

MONTANA KAIMIN

ROLL FOR INSIGHT



In the face of real world struggles,
University of Montana students use
Dungeons & Dragons as an escape

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Photo illustration by Ava Rosvold and Barrett Clement

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Kiosk



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: SE 1 EP 10



BARRETT CLEMENT | MONTANA KAIMIN

BARRETT

The Alabama IVF ruling should worry us all, even in Montana

I remember where I was when I first heard about Alabama's Supreme Court decision regarding in vitro fertilization and the personhood-status of frozen embryos. It's the same way I remember exactly where I was when I heard about the 2022 decision overturning Roe v. Wade.

I imagine it's similar to the way my mom remembered getting the call about the twin towers while driving home from the fertility clinic seven months before my brother and I were born as successful IVF babies.

In 2022, I was sitting in a hotel in Paris, and last Tuesday, I was walking on campus between the education building and the music building, wondering how we got to this point in only two short years.

IVF might not be at the top of most college students' minds like it is mine, but rulings like this, even when they're far away, have the potential to impact us all. They set precedents for future cases resulting in restricted reproductive rights.

IVF is the process where eggs collected from ovaries are fertilized with sperm in a lab. The fertilized egg, or embryo, is then implanted back into a uterus, as described by the Mayo Clinic.

Forbes estimates a single IVF cycle can range from \$15,000 to \$30,000. The average success rate on the first attempt is around 20-35% according to The IVF Center, but varies with age.

Approximately 2% of children in the United States are born through IVF, one of the most

effective treatments for infertility. It's the reason my twin brother and I are alive. My mom estimates they spent around \$50,000 throughout the IVF process.

In 2022, I worried the language in the Dobbs decision opened up a broader conversation about reproductive rights and IVF. Then last Wednesday, I started getting the news-app notifications. As one New York Times article read, Alabama health systems "paused most IVF procedures after the state's Supreme Court said embryos should be considered children." White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre pointed to the overturning of Roe as opening the door for Alabama's decision.

Some will argue the case should be considered in its context: it was a wrongful death lawsuit after a hospital patient mishandled and destroyed stored frozen embryos. It invoked an old Alabama law allowing parents to sue over the death of a minor child, and the state court ruled frozen embryos are children under the law. But in reality, this ruling raises questions nationally about all aspects of IVF.

Freezing surplus embryos is common — if one cycle fails, it can be tried again, or if a patient wants multiple children, they don't have to go through the surgical process multiple times. It is estimated there are 1.5 million frozen embryos across the U.S. After such a ruling, where do they stand now?

An amicus brief filed by the Medical Association of the State of Alabama said if the court ruled as it did, it could "require such embryos to remain in cryogenic storage even after the couple who underwent the IVF treatment have died and potentially even after the couple's children, grandchildren, and even great grandchildren have died."

The news of IVF procedures in Alabama pausing, unsure of how to proceed, is proof for me that lawmakers and judges aren't fully considering the consequences of their decisions.

Some Republicans have raced to counteract the nightmare this decision created, seeking to protect IVF. They should have seen this coming, before any poor Alabamians' procedures were paused.

If that weren't enough, what really annoyed me was seeing the IVF news headlines get weird and weirder as the week went on. All of a sudden it was the center of a strange national debate where a bunch of politicians were suddenly defending IVF, using it as a political win. As if their blessing suddenly made it OK when it shouldn't have been

up for debate in the first place.

In 2023, Gov. Greg Gianforte signed a bill making Montana the 16th state to require insurance coverage for fertility preservation procedures like egg retrievals in young cancer patients. While not directly related to IVF, it signals the states' dedication to preserving the sanctity of infertility treatment.

For the time being, we're sitting pretty in Montana. Abortion is still legal here, and the right to privacy is still protected in the state's constitution. But if I've learned anything from the past two years, these things can change in an instant. If a procedure helping families have children isn't safe in a political party that commonly brands itself as pro-life, it's hard to believe anything is safe. If Montana mounts a decisive enough Republican supermajority in the Legislature alongside a Republican governor, we won't be safe from having our rights undermined, either.

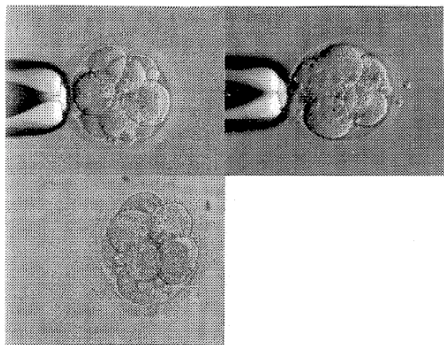
Naivety isn't going to cut it anymore. IVF is an important procedure, one that doesn't deserve mishandling by sloppy lawmakers and poorly thought out court rulings. I'm sick of seeing the way I came into this world questioned by those with little understanding of its nuance.

