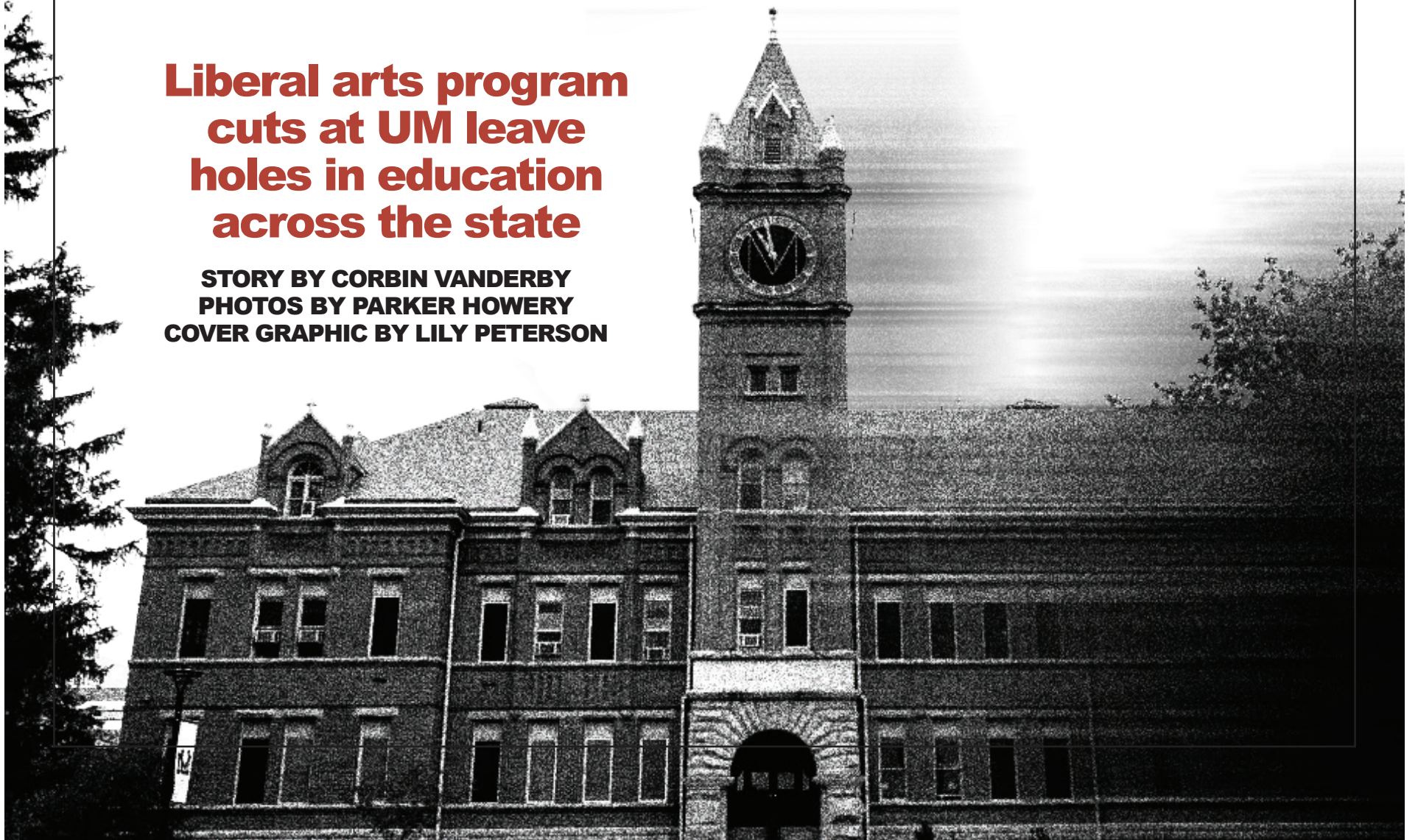


MONTANA KAIMIN

THE UNIVERSITY'S EXPANDING IDENTITY LEAVES HUMANITIES WANTING MORE

**Liberal arts program
cuts at UM leave
holes in education
across the state**

**STORY BY CORBIN VANDERBY
PHOTOS BY PARKER HOWERY
COVER GRAPHIC BY LILY PETERSON**



OCTOBER 15, 2026 | VOLUME 129 | ISSUE NO. 7

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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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KAIMIN KOMICS: #7 BIG PRIORITIES



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Weight loss drugs are hurting women

Growing up, I was always conscious of the body that was staring back at me in the mirror, wondering what I could do to look like the influencers that graced my social media feed.

Recently I started to feel more confident in my own skin and I stopped comparing myself to those around me. Then came the rise of weight loss drugs.

I saw posts about body positivity turning into ads for GLP-1 drugs that make you lose weight in order to fit into the standard that we once fought. With ads being forced down our throats showing people who look like the 2000s “it girls,” Megan Fox or tennis superstar Serena Williams going on these medications, it becomes incredibly difficult for women to accept that our different body types are normal.

Now, I get excited to see a slight glimpse of a flat stomach when I look in the mirror or when I lose my appetite because then I’ll be able to watch the pounds drop.

I’ve even had to race home to change because I felt everyone’s eyes on a tiny bit of my stomach showing, even though I knew this was just my mind deceiving itself.

I understand that this might sound insane, but it’s something a lot of women experience.

According to the National Organization for Women, around 78% of teenage girls are

“unhappy with their bodies.” A research study done by Rutgers University in 2025 shows that women who are most interested in trying weight loss medication reported higher rates of body shame and eating disorders.

It’s understandable why some people want to use GLP-1 drugs to become healthier and decrease their risk of developing medical conditions. However, there needs to be more regulation on who qualifies for this medication.

Only those who are at risk of medical complications need to have these weight loss medications advertised to them. We don’t need them for women who want to lose a few pounds to feel better about themselves.

After losing my teenage years to being self conscious and hating how I looked, I’ve made it my goal to appreciate my body and understand that no one cares if you don’t have that perfect figure.

While I am still working on this objective, I encourage everyone to put down the phone and admire themselves.

- Hannah Benitez, sports editor

Like it? Hate it? Let us know.

Email us your opinions at
henry.doellinger@umontana.edu

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

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

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

Tour de Oval



Aidan McMullen, left, and Cray Silva ride their bikes around the Oval on Oct. 9. McMullen and Silva completed 333 laps totaling 100 miles. “I guess I just didn’t want to go to class,” McMullen said. **MARS JOHNSON | MONTANA KAIMIN**
montanakaimin.com October 15, 2026 **3**

In local news...

JACK SNOW | NEWS EDITOR
jack.snow@umontana.edu

BATS WITH RABIES PROMPT PUBLIC HEALTH ANNOUNCEMENT

Two bats in the Missoula area have tested positive for rabies and officials have urged residents to take precautions to protect themselves and their pets, according to Missoula Public Health.

Rabies is a serious disease which affects the brain and nervous system, but can be prevented with vaccines and quick medical care.

Bats are the most common carriers of rabies in Missoula, but stray animals and unvaccinated pets can also spread the virus. Missoula Public Health advised pet owners to get their animals vaccinated as soon as possible if they are unvaccinated or their vaccines have expired.

"While human rabies exposure is still incredibly rare, with these recent test results, we want to make sure people know what they should and shouldn't do if they encounter a bat, indoors or outside," said Animal Services Manager Holli Hargrove in an announcement. "Animal Services is here to help, and we want folks to feel prepared and educated if they find themselves in this situation."

Missoula Public Health included the following precautions in its announcement:

- Never intentionally touch or try to handle a bat, whether it's alive or dead.
- If you unintentionally come into contact with a bat, treat it like a possible rabies exposure and seek medical care as soon as possible. Bat bites can be small and undetectable, and treatment may be necessary even if there is no obvious bite. This guidance also applies if a bat is found in a room with a child or someone who was asleep, unattended or is cognitively impaired.
- If you discover a bat in a residence or a bat acting unusual in a public area, call Animal Services at 406-541-7387.
- Report all possible human exposures to the Missoula Public Health Infectious Disease Department by calling 406-258-3896. All possible pet exposures should be reported to Missoula Animal Services by calling 406-541-7387.

