All-American, an [earned run average] under 1.5, and a batting average of .290."

Halwani hopes to get her first start quickly and show Griz fans just how "The Demon" plays.

Hannah Benitez is a sports reporter for the Montana Kaimin and can be contacted at hannah.benitez@umontana.edu. For more stories from Benitez and other reporters, visit online at montanakaimin.com



"The Demon," Siona Halwani, takes a breather after throwing some fast pitches during softball practice on Jan. 31. **RACHEL YEAGER | MONTANA KAIMIN**



University of Montana
Food Pantry

Spring Semester Hours	
Monday	10:30am – 3pm
Monday	4pm – 6pm
Wednesday	10:30am – 3pm
Thursday	4pm – 6pm
Saturday	11am – 3pm

Please note that due to class schedules we have shifted our normal Tuesday evening hours to MONDAY

Students find an easy destresser on the ice

RILEY COMSTOCK

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On any given crisp and cool winter afternoon it wouldn't be a surprise to find Madison Odenbach and Natalie Orlik shooting pucks at tiny, portable goals — gliding and scratching over the ice on the Oval.

Or, once the sunlight fades, it might be Emily Jehle and Austin Harms out learning new figure skating moves, lit by the soft bulbs that line the fence around the temporary University of Montana ice rink.

These are just a few of the students who use the slab of ice on the Oval which offers students and the public alike a free ice skating venue.

The rink is the brainchild of Cale Patenaude, the assistant director of Student Life Belonging & Recreation. During the 2021-22 school year and a time of heightened risk during the COVID-19 pandemic, Patenaude and other student affairs faculty were brainstorming ways to give students a fun social opportunity while still keeping people outside and safe.

"It was really a way to explore how we still allow people to have fun and recreate, but as safely as we could within what we knew at the time," Patenaude said.

With the president's cabinet on board, the rink was born.

The rink is largely maintained by Sean Helms, the University Center's garden facilities manager. Helms came to UM in an odd way. His wife was working at the University at the time the rink was being planned and she volunteered him to advise the project through email.

In previous jobs, Helms had managed seasonal ice rinks in a variety of places, including cow pastures, so the Oval wasn't a crazy endeavor for him.

Helms eventually came to work for UM a few years later, and now manages much of the greenery in the UC and the ice rink.

Helms said one of the common misconceptions of the rink is that it damages the grass. But with his expertise he chose a rink design that doesn't create a lot of holes or damage irrigation systems. And, he said, the grass is dormant during the winter anyway.

"As long as you get the plastic off before it gets too warm it's fine," Helms said.

One of the most unpredictable challenges he faces is the weather. Last year, a warm winter made it hard to keep the rink frozen. And it took a while for the water to freeze. Helms said someone got impatient and



Joe, left, and Wyatt Meng, right, pass a puck around on the Oval's ice rink ahead of the winter pep rally on Jan. 25. **HENRY DOELLINGER | MONTANA KAIMIN**

hopped the fence into the rink before the ice was fully frozen, resulting in a puncture that crippled the liner.

Even when the rink was open last year, it was rather hard to use. "It was very wet and melty and not very skatable," Orlik said.

But this year's weather is more favorable for the ice so far.

While Glacier Ice Rink is much larger than UM's ice, student Madison Odenbach said it is usually much busier and you often have to sign up to get a limited time slot.

In contrast, the Oval rink is free, open to everyone, and doesn't close as long as the conditions permit. The gaming den also rents ice skates for \$5 a day, and they can be taken anywhere as long as they are returned by the deadline.

"The idea is not to profit off of the students, community, etc. It's to give them an experience and really just recoup some of the labor or other things that happen," Patenaude said. "For example, if a hole gets punched in that tarp, it's done and we've got to buy a new one."

The rink package costs around \$9,000 from the company, EZ Ice. It's certainly a

hefty investment to replace if damaged, like last year. But Patenaude says it's well worth the money. He said students are consistently happy with the rink and were disappointed that it wasn't usable last year.

While Patenaude knows it seems restricting to have a fence around the rink, his goal is to preserve the ice so it can be used as long as possible.

