

MONTANA KAIMIN

THE MAIN FOCUS



As artificial intelligence continues to evolve, students and faculty alike are working to understand where its place is in academics

Written by Jack Snow
Photographed by Henry Doellinger
Photo Illustration by Barrett Clement



6 Fishy business

12 'Wuthering Heights'

14 Rugby division

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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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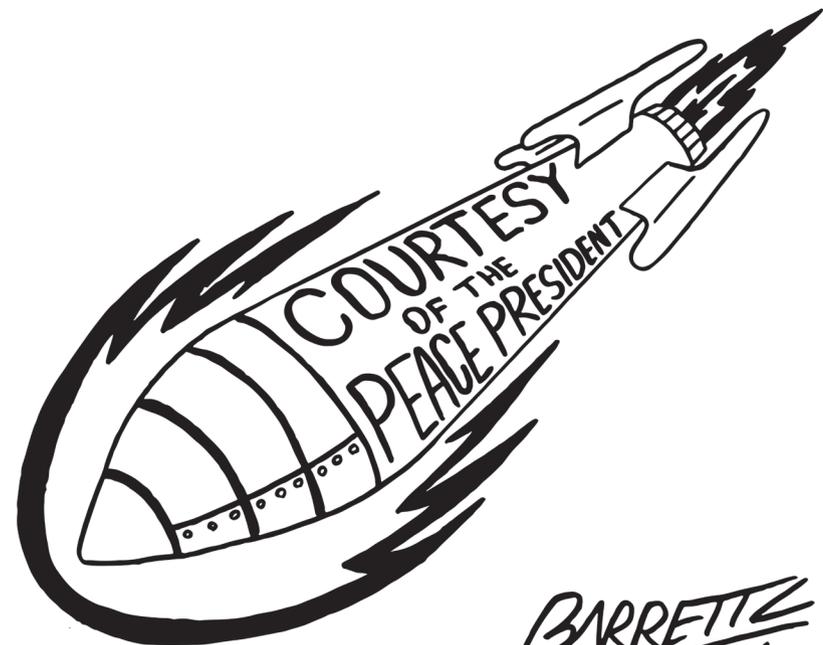
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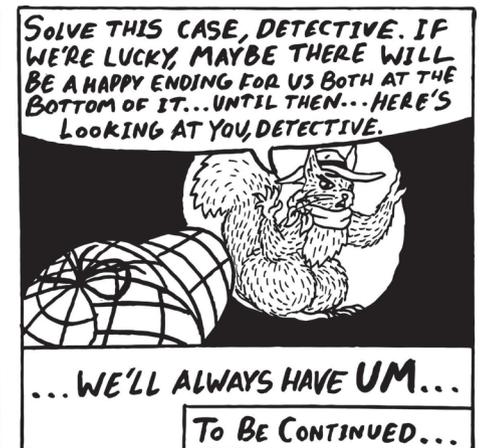
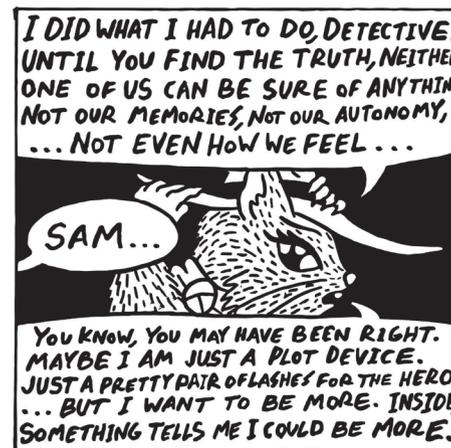
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POLITICAL CARTOON



BARRETT
2026

DETECTIVE SQUIRREL : SE 3 EP 9



To Be Continued...

It's time to turn up the roar

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

Edited by Margie E. Burke

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

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:

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

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While the University of Montana is an NCAA Division I institution home to 15 intercollegiate varsity sports, I have to say our student section is Division III at best.

I expected to come to college and be blown away by the school spirit that a university of 11,000 brings. Instead, I find myself missing my high school student section.

Football games and Cat-Griz games are the only times the student section seems somewhat engaged. At basketball games and hockey games students sit like bumps on a log, barely cheering when the team scores. They talk with their friends, stare aimlessly, hide their face when they appear on the jumbotron and leave by the second half. The rest of the stadium often shows more excitement than UM's own students.

Back in high school, a team of 10 students led cheer after cheer at every sporting event with a student section. There was rarely silence, rarely dull moments and every student was invested in the game, rooting for a win.

Zoo Crew, what are we doing?! The student sections should be filled with cheering, chants and overflowing energy. The whole point is to hype up the team and display our school pride. While it's up to all students attending to bring the energy, the leaders of the Zoo Crew should come up with new chants and get down in front to lead the student section.

The Zoo Crew says, "We want our loudest and proudest students to show their Griz pride by being part of this membership," but I haven't seen any pride beyond football.

I went to a Michigan Technological University hockey game last year, a school around the same size as UM. It was packed. Students were screaming. Cheers and songs echoed throughout the rink constantly and there were packets with the lyrics handed out to anyone who had not yet memorized the many chants. Few left at halftime. Who would want to when having so much fun?

It's time for us Montana Grizzlies to amp up our roar. We need cohesion, we need energy, we need cheers.

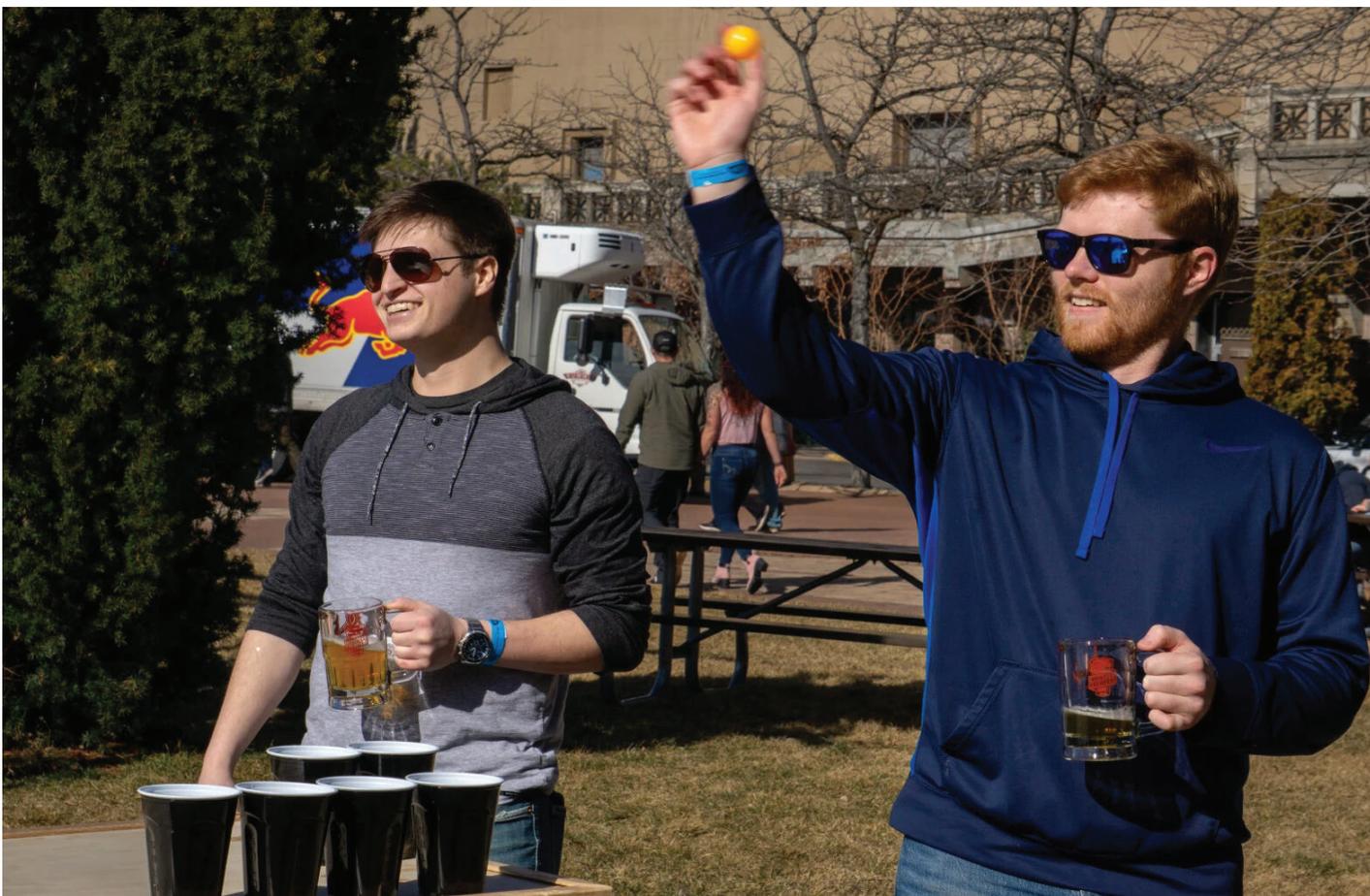
No one should leave a game feeling bored. The teams deserve consistent, abundant support. The more effort and energy, the more fun the games are for the viewers and the athletes. And the more likely they will return to the next game.