MISSOULA CAMPAIGNS FOR BREAST CANCER AWARENESS

A Missoula campaign to bring attention to Breast Cancer Awareness Month has been working to bring businesses and community members together for the cause.

The PNKMSO – pronounced "Pink Missoula" – campaign is organized by Cancer Support Community Montana and sponsored by Advanced Imaging, according to a social media post by both parties.

"We make a big effort to raise awareness of breast cancer during October," Mick Faherty, the development manager of Cancer Support Community, said to KPAX. "I am delivering to all of our participating businesses a pink bag, and in that pink bag, some information about some of our participants, some of the doctors involved with Advanced Imaging and also a QR code that has a tremendous amount of information on the different resources and things that we can help people with that are going through cancer."

The campaign also involves pink banners for participating companies, special promotions from various local businesses and community events. Sweet Peaks is offering pink vanilla ice cream and donating a portion of its sales, Studio Sweat held an event with free classes, discounts and donations, Plonk is donating a dollar for every cosmopolitan sold throughout the month and many other local businesses have made similar commitments.

"It's kind of in your face, which is great," Jenny McGuinn, Advanced Imaging's clinical manager, told KPAX. "Reminds people, 'Oh yeah, I do need to go get my mammogram,' or 'Yeah, I should be thinking about my neighbor that's having treatment' or just bring support throughout the community."

The campaign will culminate in Cancer Support Community's annual "Pink Party" on Oct. 28, where community members are invited to celebrate the end of breast cancer awareness month.



This week on the Kaimin Cast...

The University of Montana brings a young crowd into downtown Missoula's nightlife.

Bars fill with community members and college students on the weekends as the two groups intertwine to grab a few drinks, dance and socialize after a long week.

Isaac Jones Weatherford is a University of Montana sports entertainment and management major and the UM Griz hockey team's goalie who works as a Stockman's Bar bouncer when not on the ice. The role is important in a college town like Missoula, but is complicated, especially when the people at the door are peers.

"Our job is to make sure if they make the decision, 'Hey, I'm gonna go out tonight,' they can just worry about having fun," Jones Weatherford said.

Learn more about bouncing in Zootown by checking out our latest podcast "Weekend Binge: The bouncer's role" by heading to our website at montanakaimin.com or wherever you find your podcasts.

- Grace Golbach,
audio editor



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



ADMINISTRATION ORDERED TO STOP USING GOVERNMENT-FUNDED ADS

The Trump administration was ordered by a federal judge to stop using pro-Trump ads funded by the U.S. government on Sunday.

U.S. District Judge Jennifer Rochon of the Southern District of New York ordered the administration to immediately "cancel or cause to be cancelled" any such ads from airing or being spread, according to NBC.

She also wrote that the administration can no longer use Department of Homeland Security funds to "develop, create, disseminate, place, distribute, publish or air the challenged advertisements."

The lawsuit which led to those orders was brought by nonprofit group Common Cause, Democratic Alabama house candidate Robert Hunter and a New York labor union.

The Trump administration said in a Saturday court filing that the DHS had placed ad buys through Oct. 11 using a vendor, and had told the vendor not to purchase any ads after that date.

"We are pleased the court acted swiftly to prevent more taxpayer dollars from being used for such blatantly unlawful political propaganda," the plaintiffs said in a statement. "There is no legal justification – and no precedent – for the president to use the machinery of the government and funds set aside by Congress for other uses to influence electoral outcomes that further his own agenda."

FEDERAL AGENTS SEARCH CONGRESSWOMAN'S HOME

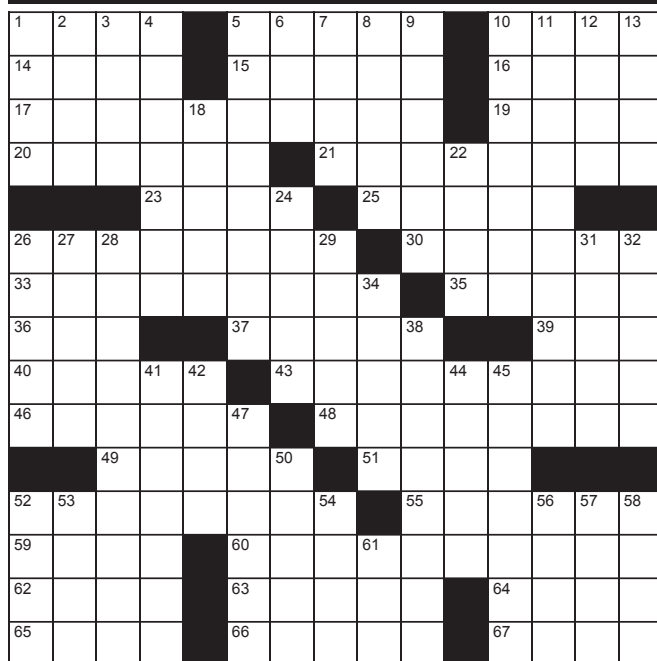
Federal officers searched the Washington home of U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar, a Democrat from Minnesota, on Monday in the midst of her reelection bid.

Omar is a Somali immigrant, and has been openly critical of the Trump administration, leading many Democrats in Congress to question the timing and circumstances of the search, according to the Associated Press.

Secretary of Homeland Security Markwayne Mullin cited an "ongoing investigation" last month which he suggested was looking into potential fraud on the immigration paperwork of Omar's family.

For her part, Omar called the search an "attempt to target political enemies and weaponize federal law enforcement" in an X post.

"For ten years, Trump has targeted me with baseless lies and smear campaigns. This is just the latest escalation in his campaign of political intimidation," she stated. "I will not be silenced."



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ACROSS

- 1 Whitman of verse
5 Big to-do
10 Santa ____, Calif.
14 Petri dish filler
15 Use, as dinner plates
16 Sweeping
17 Last book of the Bible
19 Polite fellow
20 Future doc's major
21 Breaks between words, on a page
23 Cameo shape
25 Bad-mouths
26 Communion cups
30 Colin Firth film, "The King's ____"
33 1945 bombing target
35 Follow
36 Put on a show
37 Excite joy
39 Homer Simpson's dad
40 Passes over
43 "Be cool"
46 Shun
48 Many have islands
49 Sheik's bevy
51 2023 flick, "Asteroid ____"
52 Like a baboon's eyes
55 Rope for animals
59 Trail activity
60 Covertly
62 Computer brand
63 Use a soapbox
- 64 Staph bacteria, briefly
65 Famed loch
66 Moved cautiously
67 Spotted

DOWN

- 1 Lumber defect
2 Ripening agent
3 Take a bath
4 Vocalist's vibration
5 Pain in the brain
6 Stable staple
7 Elevator man
8 Court sport
9 Historical records
10 Course of treatment
11 Ali Baba's cry
12 Spill the beans
13 "Cast" anagram
18 Wrangler rivals
22 Superhero garb
24 Girl rescued by Don Juan
- 26 Action film staple
27 Some country folk
28 Edible thistlelike plants
29 Kissing sound
31 High-quality cigar
32 Fancy footwear
34 Storage spot
38 Deserving
41 "Star Trek" weapons
42 Dried up
44 Chamber group
45 Percussion patterns
47 Mazola rival
50 Subway system
52 "Rush Hour" actor
53 Scalp misery
54 Herbal brews
56 Employ
57 Otherwise
58 Tatum's father
61 Polished off

Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

Slash-o-scope

AIDAN GRAHAM | ARTS & CULTURE EDITOR

aidan.graham@umontana.edu

Nothing says October like a good ol' slasher. We all like to think we'd make it out alive, but life isn't a movie. So never say "I'll be right back," because you won't be. Here's how you'd meet your grisly end.