When I was little, I told anyone who would listen that I was made in a test tube. Now, when I talk about IVF, it's hard not to get emotional. We should watch how Alabama charts its course with IVF, especially if it ever actually makes it to the nation's highest court's chopping block.

-McKenna Johnson, Online Editor

Like it? Hate it? Let us know.

Email us your opinions at emily.tschetter@umontana.edu



A picture from my mom's IVF procedure. SHERI JOHNSON | CONTRIBUTED



Lovesick

Desperate Electric performs at the KBGA Lovesick Ball at the Badlander on Feb. 15. The Lovesick Ball is an annual event to benefit the student-run radio station on campus. RENNA AL-HAJ | MONTANA KAIMIN

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

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

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:

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

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Briefs & Blotter

Group asks for block of birth certificate bill; MSU faces fourth Civil Rights investigation; “No Labels” party makes Montana ballot

MONTANANS ASK TO BLOCK LGBTQIA+ TARGETED DOCUMENT LAW

Earlier this week, the state health department said it would no longer update the sex marker on birth certificates for LGBTQIA+ Montanans, citing a recent law defining sex as purely binary, meaning male or female. Senate Bill 458, which took effect last October, defines sex in terms of chromosomes and reproductive organ development, with no clarification for how it applies to intersex people, those with genetic traits that do not fit traditional notions of male and female bodies. It is one of several bills proposed or passed last legislative session in Montana, and the country, specifically targeting LGBTQIA+ Americans.

The health department ruled birth certificate sex designations can only be changed if there is an error in the original document.

On Feb. 22, lawyers representing a group of transgender, intersex and Two-Spirit Montanans and allies filed a request to temporarily block the rule from going into effect, saying it forces transgender people to misgender themselves and disclose confidential health information. It further argued the bill offers no recognition for Indigenous identities that fall outside of the gender binary.

For some time, the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services has been locked in a struggle with Montana's judicial system as it tries to find a way to stop LGBTQIA+ Montanans from updating their documents.

In 2022, a Billings judge blocked a 2021 law banning Montanans from changing their listed sex without surgery and a court order. Instead, the Health Department drafted a new administrative rule disallowing all Montanans from changing their listed sex designation on birth certificates.

(Andy Tallman)

MSU RECEIVES NOTICE OF FOURTH CIVIL RIGHTS INVESTIGATION

Montana State University received notice of a fourth probe for alleged discrimination, this time against students with disabilities, from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights in a letter to President Waded Cruzado on Feb. 2.

This follows notices of three other ongoing investigations looking into how the Bozeman flagship responded to reports of anti-LGBTQIA+, anti-semitic and gender-based discrimination. According to the

letter, obtained by the Daily Montanan, the office plans to investigate if MSU discriminated against disabled students by failing to clear snow and ice from paths and not responding to a student's disability-related housing needs.

Unlike the previous notices, the office warned the University not to retaliate in any way, and if it did, students and faculty could then file a retaliation claim with the office. “Please be advised that the University must not harass, coerce, intimidate, discriminate, or otherwise retaliate against an individual because that individual asserts a right or privilege under a law enforced by OCR or files a complaint, testifies, assists, or participates in a proceeding under a law enforced by OCR,” the letter said.

In an email to the Daily Montanan from MSU spokesperson Michael Becker, he did not respond to questions about whether President Cruzado has spoken to the University community about the investigations. Instead, he wrote, “The Office for Civil Rights has not issued any findings indicating that the

university's responses have been lacking, and MSU has collaborated fully throughout this process.”

MSU is also facing two other disability discrimination cases, one investigation from 2021 and a retaliation case from 2016. (AT)

MONTANA “NO LABELS PARTY” TO MAKE 2024 ELECTION BALLOT

The minor party No Labels candidates will appear in the 2024 general election ballot after the Secretary of State's office certified it as eligible on Feb. 16.

According to the party's website, it looks to fight extremes and create a unity ticket to run for president if “the two major parties select candidates the vast majority of Americans don't want to vote for in 2024.”

David Bell, chairperson for the Mansfield Center at the University of Montana, is the party's treasurer in the state of Montana.

The national party paid \$243,000 last July to gather 5,000 signatures it needed to appear on the ballot, according to the Missoulian.

(Claire Bernard)

MISSOULA TO HOST AFFORDABLE HOUSING WORKSHOP

Missoula's government will be hosting three free affordable housing workshops to find ways to create more low and middle-income housing in the city.

Residents are encouraged to attend on March 6 from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Burns Street Community Center to speak with city officials about changes to zoning districts and regulations on how land is used.

“Residents' comments from these workshops will help the city [government] understand community preferences about housing options and diversity in Missoula and will feed into scenarios that visualize what change could look like for our city,” a press release from the Missoula planning department said.