We are the Montana Grizzlies and we wear that name with pride, so let's show it. While all home basketball games have concluded, we should continue to show our Grizzly spirit. Go to the games, bring all your excitement and cheer on the amazing athletes working their asses off to bring glory to the Grizzlies.

- Grace Golbach,
audio editor

Like it? Hate it? Let us know.
Email us your opinions at
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Brewing Fun



Dylan Sandau, left, and Gabe Mazur play beer pong at Missoula's Winter BrewFest on Feb. 28 in Caras Park. TORI KUEHL | MONTANA KAIMIN

In local news...

JACK SNOW | NEWS EDITOR

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MISSOULA HOUSING COSTS DROP

A recent housing report showed that Missoula saw median sale prices drop across all types of housing in the past year, while inventory has increased.

The report, which was published by the Missoula Organization of Realtors on Feb. 25, noted a 2.2% decrease in average sale price for housing units, according to Missoula Current. In 2024 that sale price stood at \$562,400, while in 2025 it fell to \$550,000.

Mandy Snook of Montana Home & Land Co. said that sale numbers are also up as the prices adjust.

"In 2024, we had an increase in the number of closed sales — the first time we've seen that since 2020," she said. "That increase continued into 2025, and we closed the year with 1,029 units sold — an increase of 4.6%."

In terms of specific unit types, single family homes cost an average of \$584,00 in 2025, while townhouses averaged \$497,000 and condos averaged \$343,000. Manufactured homes on owned land closed the year at an average of \$356,000.

The decrease in housing costs has also resulted in more homes considered affordable by the "affordability index," which compares the cost of housing to average wages.

For homes with a down payment of 20%, Missoula's 2025 score was an 82, which Matt Gehr of PrimeLending said is the highest in years.

"What we're seeing as we transition from 2023 to 2025 is a gradual, steady improvement to the affordability index," he said. "We haven't yet reached a point of balance of affordability, but we're closer to that than we were previously."

BOZEMAN NURSE PRONOUNCED DEAD AFTER BEING HIT BY A VEHICLE

Leslie Brown, 39, died last Thursday in Bozeman after being struck by a car while crossing Oak Street.

Preliminary reports show that the car was traveling west on the street and did not stop for Brown when she was walking on a marked crosswalk, according to KXLH.

As of Monday, police have not yet released the name of the driver, but said that the person is cooperating with investigators.

Detective Capt. Anthony Hutchings said that it's not yet certain whether the driver will face criminal charges.

"It depends on the circumstances. There are so many different variables and factors that go into each collision," he said.

Brown worked as a nurse for Bozeman Health, which released the following statement on Friday: "Our Bozeman Health care team is heartbroken by the tragic loss of one of our own, Leslie Brown, who has been a nurse at Bozeman Health since 2015. Leslie was an exceptional, dedicated, compassionate nurse and an incredible human being who had a way of making everyone feel cared for. She will be remembered for her excellence, kind heart and passion by all who had the privilege of working alongside her. Our thoughts are with Leslie's family, friends and our Bozeman Health care team as we all grieve this deeply felt loss."



This Friday on the Kaimin Cast ...

Tyler Yaney became an Uber driver after he moved to Missoula and found himself between jobs. His 10-year-old dog, Shannon, rode along with him until she passed away. Uber has now been his full time job for nine years, and his new four-legged companion is a 7-year-old golden retriever-Australian-shepherd mix, Timber.

Last April, Yaney started creating content of Timber's Uber rides for social media. The account, @timbersgottaroll, now has 91,000 followers on TikTok and over 57,000 followers on Instagram. Timber has become well known around Missoula through his backseat hangouts with locals, and across the nation through his social media content.

"People get real excited. Some people are a little confused, 'Is this my actual Uber?' Which I have to reassure them like 'Yes, I'm your Uber. I'm picking you up like I have a dog with me.' It's pretty cool," Yaney said.

Stay tuned for next week's podcast, "Need a ride? Timber provides." To hear more about Missoula's four-legged influencer, head to our website this Friday at montanakaimin.com.

- Grace Golbach,
audio editor



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



TRUMP SPEAKS ABOUT CONTINUED ASSAULT ON IRAN

President Trump said on Sunday that U.S. forces intend to sustain the attack on Iran for "four to five weeks" if needed.

Trump insisted that the Pentagon has both the forces and the firepower for sustained military action if it proves necessary, according to The New York Times.

"It won't be difficult," he said. "We have tremendous amounts of ammunition. You know, we have ammunition stored all over the world in different countries."

The president didn't address any of the Pentagon's concerns about depleting military resources that some strategists have said may be critical for potential scenarios, like a conflict in Taiwan or a deeper Russian incursion into Europe.

In terms of an ideal outcome of the conflict in Iran, Trump expressed favor for replacing only the top government officials to keep most of the country's power structure intact.

"What we did in Venezuela, I think, is the perfect, the perfect scenario," he said, in reference to the raid that captured Nicolás Maduro.

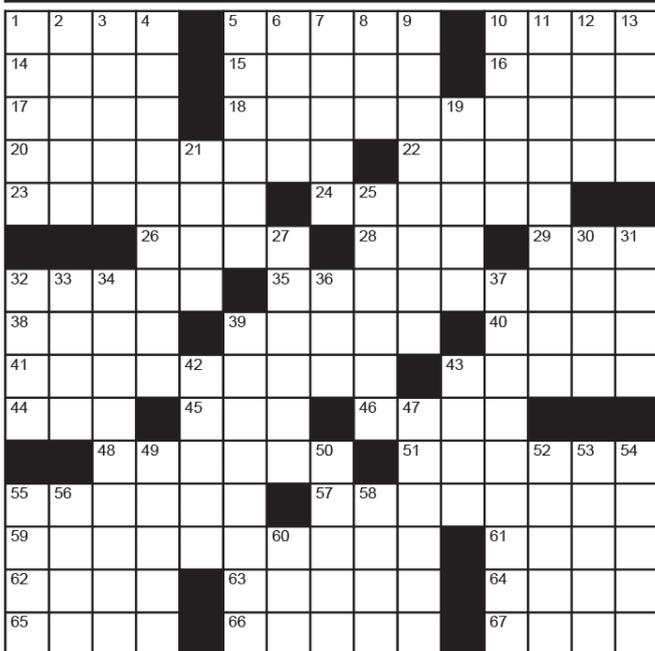
When asked about who should lead Iran in the wake of the operation, Trump hinted that he has multiple ideas, but wouldn't go into detail.

"I have three very good choices," he said. "I won't be revealing them now. Let's get the job done first."

Trump also addressed the risks of the Iranian conflict after news of American casualties. "We expect casualties," he said, but also said that he's confident in America and Israel's ability to beat Iran. "The country has been very substantially weakened, to put it mildly," he added.

U.S. and Israeli forces have already killed multiple Iranian military leaders, alongside destroying a portion of the Iranian navy, including nine ships and the navy headquarters.

Burnout-o-scope



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ACROSS

- 1 Aldrin's org.
- 5 BP gas brand
- 10 Bartlett, for one
- 14 Chemical endings
- 15 Gun an engine
- 16 Unemployed
- 17 Goes (for)
- 18 Commencement
- 20 President Macron
- 22 Ray of "GoodFellas"
- 23 Rent payer
- 24 Caterer's heater
- 26 Talk back to
- 28 ___-stop shop
- 29 Feel sorry about
- 32 Implied
- 35 Ethan Hunt portrayed
- 38 Hale or Thicke
- 39 Hot under the collar
- 40 Place for polish
- 41 Japan castle city
- 43 Set to rest
- 44 NY time zone
- 45 Pen's point
- 46 Crime-stopper spray
- 48 Second of two
- 51 Sister of Calliope
- 55 Aviator Earhart
- 57 Doing a theater job
- 59 Know-how
- 61 Verne's captain
- 62 Genesis skipper
- 63 John who sang "Daniel"
- 64 "A Visit from the Goon Squad" author

- 65 "Giant" author Ferber
 - 66 Eases up on the gas
 - 67 Disavow
- DOWN**
- 1 Orange variety
 - 2 Some Japanese films
 - 3 Looks like
 - 4 Hired guns
 - 5 Puts forth, as a case
 - 6 Only
 - 7 Track shapes
 - 8 Cow's chew
 - 9 Lavish living
 - 10 Spike for climbing
 - 11 Opinion piece
 - 12 Very much
 - 13 Sofer of the soaps
 - 19 Network, e.g.
 - 21 Shipshape
 - 25 Part of a drum kit
 - 27 Disco light
 - 30 Former Voice of America org.