LIBRA (SEP. 23-OCT. 22):

Libra, throughout all of this mayhem, you've been everyone's rock, keeping everyone sane. However, there's nothing a killer hates more than that. Alone in the dark, they got the jump on you, where no one could hear you scream. You weren't just another kill, you were an omen. No one here is safe.

SCORPIO (OCT. 23-NOV. 21):

Scorpio, you broke RULE #1! A bit concerning that all the blood and bodies was enough of a turn-on that you HAD to drop everything to get a quick fuck in. We can't be mad, but we can say you did have it coming just a little bit. Keep it in your pants next time, it might save your life.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21):

Sagittarius, you drove us crazy with your naivety. Did you think before you wandered off to investigate that noise? Did you really think, after everything that's happened, your friend would be casually calling you from the bushes? I wonder if a thought even passed through that head before the machete did. Frankly, this might be natural selection.

CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 19): Capricorn, you've seen this before. You've spent your whole life watching horror movies and for the first time it's come in handy. You thought carelessness was the only thing that would get you killed, but you didn't anticipate that facing off with a killer is a lot different in real life. In the end, your preparation backfired. The killer used your rules against you, and you're lying in a pool of your own blood. Maybe go with the flow next time.

AQUARIUS (JAN. 20-FEB. 18): Where did you go, Aquarius? We've been wondering! The last time we saw you, the climax had just started — and there's your head on a stick. Yikes! Sucks to be offscreened, but we swear we're not calling you forgettable. At least it was easier to watch on our end.

PISCES (FEB. 19-MARCH 20): Pisces, your trusting, albeit oblivious nature makes you the perfect target for the opening kill. Stabbed, torn to shreds or chopped to bits, your death may be the most brutal, but it really sets the stakes, making your face one we'll

never forget. We may only get you for one scene, but trust, you'll be haunting the narrative and our dreams for the rest of our lives.

ARIES (MARCH 21-APRIL 19): Aries, your hot-headedness was of no help to you this time. Your muscles may have helped you as captain of the football team, but taking the killer head on? What were you thinking? You got a few hits in, sure, but gains can only do so much against a machete.

TAURUS (APRIL 20-MAY 20): Taurus, it took a lot of guts to get where you are, and I don't just mean your friend's spilled on the floor. You've survived being beaten, stabbed and watched all your loved ones brutally die one by one. However, in the end you got your revenge, your life and only a bit of lifelong trauma. Let's just hope you're popular enough to survive the sequel.

GEMINI (MAY 21-JUNE 20):

Surprise Gemini! It was you all along. Somehow no one noticed you and the killer were mysteriously never in the same room. However, you're certainly not spared from a brutal end. Those meddling kids will eventually get the upper hand, and you'll get yours, in an ironic way to boot. It may seem like the end for you ... but you always end up coming back.

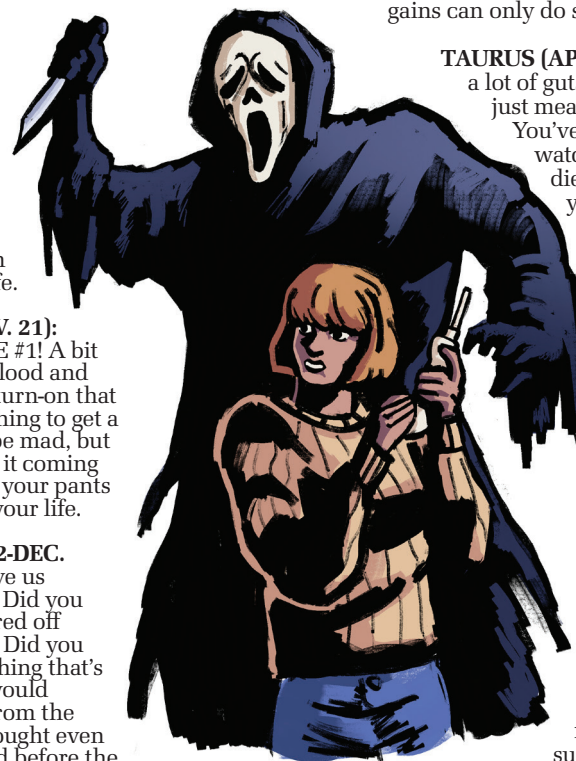
CANCER (JUNE 21-JULY 22):

We've had our eye on you, Cancer. Something just hasn't added up from the beginning. Whether it be suspiciously shallow cuts or a plain evil look, we've had you pegged as the killer from scene one. Boy, were we wrong. When the accusations began,

your friends expected admissions of guilt. Instead they got faces full of blood and viscera as the killer made an example of you. Uh ... that's our bad.

LEO (JULY 23-AUG. 22): Oh Leo, our favorite love interest, you were SO CLOSE! One of the last standing, it seemed you were destined to make it out, but your brave yet foolish heart betrayed you one last time. Nobly sacrificing yourself, whether to save your friends or simply give them a little more time, your death is drawn out enough to leave you and the audience screaming.

VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEP. 22): Loveable Virgo, even in the face of absolute horror, you know how to make light of a situation. Always a good time, probably a stoner. Your death is more brutal for us than it is for you. While your head might get ripped from your shoulders, ours will be ripped from our chests. Shit's getting real now!



ALYSSA JO MURNION | CARTOONIST

Public comment closes on Roadless Rule repeal with more than 1 million submissions

NICO KITOS | NEWS REPORTER
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Public comment on the United States Forest Service's proposal to fully rescind the Roadless Area Conservation Rule ended on Oct. 6, bringing in over one million submissions with an overwhelming majority opposing the repeal.

The 2001 Roadless Rule limits road construction in designated inventoried roadless areas, protecting roughly six million acres of Montana forest land, according to Forward Montana. The rescission would send decisions about roadless areas to local national forest managers, removing the areas' national designation.

Public response to the proposal shows that most people oppose the decision due to concerns about the environment and access to public lands. According to the Center for Western Priorities, there were over 1.6 million total comments, with more than 99% of the roughly 370,000 public comments currently available opposing the repeal of the Roadless Rule.

Lisa Ronald, Northern Rockies associate conservation director of American Rivers, is based in Missoula and focuses primarily on proactive river conservation. American Rivers is a national organization with a commitment to "make every river clean and healthy for people and wildlife."

Ronald said the high number of responses mirrors the response to the original Roadless Rule proposal. In 2001, the Forest Service received a similar number of comments, and between 90% and 97% favored keeping the rule.