"It is never to truly restrict the student, it is to make sure it can be usable for all students," he said. "If we have an exceptionally warm week, we can close it off for a little bit, let it refreeze, and then it's still usable."

While it's not the typical rounded rectangle you might find at a hockey rink, the 100-by-60-foot rink satisfies most students. A normal National Hockey League-sized rink is about 85 feet wide and 200 feet long.

"I feel like it's adequate for the use that it gets," Austin Harms said.

Patenaude said the rink isn't quite in its final form yet, though. As he and Helms learned more about managing a rink on a college campus, they have gotten more ideas on how to make the experience better.

"One of the discussions we've had is with

[Campus Recreation] on the new court that it has," Patenaude said. Given that the basketball and pickleball courts are dormant in the winter, he suggested the possibility of putting the ice rink there instead. That way, they can control access better when it needs to be closed. The idea of a rental shed has also been floated so that students can go straight to the rink to get skates and heaters.

Helms and Patenaude also said the rink is getting plenty of use this year, especially with the pep rally taking place right next to it. In response, Helms occasionally goes out and resurfaces it. While a zamboni would be overkill, he uses a hose and a towel on a T-bar to smooth out the surface.

"We understand it's not gonna be perfect, but it's great and I see a lot of people out there," Emily Jehle said.

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Staying warm and staying stylish

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY RACHEL YEAGER
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When winter hits, the majority of people opt for comfort over fashion, sticking with the go-to sweatpants and hoodie combo. But some students stay creative with layering, accessorizing and not breaking the bank while staying warm.

Cyrus Gertz, who committed to not buying any new clothes for the year, said layering is essential.

"I am actually full-on wearing pajama pants under these," Gertz said. "I have fleece-lined tights or pants under dresses. I think you can totally make that work if you're a little bit more creative about the shapes and layers."

Gertz sticks with thrifted fashion to stay unique, favoring pieces like a big leather jacket or different hats. She is currently participating in a "buy nothing new year," only purchasing from secondhand stores and clothing swaps.

Another student, Zander Pernell, a 21-year-old psychology major from Missoula, said his winter wardrobe is his favorite.

"Everyone needs to just get a cool jacket," Pernell said. "I've had this one for three years, and with a cool sweatshirt underneath, you can kind of just layer on whatever else."

Most days he pairs his go-to jacket with thrifted pants and colorful beanies, swapping them out to change up the routine. This season's footwear of choice for Pernell and many other students is Blundstone boots, which offer style, but not always adequate stability.

"They're nice for snow, but you step on ice and just slip and fall," Pernell said.

On campus, winter fashion trends vary. Some students embrace functionality while others use the cold weather as reason to add even more layers to an outfit.

"I think overall, people kind of don't want to try anymore," Gertz said. "But from a psychological perspective, if you get ready for the day, you're going to feel better about going to class."

Pernell has noticed a recent Missoularian trend of wearing looser-fit jeans and oversized clothes.

"I always see more people wearing baggier pants over their boots," he said. "And my forester friends are all about Carhartts."

Adding accessories to an outfit can help express personal style even more, despite the limitations of winter layers. Pernell wears rings and earrings, pairing them with one of his many beanies.

While some may see winter fashion as restrictive, Pernell enjoys the art of layering and stacking hoodies.

"In the summer, it's just shorts and a T-shirt," he said. "But in the winter, I can layer more, switch things up."

For students like Gertz and Pernell, winter fashion is more than just staying warm, it's about proving that style doesn't have to hibernate when the temperatures drop.

Rachel Yeager is a photographer for the Montana Kaimin and can be contacted at rachel1.yeager@umontana.edu. For more photos from Yeager and other photographers, visit online at montanakaimin.com.



BOTTOM LEFT: Styling her favorite jacket, Cyrus Gertz can be seen in creative outfits everyday no matter the weather.

TOP: Every once and a while, Ennis Doyle decides to spice up their outfit with one of their favorite pairs of vintage heels.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Strolling by the University Center rocking her plush rainbow scarf, Ava Simms enjoys a walk around campus on Feb. 2.