- 31 Slippery
- 32 Break, as a horse
- 33 Woe is me
- 34 Ben Cartwright, for one
- 36 Cereal grain
- 37 Ignorant
- 39 Impersonates
- 42 Loosen a knot
- 43 Persistent pain
- 47 2004 Olympics site
- 49 Leader of the pack
- 50 Seek out for help
- 52 Feudal lord
- 53 Jude Law's "Cold Mountain" role
- 54 Intense suffering
- 55 Complexion concern
- 56 Kind of ring or swing
- 58 Garbage boat
- 60 Building wing

Answers to Previous Crossword:



KAIRI LISING | ARTS & CULTURE EDITOR

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It's been a long year. The world is on fire. Grades are slipping. Everyone is getting sick for some reason? College life right now feels like burnout central. For my fellow burnout brothers in arms, what are you doing instead of your homework?

PISCES (FEB. 19-MARCH 20): Not much can distract you from your burnout-riddled mind. Except for one thing. That one person sitting in your math class with the hair that sits juuuust right. Humina humina awwooga, amirite? Maybe your attendance grade will get better.

ARIES (MARCH 21-APRIL 19):

The grindset is real, Aries. There's only one way to get out of this sick-of-school, burnout slump. GETTIN' BUFF. That's right. I'm talking pumping iron. I'm talking about avoiding turning in assignments. Campus Rec is calling your name.

TAURUS (APRIL 20-MAY 20):

Whenever you're feeling overwhelmed from school, there's only one surefire solution. Shopping! Whoever said shopping is cheaper than therapy was wrong, though. In this economy? A sweet treat is like taking out a second mortgage. Worth it!

GEMINI (MAY 21-JUNE 20):

Gemini, you've been reading everything except what you've been assigned. You've left behind "Wuthering Heights" and have picked up "Heated Rivalry." Hey, I can't blame you either. If only my science readings had smut.

CANCER (JUNE 21-JULY 22): Burnout is hard, I get it. But does that mean you have to avoid all of your responsibilities by lying in bed? Sure, your bed may be literally the best place on earth right now, but what about the outside world? Foreign concept, I know. Try it sometime.

LEO (JULY 23-AUG. 22): The best way to beat off burnout is beating off! Doctor's orders, you say, but everyone knows why you take 15-minute-long bathroom breaks during class. Seriously, though, I think you have an addiction. This is your intervention, Leo. Put the lotion down.

VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEP. 22): You've put off all of your studying to study the blade. That's right, Virgo. You're fighting away the burnout by actually fighting it, with swords. Someone less cool would've just buckled down and faced the music, but you? You're swinging swords on the Oval.

LIBRA (SEP. 23-OCT. 22): Libra, you've been procrastinating your science homework by returning to your biological roots. Outside is where you make your escape, away from books and diagrams and into the wild. And by wild, I mean the patch of dry brown grass in front of Eck Hall.

SCORPIO (OCT. 23-NOV. 21): Let's be real. You've been fucking. Yeah, yeah, getting laid is great and all, but how about that attendance record? I get it, though, really. I'd prefer to be taking Ds instead of seeing them on Canvas too.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21): You've put off studying for your midterms to get high as a kite. So high, in fact, your history homework is a distant memory. All that's on your mind now is Taco Bell and your TikTok For You Page. Can I join the blunt rotation?

CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 19): We all love a fun Pinterest craft, and you clearly do. You will learn any new crafty hobby just to avoid touching your homework. Origami, crochet, paper collages and baking. You've created everything except academic integrity. Call you a jack of all trades, but a bachelor's degree of none.

AQUARIUS (JAN. 20-FEB. 18): Hot girl summer never ended for you, Aquarius. While everyone else is dealing with their burnout in introverted ways, you take coping to the club! Nothing feels better than dancing your worries away with all your baddies.



BARRETT CLEMENT | MONTANA KAIMIN

Fisheries science chair named at University of Montana

SAM ARMSTRONG-DUBOIS | NEWS REPORTER
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The wildlife biology program expanded its outreach by creating the chair of fisheries science to study the effects of warmer temperatures and lower snow runoff on cold-water fish species.

Yoichiro Kanno has been named the new chair of fisheries science this month after applying for the position in September 2024.

The chair of fisheries science has officially been developed in the wildlife biology program after UM pooled \$5 million in 2024 from 56 donors in hopes of preserving the cold-water fish species many Missoulians cherish through education.

While temperatures rise, climates for cold-water fish species change, stressing the fish and changing the ecosystem in the Bitterroot and Clark Fork rivers. The importance of educating students and future conservationists about the delicate nature of the ecosystem continues to grow.

“Our mission is to train the next generation of natural resources professionals,” Kanno said. “My goal is to collaborate with partners to understand or discover what’s little known about trout ecology. And then use that information to help conserve our fisheries resources in the state and the Pacific Northwest.”

Fish populations near the Big Hole River have been recorded as lower than average for multiple years. In a river basin study conducted by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, populations taken in 2025 show that brown trout have seen nearly a 55% decline in population compared to the species’ long-term average.

Stream restoration is a way to combat the population decline, as through the restoration, biologists and hydrologists can control the rate at which water flow moves. The process helps regulate the temperature and quantity of water.

Through the education of students, Kanno hopes to inspire creative ways to continue the development of restoration.

“We learn so much from hands-on experience,” Kanno said. Fundraising from private citizens created Kanno’s position of faculty chair. Kanno has a wide portfolio of educational



Hannah Turek, 22, a history major from the suburbs of Chicago, casts her hook into the Clark Fork on Feb. 27. WESTON FUDGE | MONTANA KAIMIN

experience, having taught at Tennessee Technological University and Colorado State University.

Through film depictions of Montana’s fishing scene, like “A River Runs Through It,” Montana has been portrayed as a hotspot for fishing. However, there are many factors in conserving these stunning habitats that can be overlooked. Bull trout are a protected cold-water fish species. The species has become federally protected due to its endangerment and is also heavily impacted by snowpack.

Lisa Eby, professor for ecosystem and conservation sciences, said, “When our snowpack comes off quickly, we definitely see lower flows during the summer and that often leads to warmer temperatures and less habitat.”

Chad Bishop, director of the wildlife biology program, has been doing fundraising and work with architects and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to further raise money for a new building in the program.

The wildlife biology program hopes that through the chair and the Treasure Montana: Cultivating Our Tomorrow fundraising campaign, the department will raise \$20 million by the end of the year to construct a new cutting-edge center for natural preservation and study.

A poster for Sunrise Saloon events. The top half features a silhouette of a cowboy on a rearing horse against a sunset background with a cactus. The text reads: "SUNRISE Saloon", "Missoula's only Country Western Saloon!". Below this is a list of events: "3/5 Dance Party @9PM!", "3/6 Tanner Laws Band @9PM!", "3/7 Meadowlarks Band @9PM!", "3/10 Dance Lessons by Misfit Country Dancing @7:15PM!", "3/11 BINGO @7!". At the bottom, it says "Tuesdays & Thursdays Karaoke by PRO DJ @9PM!" and "1101 Strand Ave, Missoula, MT 59801".

SUNRISE
Saloon

**Missoula's only
Country
Western Saloon!**

3/5 Dance Party @9PM!

3/6 Tanner Laws Band @9PM!

3/7 Meadowlarks Band @9PM!

**3/10 Dance Lessons by Misfit Country
Dancing @7:15PM!**

3/11 BINGO @7!

Tuesdays & Thursdays Karaoke by PRO DJ @9PM!

1101 Strand Ave, Missoula, MT 59801

Montana files amended complaint attacking disability rights

JOCelyn HOOD | NEWS REPORTER

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Montana and eight other states filed an amended complaint targeting certain disability rights on vvvv 23.

In the lawsuit, *Texas v. Kennedy*, nine states asked the court to block a rule giving people with disabilities the right to receive services in the most “integrated” setting, rather than in institutions. That rule was published by the Department of Health and Human Services about the integration mandate, which is part of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The nine states also asked that updated Section 504 regulations be blocked. Section 504 is part of the Rehabilitation Act.

Both the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act prevent many forms of discrimination against people with disabilities, and Section 504 is directed specifically to federally funded entities, including public universities.

According to Charity Atteberry, the director of the Office for Disability Equity, the University of Montana’s access to disability services will remain intact, even if the lawsuit succeeds.

“We may have to change some of the ways that we enact our procedures, right? But I think I feel confident in stating that this campus is committed to access,” Atteberry said. “So, yeah, I’m not backing down from that. And I know this team is not backing down from that too.”