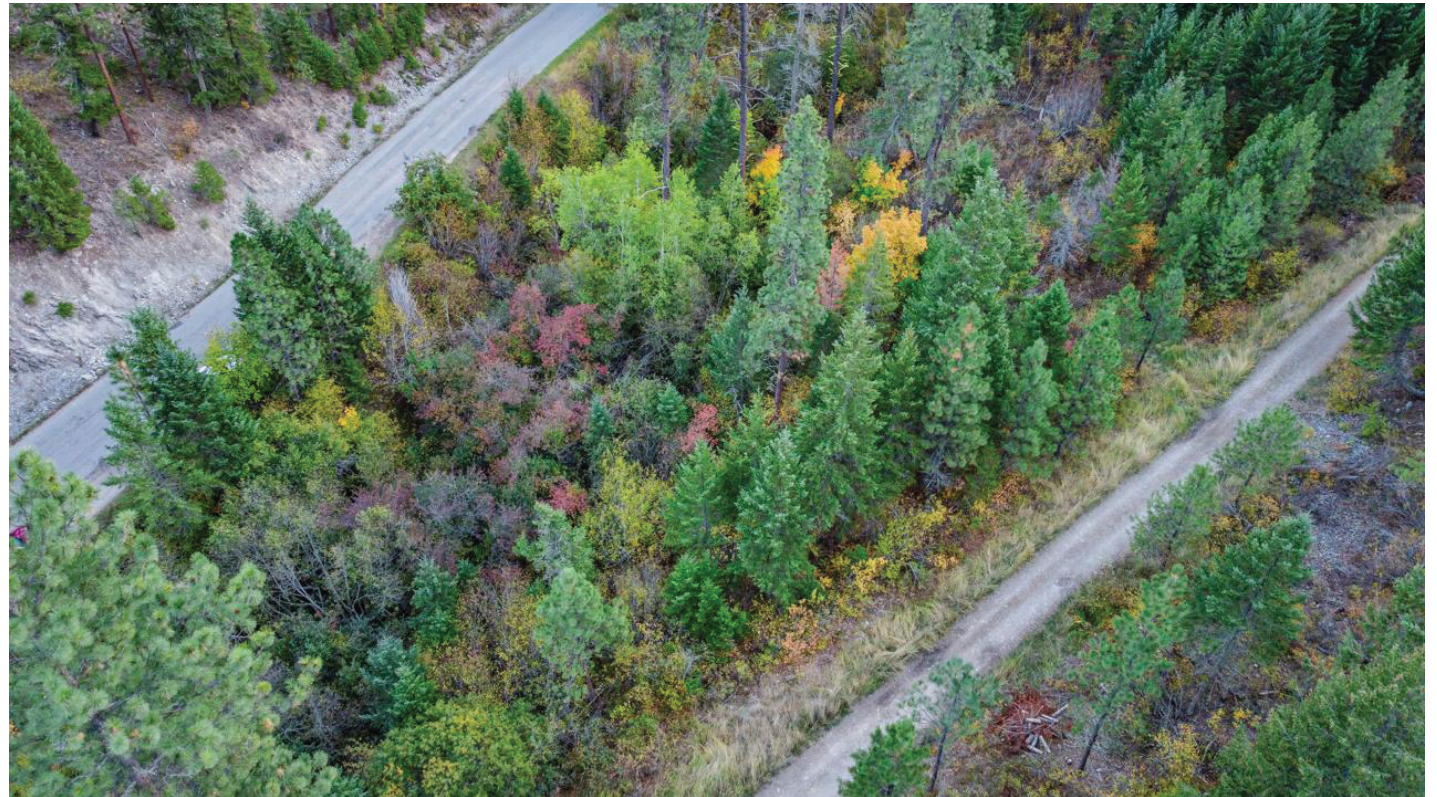
"This meant a lot to people back 20-plus years ago, and it's still extremely important to the American people," Ronald said.

Ronald said she finds it hard to believe that the agency is committed to reviewing the over one million comments from the public in three months.

"If that does happen, I think that is perhaps a reflection of the seriousness with which the administration is taking public comment," Ronald said.

The original deadline for public comment was Sept. 21, but it was extended after Congresswoman Andrea Salinas led a bipartisan coalition of 164 members of Congress requesting the government give the public additional time to comment. The next step is for the U.S. Department of Agriculture to consider all comments in developing a final rule and supporting analyses.

Ronald said that American Rivers has focused mainly on access to clean water



Roads intersect a section of Lolo National Forest on Oct. 8, 2025. JACKSON MAILEY | MONTANA KAIMIN ARCHIVE

in its opposition to rescission. In Montana, one in three people derive their clean drinking water from roadless watersheds, meaning it is already purified at no cost. Building more roads in these areas increases sedimentation, which would force Montanans residing in these areas to pay for water filtration.

This land includes areas that are currently used for outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, skiing, biking, hiking and exploring. At a broader scale, the Roadless Rule protects 44 million acres of National Forest backcountry from road development and logging across 37 states.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins stated in a release that the Roadless Rule has restricted road development, wildfire risk reduction efforts and the Forest Service's ability to carry out critical active management of roadless areas.

"For too long, outdated restrictions have kept tens of millions of forested acres off-limits to the very treatments that improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk to our communities," Rollins said. "Today, we filed a proposal to restore authority to local forest managers who know the land best, removing the barriers that have kept them

from doing the work the land demands."

A local outdoor enthusiast, 71-year-old Chris Scranton, has been an avid supporter of the Roadless Rule and fears what its rescission could mean for Montanans. Scranton is originally from Pennsylvania, but now lives in Stevensville.

"I actually just came back from a 200-mile hike, 18 days out in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, during which time I did not see another human being," he said. "That's true roadless wilderness."

Scranton found his love for the outdoors as a young adult. He enjoys hunting, fishing, hiking, birdwatching and "flower sniffing." He is involved with Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, the Natural Resource Defense Council, Audubon, the Bitterroot Bird Alliance, Trout Unlimited and the Montana Wildlife Federation.

"The main reason I love living in Montana is that we have so much public land, and the fact that we have six million acres in Montana that are classified in the roadless rule," Scranton said. "Those are the places that I hunt."

Scranton is concerned with how little the general public knows about the upcoming changes.

"The average member of the public has no clue, they don't know what they are about to lose. A lot of these people are the same people that are out hiking in the roadless areas, loving it and posting it on FaceTime or whatever."

Scranton's personal connection to the wilderness is why he is so passionate about the Roadless Rule. He submitted more than 20 comments to the Department of Agriculture, voicing his opposition to their decision. Scranton even spoke in events around Missoula about the Roadless Rule and its importance.

"I get very involved with this particular issue because to me, if they take the status away and start building more roads then something is definitely lost, once you build the roads it's hard to get it back," he said.

Although the time for public comment is over, Scranton believes it is important for people to stay up to date with this issue. So much of what he and many other Montanans fight to protect is at risk to change in ways that are likely irreversible.

"Regimes change, but it is critical that people stand up and fight for what they love," Scranton said. "The Lorax is about to be thrown out of the forest."

New program creates a pathway for students to further education from home

COLBY SUKO-CLARK | NEWS REPORTER

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A program was created at the University of Montana College of Business last month that will allow students studying at Fort Peck Community College to graduate from UM without leaving the Fort Peck area.

The new 2+2 pathway will allow students to spend two years at Fort Peck for an associate's degree, and then the final two years at UM for a bachelor's degree. It has been in the works for several years, but the agreement was signed only recently by the College of Business and the Fort Peck Community College which allows students that have received an associate's degree to finish their bachelor's at UM either online or by attending in-person classes.

"We want to serve everyone across the state, and this partnership with Fort Peck will allow us to better help out the Montana community," said Suzanne Tilleman, the dean for the College of Business at UM. Tilleman also highlighted that one of the missions of the University is to bring more people to college every year, and this is one way to achieve that goal.

The University of Montana has more freshmen enrolled this semester than it has in 12 years, and Tilleman explained that people in the program, as well as the wider University, are looking for ways to improve enrollment and retention rate.

"At the end of the day, these are people coming to the University of Montana, and this is furthering their education, which is a win-win for everyone," Tilleman said.

The program was spearheaded by several members of the College of Business.

Tilleman said the agreement had been discussed over the course of three years until it was finally agreed upon and settled earlier this year. Still, not everything is set up and ready to begin taking in students.

"There is still a lot of work left to do, from finalizing class comparisons to creating proper advising, we are still busy making sure that this project will be perfect," Tilleman said.

The class comparison is to make sure that the difference in course workloads and knowledge training does not impede a student's ability to finish their degree at UM. However, there is only a small number

of majors that this course will work for.

There are seven majors that the program will work alongside, but the predicted most common one is business administration. This degree, as well as the other six, requires 120 credits total, including 60 from business courses and 39 from upper-division courses. This number of classes is one of the reasons why the focus on workload has been so strong.

"We care about the success of these students, and the best way for them to succeed is for them to feel like they can take the class and pass, but still be challenged," said Isho Tama-Sweet, the associate dean who has focused on the curriculum of the program. She said that many students who attend upper-level universities feel stressed by the workload and UM wants to help make it easier for them.

"In other programs, the course load is a killer to the applicants, and we want to make sure everyone gets a fair shake, not only for the workload, but also the knowledge retention," Tama-Sweet said.

Tama-Sweet said the primary focus is knowledge retention after transferring. This means minimizing the gap in the curriculum to be balanced at challenging them, but still feeling like they can complete the degree.

"The online classes exist as a way for people to take all of these classes without needing to leave home," said Theresa Floyd, the department chair and the one in charge of leading the online sector of this project.

She noted that online and in-person classes require different workloads and to help students they needed to make sure the program worked for everyone. It was designed to help all students feel the experience of UM without having to make a tough decision between college and home.

"We opened this online portion to make sure people of the community could stay in the community, and we wanted to make sure they would be able to thrive at UM even if it wasn't in person," she said. The focus of the program is to help bring the experience of UM to those that don't have the ability to come to the University in person.

"We talked to so many individuals that say that they felt like they had to choose their family or college, and we have worked hard to bring the classes and talent of UM to the homes of those that really want to embrace everything the University has to offer," Floyd said. Even though the primary focus is on the online sector, a part of the program is dealing with in-person classes.

The University also offers students the ability to attend UM for the last two years of their degree. This means if they have their associate's degree from Fort Peck, they can then attend the remaining classes on campus to finish their bachelor's degree. This is one of a few similar programs, one other 2+2 pathway at the University is a bachelor's degree in social work.

The University started the social work program in 2010 and it is also through the

Fort Peck Community College. This project helped lay the foundation for how the agreement is going to work.

"Advising is such a big part of college, and for these students, it can be hard to find out the best way to push forward with the program. So we are going to step in and help them find the best balance between college and home that they can have," said Dawn Hambrick, the person in charge of student advising for the program.

"This is a big change for a lot of them, it is a bigger college with more students and that can press down on them. I want to be there to make sure that they can get through those two years and have a degree to be proud of," Hambrick said.

Students are encouraged to apply to the program before Nov. 1 to make sure they get the best chance at receiving aid and scholarships.

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THE UNIVERSITY'S EX LEAVES HUMANITIES

Liberal arts program cuts at UM leave holes in education across the state

**STORY BY CORBIN VANDERBY
PHOTOS BY PARKER HOWERY**

On the southern coast of Ireland, on the Dingle Peninsula in County Kerry, sits a light concrete home not far from a wave-swept Atlantic beach. A short cobblestone wall leads up to the front steps, and large metal letters read “Suan na mara,” meaning “sleep by the sea” in Irish.

It's here that Irish studies professor Erin Costello Wecker feels most at home. It's also where she received an email from the chair of the English department with the subject line: “Irish Studies Moratorium.”

Doing this, Costello Wecker said, is an “act of cultural erasure. It's taking away the opportunity for students to learn about how the Irish diaspora impacted the fabric of this state. You can't deny that.”

Costello Wecker knew the Provost's Office had been eyeing her program since last October. In meetings with them, she said she was told the program wasn't focused enough and didn't have enough students. Average enrollment over the past seven years was 17 students. Last year the program had 11.

But she still hadn't been told the program would be cut. In January, she learned the director of Irish studies at the time, Traolach O'Riordain, was told his position would be terminated at the end of the semester.

Then the Provost's Office brought the idea of terminating Costello Wecker's program, along with three others — Chinese studies, Master of Literature and Master of Economics — to the Academic Standards and Curriculum Review Committee and the Faculty Senate. When a decision like a program moratorium comes up, these two bodies are the first lines of defense before the Board of Regents gets the final say. Both bodies voted against the moratorium, with a supermajority in the latter.

Putting a program into moratorium allows the students currently enrolled in the program to graduate, but prevents new students from joining it.

Despite this, the Provost's Office took the plan to the Board of Regents and implemented it immediately upon approval.

“It was poetic in a way because I was sitting at my house there and thinking of what I was excited to be teaching and how great it felt to have [the review committee] and Faculty Senate support,” Costello Wecker said. Now that it had cut mainly liberal arts and humanities programs, she wondered if UM was moving away from its identity as a college with a strong liberal arts backbone.

The University of Montana has a spreadsheet of 22 “flagged programs” which will be reviewed this year. Out of the 22 programs listed, just under half are humanities or arts-related. At the top are African American studies, Native American studies and women's, gender and sexuality studies due to a 48% decrease in headcount over the past three years.

“If I was a faculty member in a different humanistic area of study here,” Costello Wecker said, “I would have a sense of unease.”



Irish studies professor Erin Costello Wecker comments on a presentation on a movie made by her students in the Lib

EXPANDING IDENTITY S WANTING MORE



AN UNCHARTED PATH

That unease was palpable just before October's Faculty Senate meeting.

Outside the Gilkey Hall auditorium sat G.G. Weix, a long-time anthropology professor and director of UM's South and Southeast Asian studies program. Her program faced a possible moratorium in 2018 and low enrollment numbers raised red flags during the first portfolio review in 2024. The annual portfolio review is a process used for evaluating every program across campus.

She laid out 13 books on a glass coffee table just before the meeting. They were stories about history and oppression, the most well-known being Anthony Bourdain's "Typhoid Mary."

"The key to a good liberal arts education doesn't lay in the classroom," Weix said. "It's in the bookstore."

Around half of the books Weix laid out were required readings in UM's Master of Literature program. Some were from Irish studies and some were from Chinese studies. Now that those programs are gone, most students won't be reading these works.

"If any of my students can pick up one of those books and tell me if it's worth reading and why, that is much more valuable than any other skill college can give you."

At the Oct. 8 Faculty Senate meeting, new UM President Jeremiah Shinn took the podium to share his thoughts on the college 100 days into his tenure.

"We have to become more financially stable," Shinn said. "I want to be honest about the financial challenges that we're facing. We are not in the financial place that we need to be."

As Shinn looked over the crowd of professors, there were a few quiet nods, a nervous look around the room and a pause of silence.

"We don't have really much margin for error at all," he said. "When we don't have elbow room, we don't have opportunities to invest, and when we can't invest, it's difficult to grow, and when we can't grow, it's difficult to maintain."

In UM's financial year 2026 budget report, its budget revenue is listed at almost \$165 million, a 9% increase from last year. But it expects to cut even with its budgeted expenditures being that same figure. Last year it made over \$151 million but spent \$152 million.

UM Spokesperson Dave Kuntz said the four cuts the Provost's Office made over the summer folded most of the saved funds into other programs for reinvestment. But two faculty positions were terminated. One was Traolach O'Riordain in the Irish Studies program who made \$60,327. Kuntz said he couldn't share the other professor terminated, but with the average salary being just under \$67,000, it's possible UM saved over \$120,000. Additionally, the two master's programs allowed the University to reallocate \$68,500 in teaching assistant stipends.

In 2023, UM launched a new cybersecurity major to meet the state's needs of professionals after Gov. Greg Gianforte said Montana lacked it. In Montana, 21% of cybersecurity jobs are left unfilled due to a lack of qualified workers.

Just this semester, UM also introduced a new physician's assistant program to address the state's deficits in health care jobs.

Now that the annual portfolio review is ready to kick off once more, faculty are left wondering who might get cut next to make room for something new.

ON THE EDGE OF A CLIFF

The truth is, as Shinn said, the University is in a tight spot. It needs to grow, but it may not have enough incoming students to do so.

Just after 2007, birth rates in America began to drop by around 20% in response to financial strain during the Great Recession. According to a study released last year by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, the number of high school graduates nationwide who may go on to become traditional college freshmen peaked in 2025.

It projects that, going forward, that demographic is expected to shrink by 13% every year, leading to nearly half a million fewer graduates who may enter college. The effects are already hitting colleges across the country.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia released a 2024 study saying the share of high school graduates entering college directly dropped from 70% to 62% over the last decade.

The effect: Around 60 colleges across the nation are closing each year. The University of the Arts in Philadelphia closed unexpectedly in June 2024 after a steep drop in enrollment. The same happened with St. Andrews University in North Carolina in 2025 and Hampshire College in Massachusetts is closing at the end of this fall.