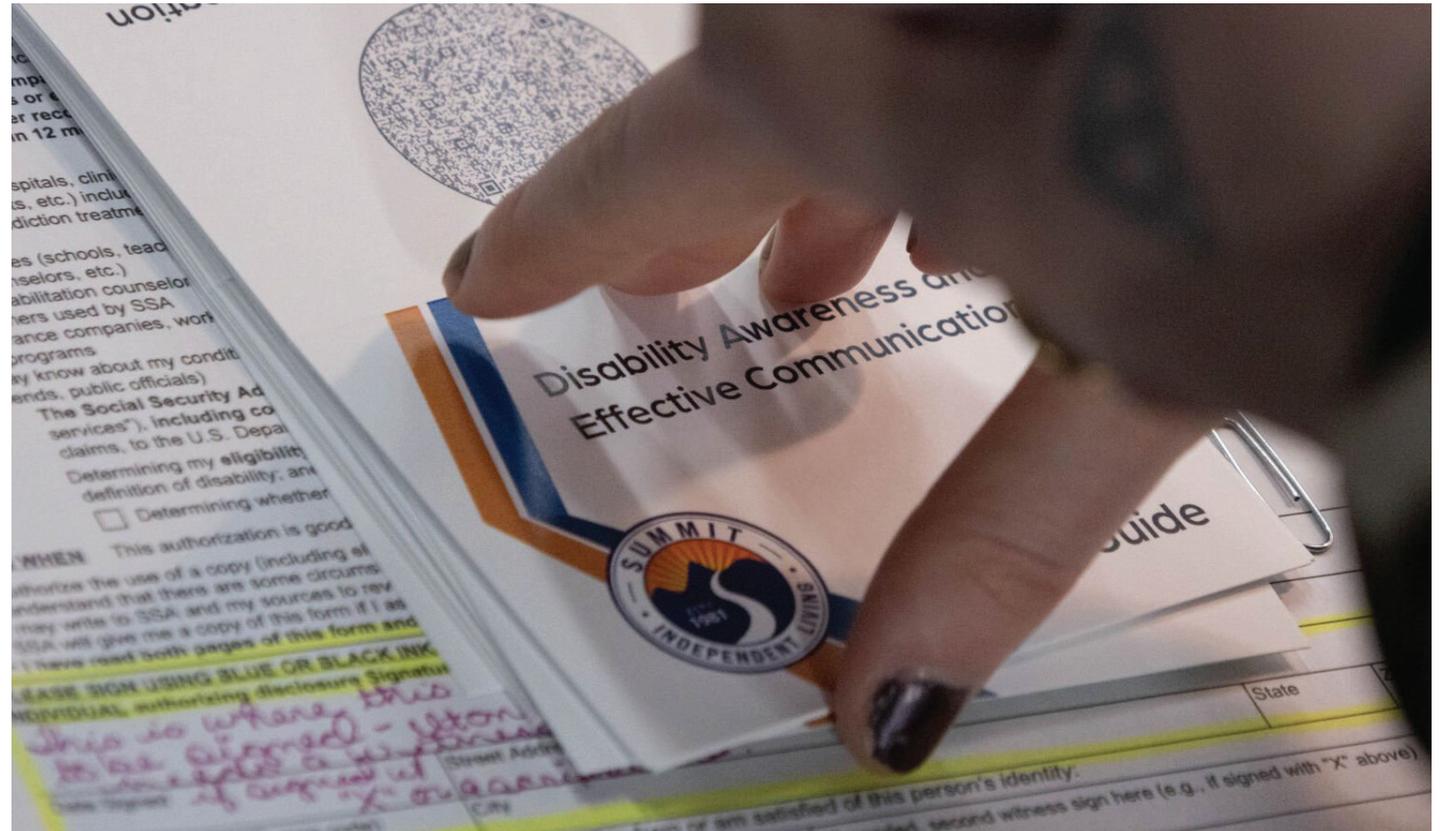
The Office for Disability Equity is “the office that is charged with really helping facilitate the interactive process for students,” according to Atteberry. It helps students and faculty communicate about accommodations, including real-time captioning, American Sign Language interpretive services and a testing center.

Senior social work major and Equity in Action Club President Quentin Allaire said he debated dropping out of college his freshman year because of invisible disabilities, but the Office of Disability Equity helped him with accommodations.

Allaire, 21 and originally from Issaquah, Washington, said someone at an orientation tabling event helped him get connected with resources.

However, Allaire said he’d be concerned about his access to accommodations if the case succeeded, even though the Office for Disability Equity said it is “committed to access.”

“Just because they say they’re going to do that doesn’t mean that’s true, for one, and because as soon as it’s not protected, people are going to start fighting back against it,” Allaire said.



Solveig Gasner, executive office manager at Summit Independent Living, organizes papers on her desk on March 2. WESTON FUDGE | MONTANA KAIMIN

Travis Hoffman, the policy director at Summit Independent Living, a center for independent living in Missoula for people with disabilities, said he shares these same concerns.

“If this rule is not enforceable, basically 504 is not enforceable, and so that affects children in school, that affects health care, like hospitals that receive federal funding, that affects pretty much every aspect of life,” Hoffman said.

Summit Independent Living is at higher risk of being affected if the lawsuit succeeds than public universities, according to Hoffman, because the rule preventing unnecessary institutionalization of people with disabilities is what keeps independent living centers funded.

“If this lawsuit were successful, the state or the federal government can no longer tell states that, even if they participate in Medicaid programs, they would have to provide services in the least restrictive setting,” Hoffman said. “Which would put people with disabilities at risk of having to go to nursing homes, often hundreds or if not thousands of miles away from their own communities.”

He said that this could lead to funding cuts for Home and Community-Based Services, which Summit Independent Living relies on.

“Why they’re going after 504, I have no idea, because our state has long supported Home and Community-Based Services. We’ve had a Home and Community-Based waiver program since 1983, one of the first in the country,” Hoffman said. “What the attorney general’s doing is really in stark contrast to what the state has been moving toward for decades.”

The case was first introduced in September 2024 with the support of 17 states, and a section of it requested that the entirety of Section 504 be deemed unconstitutional. One of the main reasons for the original case’s existence is the mention of the term “gender dysphoria” in the preamble of a rule in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

According to Hoffman, the rule with the mention of gender dysphoria brought greater access to things like digital accessibility, medical treatment and medical equipment.

“What that rule also contained in the preamble of it was that many courts held out that gender dysphoria was associated

with disabling conditions, but it didn’t classify gender dysphoria as a disabling condition in itself that was protected under 504 or the ADA,” Hoffman said.

Amanda Braynack, the communications director for Montana’s Attorney General Austin Knudsen, commented on this in an email.

“From the beginning, the lawsuit sought to protect students served by Section 504 in Montana by refusing to let Joe Biden hold students with disabilities hostage over radical gender ideology,” Braynack said. “Unfortunately, bad faith actors misconstrued the lawsuit to frighten citizens into believing that the attorney general put Section 504 in jeopardy.”

Dave Kuntz, the UM spokesperson, said UM will continue serving students now and after the lawsuit concludes.

“Even as laws change and they come and go, the core mission of serving students is going to remain. We have an ethical and a financial component of ensuring that students come here and they succeed, and the ground moves beneath our feet on a ton of different issues all the time,” Kuntz said. “But the [Office of Disability and Equity] and the employees that report up to [it] and the students [it] serves, that mission isn’t going to waiver.”



UM business professor David Firth demonstrates an AI persona in his office on Feb. 26, that he created on his YouTube channel.

Like any kind of tool, artificial intelligence, or AI, has the potential for both creation and destruction, its aptitude for one tempered only by its tendency for the other.

Used correctly, it has seemingly boundless potential for good, a force of human innovation and scientific progress that notches a new benchmark for knowledge and creation.

On the other hand, its detrimental effects on the environment and its dubious place in education have raised concern over its widespread use. Some worry that it's becoming a catch-all tool for jobs it shouldn't be applied to.

David Firth, a professor of management information systems at the University of Montana, said artificial intelligence has a place in the classroom. "You should use AI

to study, to help you come up with ideas, to create drafts, to create outlines, but then you need to humanize that," he said.

Patience Matt, a Sentinel High School graduate who plans to attend Missoula College next year, expressed concern about students relying on AI too heavily. "Personally, I don't see any good use of AI, I think it's making people lazier," she said.

At UM, both educators and students are constantly faced with the ever-changing landscape of AI. Its detriments, just like its boons, can be monumental, but it's still almost impossible to find consensus on what AI's role in education should be.

While UM doesn't have an overall policy on how AI should be used on campus, it does have a list of commitments to guide students and staff. These commitments

include promises to preserve human judgement, remain transparent, support faculty and foster inclusive dialogue. In practice, this means that specific policies can vary greatly between departments and from class to class.

Amy Ratto Parks, UM's associate director of academic assessment and faculty support, explained this flexible approach. "The policy is that instructors need to make decisions about what happens in their courses," she said.

One of the main benefits of this strategy is its ability for professors to tailor their policies to a course's specific goals. Many business instructors have extensive sections in their courses dedicated to using AI as effectively as possible, while some professors of the humanities prefer

to limit its use. Both techniques are valid in the eyes of UM's administration.

That versatility can be a double-edged sword, though. Students can become confused on when and where AI should be used.

"It's really hard to figure out how to ethically operate as a student if you don't have the answer," Ratto Parks said.

Professors have tried hard to remain cognizant of those issues, working with UM's teaching resources department to create appropriate guidelines for their courses and make sense of the changing landscape.

The University's commitment to responsible AI use is shared by each and every one of its professors, but the ways in which they apply that commitment vary greatly.

THE MAIN FOCUS

As artificial intelligence continues to evolve, students and faculty alike are working to understand where its place is in academics

Written by Jack Snow

Photographed by Henry Doellinger

Setting parameters

In UM's business school, AI is a major part of many courses. Professors like David Firth of the management information systems department encourage students to expand their understanding of AI for both educational and professional reasons.