It seems UM has yet to take the same hit. This semester, the University boasted a freshman class of over 1,500, the largest in the last 12 years. But the University is still facing the edge of the cliff.

Kuntz said Montana is lagging behind the national trend, with areas like the northeast and midwest hit hardest right now.

"We know there are going to be fewer

high school students graduating and enrolling in college in years ahead, but it's not going to change our approach that we are here to serve students and serve the state," Kuntz said in a September interview with the Kaimin.

UM also lost 300 nonresident students this semester, which provides the University with a large chunk of its revenue. For tuition and fees alone, out-of-state students pay UM just under \$35,000 a year. This is more than three times what in-state students pay.

While 300 fewer students may not seem like much, it could mean the University lost over \$10 million, assuming those students would have been enrolled full-time. If those students also lived on campus, that's an additional \$4 million. Altogether, this is around 9% of UM's budgeted revenue for

"No matter how they try to write it out or no matter what they try to say, it's severing a connection to Ireland that has been there since we all immigrated here," Sheehy said.

this year.

To address the projected enrollment drop the Provost's Office foresaw in 2024, it introduced the academic portfolio review. The review evaluates each program's statistics like enrollment, graduation rates and retention over the past seven years and identifies programs that could be put in moratorium to save money.

This is what happened to the four programs over the summer. But it isn't necessarily shocking. Many universities across the country have made this move. Syracuse, West Virginia and North Texas universities slashed their humanities offerings to address budget deficits, with the latter cutting 84 programs.

But Vice Provost for Academic Affairs John DeBoer said UM isn't targeting any particular area of study. Instead, the portfolio review is based on student interest. A recent study from the National Student Clearinghouse, a nonprofit run by members of higher education, found that students majoring in humanities disciplines dropped over 22% from 2015 to 2025.

"We struggle with the fact that student interest shifts faster than our ability to shift as an institution that's designed to be slow," DeBoer said, pointing out that curricula are

developed over long periods of time. "The tension there is real, and it can feel like targeting because of that."

Lower interest in humanities is reflected in UM's own numbers as well. According to last year's annual portfolio review, programs under the College of Humanities and Sciences had an average head count of 24. This is 34% lower than the average across all UM's programs.

But even if the numbers aren't targeted, UM chooses where to reinvest. Lately, the two biggest new programs and the ones receiving the most investment are the physician's assistant and cybersecurity tracks.

Some professors and students argue this shows UM is shifting away from its identity as a liberal arts college into what they consider more profitable. The problem is,

Ireland to work in Butte's copper mines after the famines of the mid-19th century.

"No matter how they try to write it out or no matter what they try to say, it's severing a connection to Ireland that has been there since we all immigrated here," Sheehy said.

Sheehy said the support of so many students, despite the Faculty Senate's decision, made her feel hopeful.

"In those moments you realize how many people actually care about these things because a lot of people did," Sheehy said. "But it did not matter that hundreds of their students were upset. They had already made that decision. That's what was really disturbing about it. They did not care."

Costello Wecker shared a similar sentiment.

"I felt deeply betrayed that the administration, despite what those two bodies had voted for, still put the program in moratorium," Costello Wecker said. "I was just deeply heartsick that this program would be something that would just so easily be cast into moratorium."

To Sheehy, UM is trying to compete with Montana State University in science, technology, engineering and math, or STEM. But Vice Provost DeBoer said "We're still serving that role [as a liberal arts college] in the state, but our role in the state has been expanding for a while."

AN EXPANDING IDENTITY

Since 2021, Gov. Gianforte has taken to stages across the state and spoken of a need for more cybersecurity specialists in Montana.

That same year, the Montana Legislature granted UM \$1.5 million to establish Missoula College's Cyber Hub and teach the discipline remotely statewide. Later that year, the Montana University System received \$6.5 million for UM's public education-focused CyberMontana initiative.

And in 2024, the National Science Foundation and the National Security Agency gave UM \$600,000 to lead a multi-state cybersecurity education coalition.

Since then, the program has thrived, growing from 11 students in its first year to 62 last year.

Cybersecurity professor Bryan Hammer attributed the popularity to workforce demand and the field's "sexy" name.

"You think of hacking, you think of all these different concepts and activities related to cybersecurity," Hammer said. "It just sounds so fun, and it is."

The physician's assistant program has a similar story. It started this semester and maxed out with 24 students. Over 600 applied.

But to professors like Costello Wecker, it's a clear sign that the grass is greener where you water it.

"That is technically expansion, but how do the other parts grow if they don't have sunshine?" Costello Wecker said.

Hammer, one of about 10

cybersecurity faculty members, earns \$130,000 annually, according to UM's financial records. This is around 105% higher than the average of \$66,855 across faculty.

Marci Contreras, who leads the new physician's assistant program, had a salary listed at around \$140,000. That is just higher than Costello Wecker's and O'Riordain's listed salaries combined, \$79,594 and \$60,327, respectively.

Of the top 10 highest paid employees at the University of Montana last year, half are administrative or sports-related positions, a third are faculty members in the health school and the other two are the deans of the law and forestry schools.

Last year the College of Humanities and Sciences had two interim co-deans, Julia Baldwin and Matthew Semanoff, who are tied for 50th in salary, both making just over \$165,000. The current dean for the department is Micheal Lynn.

But with an approaching demographic cliff and fewer nonresident students, DeBoer and Shinn said that investments need to go where growth is. That growth hasn't been in the humanities.

"If students aren't choosing something, then we have to decide what we do next," DeBoer said. "The University relies on a balance. We're trying to come to a point of equilibrium and it's really hard to achieve in such a dynamic higher education market right now."

At this month's Faculty Senate meeting, Shinn highlighted similar concerns.

"We have to grow," Shinn said. "We are physically built for a larger student body than we have, and we are staffed for a larger student body than we have. It's not just an enrollment goal, it's an economic imperative."

THE FUTURE OF UM

It's possible even more programs will be slashed.

"I would say that we are working this year to make sure that if we have to make similar decisions in the future, that we have the right information to share with campus so that they understand the decision," DeBoer said. "But those kind of decisions are always going to be made."

Costello Wecker said she understands the University's position, but wishes programs like hers had received more consideration.

"Expansion is something that I'm not afraid of. As a faculty member that loves working here, that's exciting to me. I want this place to succeed," Costello Wecker said. "But at the same time, is it expansion for the entire campus or just in ways that then will cast a shadow on other parts?"

Sheehy, an English literature major,

said that even though she's graduating this spring, she's upset that UM may continue to cut programs, especially in the humanities.

"You do know you are the liberal arts school and to ignore that and throw it away because there's not enough money is just ridiculous to me," Sheehy said. "To throw away our reputation for being a liberal arts institution is greatly disturbing, and it should be to everyone."

Sheehy looked back on packing the Faculty Senate meeting with her peers with pride and said she'd do it again if she needed to.

"If they want to continue down this route, they're about to learn that if you're a liberal arts college and you cut all of your liberal arts programs, people will just not go," Sheehy said. "You will fail as a university because you failed to cater to the students who come to you."



Professor Paul Kirgis leads the Faculty Senate meeting in the Welcome Center on Oct. 8.

Community Medical Center raises awareness for breast cancer with drive-through

SABRINA PHILIP | ARTS REPORTER
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On a cold October morning, cars lined up for Brake for Breakfast, a Community Medical Center event for breast cancer awareness.

At 7 a.m., as the sun warmed the morning dew, the cancer care and prevention team stood in the chilled air, encouraging visitors to prioritize their health.

According to the center's director of marketing and community relations, Megan Condra, this is the second year the event has taken place. She explained the event's setup, pointing to the clear bags on the table under the tent filled with breakfast snacks, canned coffee and informational pamphlets about breast cancer.

"One of the biggest barriers for people not getting mammograms or doing their regular screenings is lack of time," Condra said. "We wanted to make this an event that is convenient. Stop by, get breakfast and get additional information on screening."

Condra explained that after COVID, as people got out of their normal routine, many stopped attending their normal screenings. A major point of the event, she said, is reminding women to get back into a normal screening pattern.

Those helping with the drive-through stood under a pink tent talking among themselves, ready to hand out bags to visitors. The cancer center's breast specialists are all women.

"One of the unique things about the community, especially, is that we have an all-female breast team," Condra said. "We have a female breast surgeon, female medical oncologists, a female radiation oncologist and then a female breast health navigator. These women are passionate about what we do."

One of the women, Deanna Waller, is the oncology nurse navigator of the cancer care and prevention team. She navigates all breast cancer patients, and is the point of contact "from start



Oct. 7 at Community Medical Center. While giving a bag to the driver and passenger, she discussed mammograms for women over 40 for early detection of breast cancer. **MARS JOHNSON | MONTANA KAIMIN**

to finish." She shared the benefits of the program in Missoula, noting the advanced imaging and radiology department.

"We offer a very good genetics program, a high-risk breast program with screening for benign processes in the breast as well, and then we also do clinical trials," Waller said. "The uniqueness of that just all melds into our program. We have a dietitian, and we have a social worker. We have all the aspects of a really good breast program."

The high-risk breast program, according to Waller, looks at patients who may have some of the various breast cancer genes. She said for women who might find this out in their 20s and aren't ready to have prophylactic surgeries, the program allows them to follow up with breast surgeons and do imaging and exams every six months.

"The other part of the high risk breast program is a lot of times women will come in and they'll have a biopsy and it's a high risk breast lesion,"

Waller said. "So they will follow those and do appropriate screenings and all those things. So you're getting everything that you need from a breast surgeon to be able to safely proceed with being very, very highly surveilled."

One visitor to the event, Hope Bates, is a Missoula resident who stopped by after seeing the pink gathering in the Medical Center's parking lot. After having a personal experience with cancer, she said the event is important in bringing awareness to getting screened.

"I had a mammogram last year, but I also had melanoma, so I had a whole bunch of other tests done too," Bates said.

While Bates said her own journey "wasn't that bad," she still advises people to screen early to avoid it being worse later down the line. Waller echoed this message, emphasizing the importance of breast cancer screening for university-age students.

"Just be aware of your breasts," Waller said. "The youngest patient I've

had with breast cancer is 19, and we get them all the time in our late 20s, early 30s. If you do have a breast issue, please see your doctor, push for the right thing and make your doctor listen to you. I'm not saying it's going to be cancer, but listen to your breasts."

According to the American Cancer Society, breast cancer is the most common cancer in women in the U.S. besides skin cancers. The website estimates that about 322,000 new cases of invasive breast cancer will be diagnosed in 2026. While these numbers seem grim, Elizabeth Suh, medical director in the breast program and genetics education program at the Community Medical Center, said there are exciting developments coming to the field soon.

"The big exciting one is that vaccines for breast cancer are going to come out in some kind of fashion soon," Suh said. "That research is so innovative, and it's going to be so helpful for the future."

Suh also mentioned that patient comfort in the breast cancer field is an area researchers are aiming to improve. She noted the discomfort of MRIs due to patient positioning, and that with technology, she hopes this will improve.

"I think that comfort for the patient is really getting streamlined, and better imaging technology, so that it's easy, and it's fast," Suh said. "We've come a long way from standard mammograms, 2D compression, all of that. It's a lot more comfortable. Still, some patients have difficulty, but there are ways around that as far as figuring out how to image people optimally."

Waller estimated that by the time the event ended at 9 a.m., the group had handed out about 150 breakfast bags. Yet, as they raised awareness to kick off Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Waller and Suh reinforced the importance of advocacy year-round.

"I think you should be getting your mammogram all times of the year, but October brings us together as women and as health care providers to really promote the need for mammograms," Waller said.

Stop and smell the paint: Murals' impact on Missoula

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When walking under the Beartracks Bridge en route to Caras Park, colorful birds and flowers pop from the cream-white pillars.

The mural is beautiful, but beneath the aesthetics lie subtle ripple effects. Murals are transforming Missoula through placemaking and crime prevention.

The Downtown Missoula Partnership is a membership-based organization with more than 500 members and acts as an umbrella organization for the Missoula Downtown Foundation. Founded in 2014, the organization has been focused on the betterment of downtown Missoula for years, according to Jack Hall, the partnership's director of finance.

In 2023, the downtown foundation started the Downtown Arts and Culture Impact Grants. The foundation funds the painting of signal boxes, murals and even "alley activation," a concept that focuses on lighting, murals and pop-up events within alleyways.

Oftentimes, the partnership will work with property owners, then post a wall as available to local artists. The applications open in January or February. "We'll typically ask artists for an actual outline of their design, just to get a feel for the project, and the artist's portfolio," Hall said.

Occasionally, private property owners will reach out to the partnership with a wall in mind for a mural, and even help fund the artist. These murals can be seen around Missoula, like at Grizzly Hackle Fly Shop.

"The classic 'Greetings from Missoula' mural is one of the first that the foundation spearheaded," Hall said.

Murals don't just help welcome people to Missoula. "Studies show that murals lead to less graffiti," Hall said. This aligns with principles of a concept known as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design. This is a multi-disciplinary strategy that uses architecture, urban planning and property management to deter crime and reduce the fear of crime by intentionally shaping the urban environment.

According to the International CPTED Association, the approach focuses on



Mural painter A.J. Tiam, who goes by StayBacon, works on his portion of the mural on the side of the Clark Fork Riverside building on Oct. 5.

PARKER HOWERY | MONTANA KAIMIN

reducing criminal opportunities before they happen, rather than relying solely on reactive measures.

"Even if [the art] is sculptural, it gives off a message that this is a public space that everyone needs to respect," said Kim Brown Campbell, an art therapist based out of Missoula.

But Campbell doesn't simply view art as a way to keep a space clean. She views it as an essential element of city culture.

"There are so many cities across the world that seem to have way more public art than others," Campbell said. I know Mexico City, for instance, is one. There's this celebration of art by the public — as a cultural icon and cultural enrichment. But I feel like the U.S. is moving in that right direction, hopefully. In Missoula, even in these past couple of months, I've witnessed that progress."

It's for this reason that Hall believes murals are a worthy investment, as well as placemaking, which is defined as building a place where people want to be.

"Placemaking is huge. Murals benefit placemaking. Downtown, where we're surrounded by a lot of concrete, anything you can do to break up the concrete is great. People love art. It's part of what makes Missoula an attractive destination," he said.

But not everyone is an avid supporter of Missoula's murals.

Some historians cross paths with the partnership's goals, according to Hall. Concerns can arise that artwork is diminishing the original, historic architecture. However, Hall pointed out, if private business owners aren't going to maintain a building's original mercantile sign, for example, why not

make something out of the wall that everyone will benefit from?

"If you're walking around and you see a mural as opposed to a brick wall, it takes you out of your head and can get you into more of a headspace of just being in the moment," Campbell said.

Cities will never be perfect. "You tend to notice the goods and the bads of downtowns — it's somewhat the nature of the job." While you can't fix every back alley bulb, the Missoula community continues to grow a bit brighter, mural by mural.

The Downtown Missoula Partnership awards two grants per year to artists in Missoula for murals. "I'd encourage people to apply," Hall said. "We put an emphasis on local artists, including UM college students." He hopes the partnership will be able to fund three murals in 2027.



NOT YOUR AVERAGE PUPPET SHOW

Nick Matthaes performs with his puppet "Alpha Bro" during the Thunder Garden puppet show at Free Cycles on Oct. 8.

EMBRY ERICSON | PHOTOGRAPHER

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Most people consider puppets to be reserved for a young audience, but if you brought your kids to the Thunder Garden puppet show at Free Cycles on Oct. 8, you were in for a surprise.