Firth has been an outspoken voice for the benefits AI can bring to college education. He recently made a video about AI for students in his classes, where he explained the basics of AI terms. Firth began the video by cracking a quick joke about how, with so many acronyms, learning about AI can feel like swimming in alphabet soup. Except he didn't.

Firth never said that joke, nor did he record that video on AI terminology. The entire presentation was generated by AI. The video used a detailed "digital twin" that mimicked Firth's appearance, from his facial features to the cadence of his voice and the very rings on his fingers.

Firth said only close acquaintances could tell the difference between himself and his virtual clone without detailed inspection.

Firth uses AI tools like video generation to engage students and streamline teaching. "We should be using it in class to make sure students understand how to use it properly, use it ethically and use it responsibly," he said.

In addition to videos, Firth recently began developing an AI generated teaching assistant. He demonstrated its capabilities by having the assistant administer a mock oral exam, where it asked questions, collected responses and changed its technique based on how he answered.

"I've only just started playing with this, but this is a way to scale the ability to do an oral exam," he said. "So what happens is I get a transcript of that, and then you can grade the transcript."

Most AI transcription programs claim to be 80-90% accurate. A 2024 study by Cornell University researchers found that AI transcription hallucinations, or when the program adds words or phrases that weren't there, is around 1%.

Firth hasn't implemented the assistant into his courses yet, but said that a similar design has gained popularity at New York University's business school.

Despite Firth's avid AI use, he said there are absolutely limits on its value in education. "If you use AI properly, it's fantastic," he said. "If you use it as a crutch, or a replacement for your critical thinking, then that is a real problem."

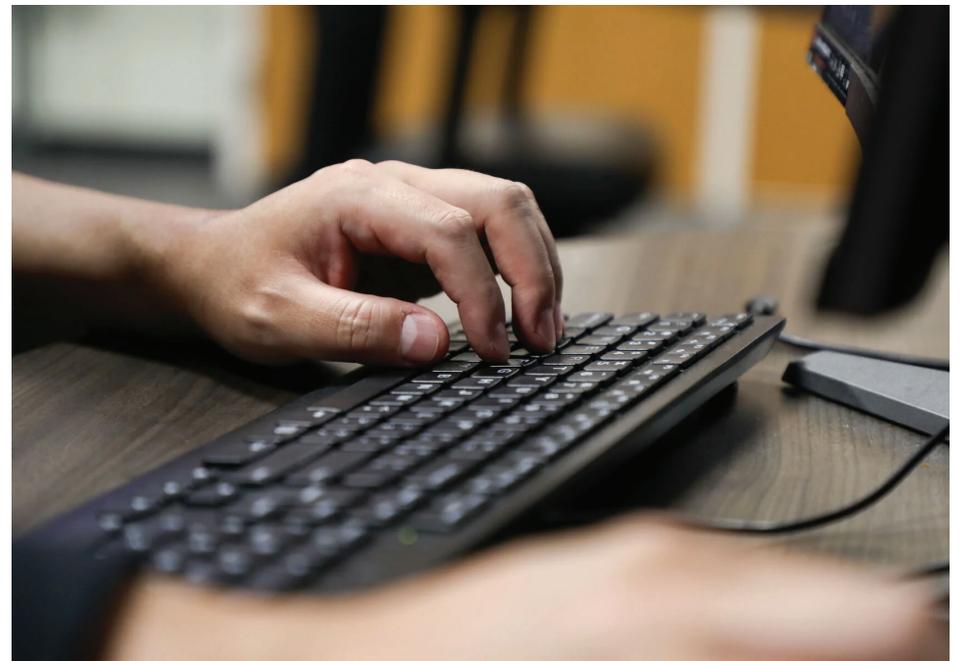
His remedy to this problem is to "humanize" AI outputs by placing them in proper context and adding to what it generates. Instead of viewing the output as a finished product, Firth encourages students to use AI to come up with ideas, outlines and drafts to be built upon later.

"What it's doing in a lot of businesses is taking away the grind, and allowing humans to use their humanistic attributes: empathy, the ability to think, the ability to be ethical and know when something's right or wrong," Firth said.

Minimizing busy work can be a positive

for business courses, but in the humanities, it's not always so cut and dry.

Mark Hanson, who teaches philosophy at the Davidson Honors College, said he sees great value in learning to grapple with challenging ideas. "Outsourcing those types of skills to AI, I think, is contrary to the purpose of education," he said.



UM Esports coach Ryan Knowles works at a computer in the UC on Feb. 24.

"If you use AI properly, it's fantastic. If you use it as a crutch, or a replacement for your critical thinking then that is a real problem."

-David Firth

Classes that focus on reading and artistic analysis are uniquely vulnerable to being subverted by AI cheating. AI can instantly summarize lengthy texts and provide detailed analysis of course materials, bypassing student exploration.

"It becomes a tempting tool to be able to produce the best product that they can in terms of their writing assignments," Hanson said. "But education isn't always about producing ... the product isn't the entire goal of education."

Hanson encourages an approach based less on results, and more on the process of learning itself.

"I think learning to focus and to stick with something and to struggle with anything that is worthwhile is in itself rewarding," he said. "I see education as being transformative, or I think it should be transformative, and transformation takes effort."

This spring, members of UM's Future Project, which serves as the University's initiative on the implementation of AI, proposed the option to earn an AI certificate. One of those members was Michael Cassens, an associate professor for the School of Media Arts who currently teaches courses that deal with the history and applications of AI.

"What we've proposed is creating this thought where we have courses where you learn about not only the foundations of generative AI, but also about the ethics and the morals," Cassens said.

The goal would be to educate students about the technology, and prepare them for the changes it's already making.

Cassens has observed the way that AI can breed creativity when used correctly in his classes. Its ability to reframe concepts based on the needs of the user can help students to view ideas from a perspective that their professor may not have considered.

He was also adamant that regardless of opinion, it's important for people to have an understanding of generative AI and what its uses are.

"I really want to lean into getting as many people around the table to talk about it, good, bad or indifferent," Cassens said. "If you hate it, I still want you to be at the table, if you love it, I want you to be at the table."

That proverbial table may have been set by Cassens and his contemporaries, but many of the seats will end up filled by those they teach.

Machine learning

Much like their professors, UM students hold a wide variety of opinions about where AI belongs at the University.

Simon Montecillo, a freshman music major, refuses to use the technology altogether. "As somebody in the arts I see a lot of generated material tossed around," he said. "Generally that's what I disagree most with, AI art."

Montecillo is also a business minor, so he's had some conflicting experiences with AI. He's currently taking a management information systems class where AI use is encouraged. "I'm trying to understand how it's valuable, but I can't help but be a little cynical," he said. "I like to believe it's mostly used incorrectly as a crutch."

Despite his critical view, Montecillo expressed doubt that music is significantly threatened by AI. "I still do not think that AI could ever beat human creation for the sole fact that AI can never be human," he said. "I don't think AI could ever take over my major."

The question of which jobs AI can perform has reshaped the way many students look at their majors. Students like Montecillo are confident that humanity will prevail in their fields, but some aren't so sure.



UM student Simon Montecillo poses in the UC on Feb. 24. Montecillo said he avoids using AI.

UM alum Ryan Knowles, who graduated in 2019 with a degree in computer science, is one such case, but still sees AI in an optimistic light. "I understand that there are a lot of negatives, but I would say there [is] an incalculable amount of positives because we don't even know what all the positives are," he said.

Knowles said he uses AI for a wide array of tasks. He's found it helpful for work, recipes and language translation. His recent use has allowed him to play online games with a group that consists of people from Ukraine, Germany and France, communicating with ease despite the language barrier.

On the flip side, Knowles observed the impact that AI has had on his major firsthand, attributing the lack of computer science jobs to its use. "Everyone that I can recall that I graduated with is no longer in computer science," he said. "I graduated with about 20 people and I can't think of a single one who's still in the field."

Coding in specific has been drastically changed by AI, with many elements now automated. Many members of Knowles' graduating class still work in adjacent industries to computer science, but none still participate in coding for work.

Among recent college graduates, both computer science and computer engineering majors hold some of the highest unemployment rates, at 7% and 7.8%, respectively, according to a report from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Those numbers put the two majors at the fifth and second-worst in terms of unemployment.

Prospective students also hold strong opinions on AI use. Upcoming Missoula College student Patience Matt said she doesn't think it has a place in education. "I think that it limits people's ability to truly think," she said.

In high school, Matt observed an erosion of certain classes and skills because of AI use. "I felt like people stopped valuing their English classes," she said. "They didn't have to think critically."

Matt plans on studying culinary arts and said she isn't worried about AI impacting the field, but still feels it's a negative force for education.

Whether positive or negative, AI's impact on learning is undeniable, but beyond academic issues, there are other worrying implications of its use.

Generating controversy

For many, the elephant in the room is the environmental impact of AI data centers.

Ben Catton of the Montana Environmental Information Center explained that the effects of these centers are already massive. "You can't use enough superlatives to depict what an enormous change that is in our relationships to energy," he said.