Thunder Garden puppet show was founded in August by Kera Rivera, 34, and Ariel Gregory, 45, bringing in around 100 viewers every show. The aim was to create a fun show that allowed an older-than-typical audience to enjoy the art of puppetry. It works in the style of an open mic comedy night — performers sign up beforehand and submit their cue lines, but there is no audition and no vetting.

Stand-up comic Amanda Taylor served as the master of ceremonies for the night, going onstage in between acts to perform

while the puppeteers set up the next set. Taylor riffed off of the performances, as well as using her own material.

"It's hard being the mother of a serial killer," Taylor said, referring to her cat.

"I won't lie, I've definitely dated some Alpha Bros," she said, referring to Nick Matthaes' puppet "Alpha Bro."

"You're not supposed to side with the puppet," said Matthaes, 49, a long-time puppeteer and middle management worker in Missoula.

After Matthaes quit coaching soccer and basketball for his two sons, he felt that he needed a new outlet for his energy. He tried painting and playing music, but neither were able to fulfill his needs. At the time Matthaes lived in Atlanta, where there is a "ridiculous puppet scene," albeit one that is marred with controversy over full frontal puppet nudity. Nevertheless, he got hooked.

Matthaes had two puppets in the show, including "Alpha Bro," a yoked puppet satirically targeting the "Alpha male" podcaster stereotype. During his performance, Matthaes joked about testosterone levels and the "female gender" before his character was interrupted by his mother asking if he had done his laundry.

"I feel like I'm able to create satire that would be more difficult to create in a different way," Matthaes said.

What is unique about puppetry, according to Matthaes, is that the performer is not actually the one the audience sees. The puppet acts as a middle man.

"I feel if I said some of the things that my puppet says people wouldn't be able to see the irony," Matthaes said.

"I think everyone has some kind of puppet story," said Rivera, co-founder of the show. Rivera and her partner Gregory

started the show to share the fun of puppetry with an adult audience.

"Fun doesn't just stop when you're an adult," Rivera said.

Rivera is attracted to the separation that puppets allow. "My body can't float in space, but my puppet can," Rivera said.

According to Rivera, it was important for her to bring a more mature energy to these puppet shows. "I just love adult humor, I am an ooky, spooky gross human being and I love putting that into puppetry," she said.

This show was the last of the season, and the Thunder Garden puppet shows will resume in August 2027. It was important for Rivera to bring this kind of performance to Missoula.

"Missoula's a weird little town, why not have the weird little town do weird little puppet shows," she said.



Gallery | Puppet shows

Thunder Garden puppet show co-founder Kera Rivera performs during the show at Free Cycles on Oct. 8.



A crowd gathers at Free Cycles for the Thunder Garden puppet show on Oct. 8. The audience amounted to around 100 people at its peak.

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More than a number

JULIEN CLEMMER | SPORTS REPORTER
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Within the University of Montana football team, a Montana-born player is given the opportunity to wear the number 37, a tradition with decades of history.

This legacy number can be found among players, administration and fans around UM athletics. Not only do players get to wear the jersey, but before every home game, a flag is waved during the pregame ceremonies to honor the former players.

Fullback Kraig Paulson was the first to begin the tradition in 1983. Paulson wore the number throughout his college career and eventually passed it to Tim Hauck, a fellow Montana native playing safety.

"There's a rich history to the number 37. It started with one of my best friends Kraig Paulson, back in the early 80s," said assistant head coach Rob Phenicie. "For a young man in Montana to wear that number, I think it's one of the highest honors these guys can get individually."

Besides needing to be from Montana, the players who wear the number must also embody certain Montana values of "hard work, dedication to the team and tough play on the gridiron," as per the University of Montana Athletics website.

While there isn't a rule on which side of the team is given the jersey, defensive players have dominated. Although the founder of the tradition was a fullback, an offensive position, every subsequent player has been from defense.

Currently, linebacker Clay Oven, 21, is the Grizzly who dons the number. "Clay brings an unrivaled passion for Montana football in addition to defense," Phenicie said. "He plays extremely hard, that's one of the things that's so impressive about what he does."

Uniquely, the decision on which player gets to wear the jersey is not made by the athletic administration or the coaching staff. This tradition is entirely player-run, as every successive player wearing the number 37 has passed it on to another player.

Like all before, Oven was given the ability to wear it from a former



Griz linebacker Clay Oven poses on The Rimrocks, outside of his home city of Billings.
RYAN BRENNECKE | UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

teammate. "Trevin Gradney was before me. He was a [cornerback] from Billings, and he had it his senior year here," he said. "Two summers ago, he gave it to me in June, and I've been wearing it ever since."

Oven's Montana roots run deep. He is also from Billings and played high school football at Billings Central.

"Growing up here, you see the environment [in Missoula]. This is our premier football," he said. "It's been a goal of mine every day to be able to come out here to represent the state, the city of Billings, the city of Missoula and wear the number."

During his high school career, Oven was a first-team all-state linebacker twice and an all-state running back. His senior year, he made 53 total tackles.

Oven had an impressive season in 2025, the first year he was able to log 49 total tackles and had the second-most quarterback hustles on the team that same year.

In a season high, he managed to complete eight total tackles in a win over

Central Washington University on Sept. 6, 2025 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium.

Oven was able to make an appearance in all 15 games of the 2025 season, showing the hard work that players who wear the number 37 jersey need to have in order to represent the legacy.

In this year's season, Oven continues to work hard at practice, often being one of the last few players off the field when practice ends. In this year's games, Oven has played in all seven games and logged three tackles in a game against Oregon State on Sept. 19.

Oven has also received awards off the field. In both the 2024 and 2025 seasons, Oven received the UM president's award for top grade point average in Grizzly Athletics.

Oven understands the opportunity to wear the number is more than an ID marker on the field.

"Seeing what it means for the community, not only here but all across the state, and seeing little kids look up to you, that means the world to me," Oven said.

SPORTS BRIEFS

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GRIZ FOOTBALL HANDED ITS FIRST CONFERENCE LOSS

The second-ranked University of Montana Grizzlies fell to the 13th-ranked Northern Arizona Lumberjacks 49-44.

Throughout the first half, both teams went back and forth, trading touchdowns and field goals.

However, the Lumberjacks opened the second half with a bang, scoring two touchdowns with help from an interception thrown by Keali'i Ah Yat, and holding off the Grizzly offense.

UM began its comeback run when Ah Yat connected with Lekeldrick Bridges for an 11-yard touchdown and then passed to Jordan Denver for a two-point conversion, cutting the deficit to 35-32.

"That was disappointing because I thought really at the start of the third quarter that if we did something on offense, we could have taken that game by the horns," said Bobby Kennedy, head coach of UM football. "We had some silly penalties down by the goal line that maybe ate up some time, but also, giving up a kick return, that's what really hurt us."

But the lights quickly went out for the Grizzlies as they saw Lindsey Graves return the kickoff 100 yards for a touchdown to extend the Lumberjacks' lead to 42-32.

With the clock running down, Montana found itself down 49-44 with the ball in its opponent's hands with five seconds left, but the Griz fans' hope faded as the Lumberjacks quarterback took the knee to end the game.

FIRST WIN DOWN

The University of Montana softball team opened its fall exhibition schedule with a doubleheader sweep of the Black Hills State Yellowjackets.

UM won its first game of the series with a score of 13-9 and 15-6 as the Grizzlies batted 39.6% with four home runs and 10 extra-base hits.

Game one was tied 3-3 after the first three innings before Montana ran away with help from Anna Cockhill, who kickstarted the run for the Grizzlies with an RBI triple.

The game was filled with rain, which made the conditions unplayable for both teams. Makenna Burton was one who faced the most hardship as she gave up six runs in the top of the seventh when the ball became slick.

While the Yellowjackets scored six runs all in the seventh inning of the first game, Black Hills State came back and scored three runs at the beginning of the second game.

Though Carah Sweet felt the pressure, she quickly settled in at the plate as her team helped lower the deficit, with Montana scoring six runs on five hits.