According to Catton, the advent of AI has started a race to generate as much power as possible. Currently it takes around 760 megawatts to power the entirety of Montana every year. Every light, heater and refrigerator in the state contributes to that number, but Northwestern Energy recently signed letters of intent to direct up to 1,400 megawatts of power to AI data centers annually.

For scale, one megawatt can supply power to 400-1,000 average American households with power, according to Biology Insights. A fraction of a megawatt can be used to power a small manufacturing plant, and large hospitals typically require up to two megawatts.

That kind of energy consumption is unprecedented, and could have major effects on the environment. "Data centers use huge amounts of water for cooling, both on site and off site," Catton said. "Montana does not have water to spare."



Prospective UM student Patience Matt poses outside the UC Market on Feb. 24. Matt said she does not believe AI has a place in education.



UM Esports coach Ryan Knowles works in the UC on Feb. 24. Knowles said he views AI in an optimistic light.

According to the National Integrated Drought Information System, there are currently about 537,200 Montana residents in areas of drought. Montana also experienced its fifth driest January on record since 1895 this year.

The Big Horn Data Hub in Hardin uses about two million gallons of fresh water from the Bighorn River every day for cooling its electronics.

In addition to water consumption, there's concern about the lifespan of data center electronics and the waste they can generate. Catton said that most of those electronics last between three to six years, and the majority end up in local landfills because of Montana's lack of recycling infrastructure and lax policies for disposing of electronics.

Montana's economy could also feel strain from these upcoming changes. With such a massive expansion in the works for Northwestern, Montanans could be expected to carry the cost with their everyday energy bills. "Everywhere with existing data centers has seen rates go up," Catton said.

The financial impact applies to job generation as well. As data centers begin to grow, it takes more and more money to create work positions.

The environmental and economic impacts of AI can be enormous, but the payoff is still worth it to many.

Emergent behaviors

Questioning an AI about AI seems incredibly meta, no pun intended, but ChatGPT's ability to sift through massive amounts of information made it well suited for the task.

On the topic of AI's place at the University, ChatGPT laid out an argument that mirrored UM's own ideas. "AI's place in college education should be augmentative, transparent, and guided by ethics," it said. "It should expand learning capacity – not erode intellectual rigor."

It went on to write about how it would handle the issue of different departments and courses needing different policies. "At institutions like the University of Montana, I believe AI policies should follow a hybrid model: shared principles university-wide, but tailored applications by department," it said.

That approach proves similar to what many UM professors have said about their own course systems, down to the fact that the University has chosen not to implement a universal AI policy. Maybe it was to be expected that ChatGPT would reflect human opinions, as an amalgamation of human research and thought, it's not terribly surprising that it expressed such a complex understanding of worries expressed by others.

ChatGPT went on to write that fields like business analytics and data science might use AI as a learning objective on its own, echoing the stance of Firth. For English, history and philosophy, it agreed with Hanson that AI writing can undermine the development of skills, requiring the consideration of tighter restrictions.

Beyond strategies for ideal AI use, ChatGPT also made observations about the value of higher education as a whole.

"The worth of a college degree has never been rooted solely in producing essays or recalling information," it said. "Instead, it comes from developing critical thinking, learning how to evaluate complex problems, engaging with mentors and peers, and gaining the ability to apply knowledge in meaningful ways."

Ultimately, that's the crux of the issue that so many students, professors and others had been getting at. It's easy to get caught up in the web of grades, credits and degree requirements, but at the end of the day, college is a place of learning first and foremost. UM has its commitments and many students have convictions of their own, but the jury is still out on exactly where AI belongs in the University.

"AI's place in college education should be augmentative, transparent, and guided by ethics. It should expand learning capacity – not erode intellectual rigor." -ChatGPT

'Wuthering Heights' explored

SABRINA PHILIP | ARTS REPORTER

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A black screen, and the sound of grunting, moaning and heavy breathing: Is it sex, or is it someone getting hanged?

Emerald Fennell's film adaptation of English author Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights" opens with someone getting hanged, having an erection and those watching experiencing mixed feelings of shock, passion, horror and intrigue. The tone of this "Wuthering Heights" storyline in the new 2026 movie is immediately clear: Sex sells.

The modern adaptation of "Wuthering Heights" is defined by new Charli XCX music, Margot Robbie, Jacob Elordi and an \$80 million budget. The film has been playing in theaters across the country for about two weeks and has sparked controversy amongst viewers.

According to Kathleen Kane, an associate professor in the English Department, she has taught with "Wuthering Heights" a number of times and has found that with those she has educated on the book, most have developed "some kind of relationship with it." This semester in particular, Kane educated students on the book at the University in a graduate seminar, studying a field of literary inquiry and theory called "Affect Theory."

"It's a very complex field, but thinking about emotions, to me, one of the most interesting things about 'Wuthering Heights' is the kind of impact its had on our understanding of romance, even if that's in error not almost exclusively," Kane said. "I mean, it's just a kind of very familiar text. Even though many people have not read it, they have some kind of relationship to it, and that relationship has to do with our understanding of one of the most emotionally laden connections we can have, which is romance, right?"

One topic this conversation sparked was the casting of Jacob Elordi as Heathcliff, a character previously written and adapted as a person not of white descent.

"Why did Fennell choose to cast Jacob Elordi, a white man, in a role that is clearly, in the book, designated for a racialized subject position?" Kane said. "Heathcliff is either described as a gypsy or a Lascar, and Mr. Earnshaw kind of picks up Heathcliff in Liverpool, which is a great port city. When Brontë calls him a Lascar, she's saying he was like a sailor from the East Indies, so from India."



A poster for "Wuthering Heights" outside of the Roxy Theater on Feb. 27. TORI KUEHL | MONTANA KAIMIN

Kane continued that in the text, Brontë is "basically saying he's a brown man from India, or he might be, and she uses the term 'gypsy.'" They said the text implies Heathcliff might be a person of Romani descent, but throughout the text, he's talked about as a dark-skinned person.

According to second-year political science graduate student Lauren Van Cleaf, this also explains why the story remains relevant in a classroom setting, particularly for high school students.

"I think it's incredibly relevant because when you're in high school, for the most part, you're just starting out in these more complex relationships, especially romantic relationships," Van Cleaf said. "So, it's important to assign a text such as this because it really takes apart what a relationship could be like. It really plays into the notion of manipulation tactics, of how love bombing, whether or not passion is truly enough to have a sustainable relationship that not only will last, but also serve you."

Van Cleaf continued to describe the relationship between the characters in "Wuthering Heights" as "a car accident," explaining that the nature of the relationship, surrounded by manipulation, revenge and toxicity makes a viewer "not want to look away." This, she said, is

appealing to high schoolers, who are "in a vulnerable state in their life."

Upon seeing the trailer, Kane explained their immediate acknowledgement that the adaptation was going to be a "very odd version of 'Wuthering Heights.'" After viewing the trailer, her class discussed what the film means in the context of today's society and the interests of people today, and how these ideas can be connected to the story.

After discussion like this, Kane took their class to see the film, along with members of their book club and with some invitees and other professors. Renting out a theater at the Roxy, students in their seminar sat together and watched the film.

"It was funny because in my book club, they kind of have their own relationship to books, and it's much more serious, but my grad students were already laughing when Jacob Elordi came out," Kane said. "I think my book club was like, 'Why are all these people laughing at this film?' My students were taking it really lightly. I don't think anybody knew that's how they were going to feel before they got there."

This change to the plot was also noted by Van Cleaf, who noted that while she understands where the anger behind this change is coming from, and agrees it could have been done differently, she also

appreciates the film for what it is.

"Do I think Jacob will already do an outstanding job? Yeah, absolutely. Do I think another actor, if given the opportunity, could have done just his amazing job, maybe even better? Yeah, for sure," Van Cleaf said.

Yet, a sentiment offered by both Kane and Van Cleaf was the categorization of the film as a separate entity from the original novel, viewing the movie as a complement to Brontë's original story.

"It's just they're two separate things, and one of them is, you know, it's very much like popcorn, like it's entertainment, and, you know, that's fine," Kane said. "It's just that the other thing is separate. People really care about the novel, and they care about some of its themes. For example, class or race, or intergenerational trauma. So they want that dimensionality. There is a thing about this day and age, about seeing a ton of money dumped on something for just a kind of stylistically interesting end product when it could be doing so much more."

Van Cleaf agreed Fennell's version of "Wuthering Heights" could be classified as a complement to the novel rather than an adaptation due to the changes and differing interpretation of the storyline. This change in perspective, she said, helped her to process the movie for what it was rather than as a critique against the book.

"I don't think it's fair to call it an adaptation, because it's so different from what the book is," Van Cleaf said. "So going into it like that, I knew that there was going to be some changes, so I kind of resigned myself to the fact that there's going to be differences. I think that made me more open to it."

Kane and Van Cleaf both concluded that despite all the adaptations over time, and the different exploration of the plot, they both think the story is something that will continue to stay relevant over time.

"I think it will absolutely remain relevant for a very long time because what is truly at the core of this book and movie is humanity," Van Cleaf said. "We are innately political animals in that we want to congregate, we want to socialize. With that, we have to understand that there are expectations that society places on us, that it's our job to reevaluate and to change as time allows, but it's always going to be there."

UM's Makerspace brings 'Bob Ross' to campus

BEE REISWIG | ARTS REPORTER

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A rustling of plastic smocks unwrapped and the hum of chatter quieted as a figure made their way to the front of the room. Tightening the strings of the landscape-covered smock, Lindsay Torres, decked out in a curly-haired wig, spoke: "I'm Bob Ross, with The Joy of Painting. This is episode one."

Torres, the student lead of the Makerspace, dressed up as Bob Ross — wig and all — to teach Missoulians how to paint Glacier National Park on Feb. 26. Not only did she lead the class, but she worked for over two weeks to design and organize it.

Torres hoped to teach students a variety of painting skills such as color theory, composition, proportion and brush manipulation. Her previous teaching experience includes offering classes and leading workshops as president of their high school's National Art Honor Society.

"You learn to appreciate how much of an impact you have on students," Torres said. "Things that they wouldn't be able to do if they didn't have somebody who understood what was going on, helping them understand it on a more basic level."



Lindsay Torres dresses as Bob Ross to lead the Bob Ross Painting Night event in the Makerspace on Feb. 26.

TORI KUEHL | MONTANA KAIMIN

Kevin Bell, who runs the University of Montana's painting program, agrees that Ross introduced many people to art and "the joy of self-expression." Bell is a fan of the famed artist and believes his work in making art more accessible is important.

"Whenever I get a cold or sick, and I can't do anything else, it's always wonderful to find on public television Bob Ross and just watch him make a painting," Bell said. "There's real magic to creating an image on your own and seeing that emerge."

A line of people waited to get their palettes filled, ready to make their own Rossian image. About half of them were already wearing their plastic smocks. A TV screen displayed Torres' canvas in the center — after realizing how far back 30 people would have to sit, she rigged a way for those at the very back to see her detail work.

Father-daughter duo Chris and Katherine Kennedy found their places near the back of the room once the event officially began. The 26-year-old elementary education sophomore had seen the flyers around campus and invited her dad — who's known about Bob Ross since he was a kid.



Students gather to paint mountains and trees at the Bob Ross event in the Makerspace on Feb. 26.

TORI KUEHL | MONTANA KAIMIN

"It's kind of been a bucket list item for me to do a Bob Ross painting with Bob Ross instructions," Chris said. "[I want to get] something amusing to put on the wall and, of course, spending time with my daughter is nice."

According to Chris, now that the two have found out about the Makerspace, they want to explore their options more. One of the upcoming events that features visible mending and patches on March 12 is on their radar. Katherine appreciates the value of creative events featured at UM.

"I think it really helps people feel like a community in the University," Katherine said. "Also, just doing something creative, having things that aren't just purely educational opportunities."

Jaiden Crawford, a 19-year-old elementary education sophomore from Missoula, found herself drawn in by the advertising after she found out about the event from GrizHub. She brought two of her friends with her.

"Learn to paint with Bob Ross, are you kidding me?" Crawford said. "Also, I brought my friends here to make fun of their paintings, see what they look like."

She wanted to learn more about drawing and painting, and she'd have

a masterpiece at the end of the day. Crawford has attended other events and was excited to see the big turnout. Her friend, Dana Keller, who Crawford imagined would do better than herself at painting due to her attention to detail, looked forward to the event as well.

"Just seeing someone wear a wig," Keller said. "That's what I wanted to come here for."

The 20-year-old accounting sophomore from Houston, Texas, uses the Makerspace to make jewelry. She saw posters around the University Center and wanted to come. Keller has drawn frequently since elementary school, mostly using graphite, and hadn't worked with acrylic paint much. She was excited to get a fun experience with her friends out of the Bob Ross Painting Night.

"It gives students a time to relax and stop thinking about all the assignments that they have to fulfill," Keller said.

Toward the end of the event, Torres said she walked around and gave each student personalized feedback about their masterpieces. The class took group photos together, and when Torres suggested making the event into a series, the room filled with excitement.

The next chapter for Griz women's rugby

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For years, the teams shared jerseys, numbers and a single sideline. Now, for the first time since 2020, the University of Montana's club women's rugby team is strong enough to stand on its own set of cleats.

What once was "BetterGriz" has grown into something even bigger: two independent teams, one powerful community.

This season marks big news for UM's club rugby team. After many years of combined rosters, Griz Women's Rugby Club and Betterside Women's Rugby Club are officially playing as independent teams. This separation is not a split of conflict, but rather a celebration of growth and a sign that the sport has flourished enough to support two full, competitive sides.

For Hadley Bybee, president of Griz Women's Rugby Club, the moment represents both a return and a new beginning.

"This hasn't been done successfully yet, so it's kind of nerve-racking," Bybee said. "For the team, I'm hoping that we can elevate our level of play and really be like a college club. I'd like it to be a competitive team."

Since 1976, Betterside Women's Rugby Club has served as the University of Montana's official women's rugby club. It also happens to be the oldest women's rugby team in the state of Montana, celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. Over the decades, it became a staple of the Missoula rugby scene, being competitive, community-driven and deeply rooted in tradition. Even after officially separating from the University in 2020, long-standing relationships remained.

Then came the pandemic.

Reduced membership and uncertainty forced the two groups, university players and community athletes, to lean on one another once again. What emerged from that challenging period was "BetterGriz," a blended roster that combined the energy of student athletes with the experience and stability of veteran community players.

"[Betterside] has done a great job of creating an environment of friendships by being able to care for each other, but also taking the sport seriously," Bybee said. "You want to do well, but you're looking out for each other and everyone. It's an environment where everybody's welcome."

The partnership proved not only practical, but powerful. It kept women's rugby alive in Missoula during a time when many programs across the country struggled to survive. More than that, it created a culture that blended mentorship,



The UM women's rugby team plays against the Helena women's rugby team on Oct. 18, 2025.

CONTRIBUTED | NATHAN LAUBACH

resilience and inclusiveness.

Now, that foundation has paid off.

"We're in the process of joining the National Collegiate Rugby Union, and it's going well," Bybee said. "There aren't many nearby schools that are NCR-registered, so figuring out the logistics has been a little challenging. That said, we do have our season schedule set, so everything's lined up and ready to go."

The decision to separate wasn't rushed. It came after seasons of rebuilding numbers, strengthening recruitment efforts and developing leadership within the University roster. However, challenges will continue to arise, but it serves as a testament for future seasons to come.

"One of the challenges will be adjusting to being fully college-run," Bybee said. "With Betterside, we were playing alongside adults who are really emotionally mature and grounded. That's naturally a little different from having a team made up entirely of college students."

The years spent combined with Betterside shaped the culture of the Grizzlies' women's rugby in lasting ways. Practicing alongside experienced players raised the competitive standard and reinforced much of rugby's core values, which are respect, discipline and camaraderie.

"One thing [Betterside] definitely instilled in us is the importance of caring about each other," Bybee continued. "You can be friends, you can have fun, but you also respect each other and the game. I really appreciate that foundation."

Inclusivity has long been central to rugby, and both programs pride itself on welcoming athletes of all experience levels. Many players step onto the pitch for the first time in college, or even well into adulthood, unsure of what to expect.

"We get tons of new people every year. A lot of them ask if there are tryouts, and I always tell them we're here to help you learn," Bybee said. "We want people to come out and try it. It's all about giving them a comfortable introduction to the game."

For the Griz, success this season isn't measured solely through points. Independence brings its own benchmarks from stable numbers, player development, leadership growth, and maintaining the joy that has defined the program.

"For me, success would look like recruiting enough players to field a solid 15s match," Bybee said. "But beyond that, it's about really cementing a strong club culture. This is our first season fully on our own, so I want to build a foundation that will last for years. Ideally, we create something sustainable, something that can continue to grow and thrive long after we're gone."

From Betterside's perspective, the combined years were equally transformative. Kaitlyn Wimmer, a member of Betterside for two years, saw firsthand how the partnership strengthened team chemistry.

"It felt like worlds colliding in the best way," Wimmer said. "Everyone got to connect with people in different stages of

life and see different perspectives, and I think that was really good for all of us."

Having college athletes and community players side by side creates a rare dynamic. Younger players brought speed and fresh perspective, while veteran players offered game knowledge and life experience. The sideline became a space where students, professionals and longtime Montanans connected through shared bruises and post-game socials.

"When I started playing with Betterside, I hadn't really played alongside many college athletes before," Wimmer said. "I especially valued playing with people who were new to rugby or still learning, because I could identify with that. I know what it's like to be in that stage."

The partnership worked because it was rooted in mutual respect. Neither side viewed the other as temporary or secondary. Instead, both teams operated as one unit with the shared goal of keeping women's rugby thriving in Missoula. "For me, the biggest benefit was camaraderie and just feeling connected through that shared experience," Wimmer said.

Ask anyone involved, and they'll likely say this rugby community feels different. It's competitive, but deeply supportive. It celebrates toughness and tenderness in equal measure.

"Even if it's just a 10-15 minute run, staying consistent is what builds your game," Wimmer said. "That's true for any athlete, but especially in rugby. The game is continuous, and you have to be able to keep up. At the same time, you have to be open and willing to listen to the people around you. Rugby is complicated, and when you're learning, it's so important to take advice from the people who've been playing longer."

Of course, BetterGriz itself will never truly disappear. The love of playing together will continue to happen, as there will still be shared tournaments, familiar faces on opposite sidelines and friendships that blur roster lines.

As UM's team moves into this new chapter, the story isn't about division. It's about abundance. Two practice schedules and two chances for young athletes, as well as community members alike, to discover a sport that demands grit and a welcoming community.

"We try to be very clear that everyone is welcome here," Bybee said. "No matter how you identify, there's a space for you on this team."

Both teams have proven its own resilience. It weathered separation from the University, survived a global pandemic and merged when necessary. The Griz now stand confidently on its own again.

Griz ready to run it back

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The regular season has concluded for the University of Montana's men's basketball team, and with the Big Sky Conference championship next week in Boise, Idaho, the team knows what it needs to do to repeat as conference champions.

The season has been inconsistent for the Griz, finishing the year at 16-15 overall, and fourth in the conference at 10-8. The team swept Portland State University, the number one team in the conference, but lost against Idaho State University and California State University, Sacramento, two of the worst teams in the conference.

For head coach Travis DeCuire, who picked up conference win number 150 on Saturday, the team is "still a work in progress."

He said he believes the team has the experience necessary to do well in Boise.

"Everybody's played enough games now that they should have enough experience to go out and perform in the conference tournament," DeCuire said. "We expect all of these guys to play well, they just all need to be more consistent."

As has been the story all year, DeCuire said the key for the Griz is going to be defense.

"When you go out and you can hold your opponent to 40% [shooting], you're going to win most of those games," DeCuire said.

He said in every loss, the team has come away knowing that the game wasn't out of reach.

"I think we've walked away from all these losses feeling like there's one or two things that we could fix that would lead to wins in those games," DeCuire said. "We walked away feeling like these are winnable games."

Heading into his final Big Sky Conference tournament, graduate student Te'Jon Sawyer said he thinks the team still has work to do, but is close to achieving its goal of repeating.

"The tournament's coming up soon, but there's still time to keep getting better," Sawyer said. "We're bought in now. At this point everybody knows what their role is."

He said practice is the key for the Griz.

"In practice we've been playing tough, we've been locked in," Sawyer said. "I think that's preparing us for the game when it's time to get down and physical."

Sawyer has consistently been one of the most physical players for Montana, leading the team in rebounds and only trailing Money Williams in points.

DeCuire said that Sawyer is going to be important for the Griz down the stretch.

"[Sawyer]'s a big presence around the basket when the guys do a good job of getting him the ball," DeCuire said. "He's going to



Griz basketball Forward Te'Jon Sawyer goes up to try a block a Portland State basketball player on Feb. 28 at the Adam's Center **JACKSON MAILEY | MONTANA KAIMIN**

generate offense, not only for himself, but also for others."

Sawyer said that with his final season winding down, he really wants to get back to the NCAA tournament, and so does the team.

"We're playing for our seniors," he said. "It's our last ride, so we're trying to get it done, and make another run back to March [Madness]."

While Sawyer is known for his presence on the basketball court, Brooklyn Hicks, who was inserted into the starting lineup last week against Sacramento State, said that Sawyer is also a leader off the court for the team.

"You guys might see the scoring or the rebounds or the blocks, but he's a leader in the locker room," Hicks said. "He's so much more than just a basketball player, so I appreciate him. I know the coaches do too, as well as every player on the team."

For the team, while it is led by the seniors, Hicks said the key is the team's mindset before games.

"You kind of feel the energy before the

game that we were going to come out here and play Grizzly basketball," he said after the team defeated Sac State.

As Montana's sixth man, Hicks is averaging roughly 8.9 points per game, third on the team, and is fourth in rebounds.

He said that the team is going to need to do more collectively if it is to win another Big Sky Conference title.

"More effort, more shot making, more passing, more defense," Hicks said. "This team is so capable of it."

He said that throughout the season, the team has grown to believe in each other.

"We trust each other," Hicks said. "We know that my brother's gonna have my back if I mess up, and I'm gonna help him afterwards."

If the team continues to win, the Big Sky Conference semifinals take place on Tuesday, and the championship game, with a chance at the NCAA tournament on the line, is on Wednesday.

SPORTS BRIEFS

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TRIPLING IN GOLD

During the Big Sky Indoor Championship in Pocatello, Idaho, the University of Montana track and field team secured three gold medals.

One of the top winners for UM was Callie Wilson, who became a Big Sky Conference Champion in both the 60m and 200m races.

Wilson broke the Big Sky Conference record by finishing the women's 60m with a time of 7.26, finishing with .15 seconds to spare between her and second place.

She also finished the women's 200m with a time of 23.54, just .05 seconds longer than her personal best.

Wilson became the first Griz to win both the 60m and 200m in a single meet since Loni Perkins-Judisch in 2008.

Karsen Beitz brought home the last gold medal for the Griz after coming up big in the men's 200m with a time of 21.09.

Beitz became the first Griz player to win the 200m indoor race since Darren Stringer in 1993.

"I'm really proud of the fact that we progressed through the regular season and were at our very best at the Big Sky Championship," UM's track and field head coach Doug Fraley said. "That is what our design is, so to be able to work our way through January and the first part of February and then do the best things that we've done this indoor season at the championship is what I'm most proud of."

SPLITTING THE NETS

The University of Montana Men's Tennis team split the weekend rivalry game against the University of North Dakota.

UM lost the first match with a score of 4-3 but found itself in the win column in the second matchup with a score of 5-2.

In game one, the Griz started slow after Tom Bittner and Baltazar Wiger-Nordas were the only pair out of the three groups to get a win in the doubles matches.

But UM saw some life in the singles round after both Duncan McCall and Matt Upton won against the Fighting Hawks. However, it was quickly lost as North Dakota delivered against the rest of the Grizzly team.

The second round of matchups continued the same short start as Eivind Tandberg and Matt Upton won the doubles for the Griz.

However, a twist of events came forward for the Griz in the singles match. After trailing by one point, the Griz went ahead with a win by Tom Bittner.

Then the Griz continued on its winning path as Matt Upton, Joseph Townes and Johnny Wilkinson won their singles games.

UM will travel to Boise, Idaho, to compete in the Boise State Spring Tournament this weekend.

Gallery | Slidin' stones



ABOVE: Curly Fries team member Troy Adam, left, and Sweeping with the Fishes team member Drew Murray, right, direct where they want the stone to go at the Winter League regular season games.

RIGHT: Curling players sweep the ice to speed up the stone during a Winter League game at Glacier Ice Rink.

BELOW: Ice Holes curler Megan Parks slides a stone in an effort to get it in "the house." Teams get points depending on how close the stones come to the house.



Missoula curling faces off at league night

JACKSON MAILEY | PHOTOGRAPHER
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On Saturdays, Glacier Ice Rink stays open until midnight for Missoula Curling, the winter sport known for sweeping the ice and pushing 42-pound stones across the rink.

Curling is a sport most commonly seen in the Winter Olympics, in which two teams slide a stone across the ice toward a target called "the house." The sport is played in ends, similarly to innings in baseball. After players slide all their stones toward the house, the end is over and the teams count points based on how close they came to the house.

"I think everyone is pretty much comfortable about just doing something super weird with their body, like the body mechanics are super strange," said Erika Hildner, a member of Missoula Curling's board of directors.

Hildner also acknowledged how "niche" curling is, but she said it's that nicheness that gets people into it.

"It's not a sport that everyone knows about, so it makes space for people to just try it out and not feel silly about it," Hildner said.

Missoula Curling is a nonprofit organization that introduces the sport for all ages in Missoula, holding many different leagues and events. Last Saturday, the organization held an Olympic League night for people getting into curling.

"We do that every Olympic year as a way to get new curlers more attuned to

the game in a quicker fashion," said Jay Black, president of Missoula Curling. "It's cool to see people who are just getting used to it."

Black said he got into curling in 2018 and has been with the organization ever since.

"We're a pretty tight-knit group of people and this community is always there for one another," Black said.

More experienced players also competed last Saturday in their last regular season games of the Winter League, a more competitive league with team names such as "Curly Fries" or "Ice Holes." The league has 12 teams all vying to be champions.

The matches balanced the intensity of the sport with the friendship between teammates. Shouted instructions to sweep the ice mixed with jokes and cheers for good shots.

"It's the right mix of fun and competition," Hildner said. "There's also a deep sense of etiquette as well."

According to Black and Hildner, the organization is also fundraising for its very own dedicated curling facility.

"We have capital campaigns running, we do raffles and pint nights, we're a pretty scrappy club," Hildner said.

The organization's main goal is introducing the sport of curling to all Missoulians and building a case for creating its own curling facility.

"The best thing is getting to meet all the new curlers," Hildner said. "I'm really trying to lead the way to the future generations of curling."