According to the Missoulian, a senior city planner, Emily Gluckin, told the newspaper last year two-thirds of Missoula's residential land is made up of larger houses, with lower populations than apartment complexes or other housing options. The Missoulian reported less than one-third of Missoula's population can afford this kind of housing.

(CB)

POLICE BLOTTER

ANDY TALLMAN

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It was a slow crime week post-Valentine's Day, with the University of Montana Police Department busied themselves taking students' fingerprints and jump-starting cars. Technically, there wasn't even a bike theft, but UM still saw a few troublemakers and thieves. Between Feb. 11 to Feb. 20, UMPD only responded to three crimes.

FRIDAY, FEB. 16 - CYCLE CRIME

Last spring, someone left their unicycle locked outside Eck Hall, and only now noticed it was gone. UMPD has no leads, and the unicycle was not found in their yearly roundup of all the bikes left around campus. Presumably, the victim's next steps are to keep an eye out for suspicious jugglers and check local clown clubs. How are they supposed to get across campus hands-free to pull rabbits out of hats now?

SUNDAY, FEB. 18 - LAUNDRY LIBEL

Tensions run high in the laundry rooms, I get it. We've all been annoyed when someone doesn't come to get their clothes out of the dryer after 30 freakin' minutes. But a University Villages resident took it a step further. He said he found his laundry wet on the floor and taken out of the washer. So he replaced the stranger's load with his and left a threatening note telling the owner to never touch his stuff again with an expletive. When the other student found the note, she called UMPD, who cited the laundry vigilante for a violation of the student conduct code.

TUESDAY, FEB. 20 - PILFERED PACK

Outdoor gear too expensive? Try a lootbox on wheels! That's apparently what someone did on Tuesday by opening up a Suzuki parked in Lot J and stealing a backpack filled with an estimated \$400 in camping supplies. There was no damage to the car locks. UMPD said that means the owner probably forgot to lock the car. But maybe there's a master lockpicker out there, using their mad skills for petty crimes.

MISCELLANEOUS MARIJUANA MISCREANTS

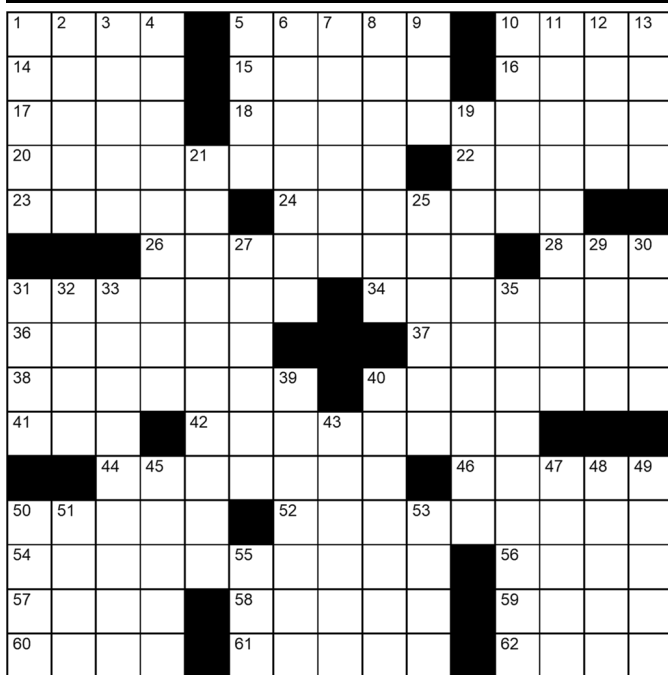
On three separate occasions this week, UMPD was called to a residence hall because someone smelled weed. But all three times, they were either unable to locate the source of the smell or the tokers behind the door simply didn't open up for the fuzz. The ones that didn't open up were cited for student conduct violations.

Can't get enough? Start listening.

This week, hear Bayliss Flynn speak to a Montana author about his solo experiences in the unforgiving winter wilderness.



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



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ACROSS

- | | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Whole bunch | 2 Strep throat bacteria | 30 Muppet with a unibrow |
| 5 Nitpicks | 3 Partner of pains | 31 Opening for a coin |
| 10 Lollipop sampling | 4 Openers of a sort | 32 Parting word |
| 14 Somewhat, in music | 5 Last part | 33 Took control of |
| 15 Voodoo relative | 6 Getaway driver, e.g. | 35 Triple spiral motif |
| 16 Old world buffalo | 7 Annul, as a law | 39 How a snorer sleeps |
| 17 Parrot | 8 Cowpoke's pal | 40 Sharp-edged |
| 18 Sedative | 9 "Steady as ____ goes" | 43 Not up to snuff |
| 20 Made sour | 10 Surgery tool | 45 Bridle parts |
| 22 Kravitz of music | 11 "Be that as it may ..." | 47 Hopping mad |
| 23 Hazardous | 12 Mass. Neighbor | 48 Quick summary |
| 24 Leather producer | 13 "Firework" singer Perry | 49 Romantic interlude |
| 26 The Little Corporal | 19 Most thin | 50 Conclusion preceder |
| 28 Hailed wheels | 21 "Absolutely!" | 51 Unload, so to speak |
| 31 Learned type | 25 Of the intellect | 53 Sad ending? |
| 34 Bureaucratic stuff | 27 Hymns of praise | 55 Barnyard male |
| 36 Responsible (for) | 29 Big galoots | |

Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

DOWN

- 1 Asparagus unit

What's your Leap Year lore?

HALEY YARBOROUGH

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Now that you've leaped into the new year and (likely) fallen flat on your ass, it's time to add an extra day to this incorrigible 52-week thing we call 2024. Whether you're 21 or 84-years-old (21 in leap years,) grab yourself a drink, and get ready for a deep dive into leap year history. Whether it's the birth of Jesus Christ, the beginning of the black plague or a frogastic leap day celebration in Turner Hall, leap years are often either a blessing or a curse. So take a look at the stars and find out whether you're defined by tragedy or triumph.

PISCES (FEB. 19-MARCH 20): Pisces, you're an old soul at heart and believe in upholding true order, which is why you have to crush any enemies of the British Crown with an iron fist. As 1660, you're the year Charles II took the crown and (possibly) when Queen Elizabeth was ACTUALLY born. Nothing like upholding the British Monarchy. Innit great?

ARIES (MARCH 21-APRIL 19): You're a sore loser, Aries. So what do you decide to do? COLONIZE. Typical, you fucking Brit. After losing the Revolutionary War to America, you dragged your sorry fleet to Australia in 1788 to set up a penal colony of prisoners. Nothing new, now you've cursed generations with bad teeth and stolen their land.

TAURUS (APRIL 20-MAY 20): No more babies, baby. You're 1960, the year birth control was first approved in the United States. Makes sense, since you're an absolute boss bitch, Taurus. Women's bodily autonomy may constantly be threatened, but take this as a seemingly always temporary win.

GEMINI (MAY 21-JUNE 20): Gem, you've always been a bit curious, so it's only natural you're 2012. No, you're not the end of the world, but you're the beginning of learning about a new one (aka the official year Curiosity first touched down on Mars.) You may not be exploring anyone's body any time soon, but you better bet you gonna find some cool ass rocks while singing "Happy Birthday" to yourself (I'm not crying, you are.)

CANCER (JUNE 21-JULY 22): As the year Isaac Newton published his famous work "Opticks", you better bet your physics teacher will be the one giving you blow-jobs, not the other way around. You got that big brain energy, Cancer, and it's not just because of an apple hitting your head.

LEO (JULY 23-AUG. 22): You just wanted a pet rat. Turns out Remy can't cook

food, but he can make your toes turn black. Bitch, you're the beginning of the end, aka the Bubonic Plague. Half of Europe may be rolling in their graves, but at least the Black Death gives doctors an excuse to terrify their patients in a Halloween costume. Is this the origin of mask kinks? Move 1348 isn't so bad after all.

VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEP. 22): Ah yes, 2016. A leap year that is almost as unhinged and unconventional as you. Not only is it scarred by the tragic loss of our gorilla god Harambe, but the election of the one — the only — Cheeto Man. Hey, at least you're not in 2020 ... wait.

LIBRA (SEP. 23-OCT. 22): You know what? FUCK YOU and your stupid fucking virus. As 2020, you were supposed to be the year we all went to college and let out our wild side. Instead, we butt-chugged alone in our dorm rooms while bitching about Zoom classes. Let's just say this was all a fever dream, yeah?

SCORPIO (OCT. 23-NOV. 21): Turns out that smoking the devil's lettuce was considered witchcraft in 1692. Scorpio, you're no longer the Wizard of Za, but the Wicked Witch of the Weed. Do you know what that means? You and hundreds of other witches are about to get lit. Like, literally. **SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21):** Sag, you have a bit of a knack for competition, so it's only natural you're the beginning of truly competitive "leaping." That's right, as the year 1896, you're the inception of the first modern Olympic Games in Athens, Greece. Sprinting, tennis, hurdles, you're not only responsible for a world-unifying event, but the inspiration for Wii Sports.

CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 19): Ice, Ice, baby. Like a certain really big chunk of ice in the North Atlantic Ocean, you're just chilling when a stupid fucking boat called the Titanic decides to ruin your night.

You're not only responsible for the tragic deaths of thousands, but also making hundreds of middle-aged women cry while watching Leonardo Dicaprio die. #JusticeforJack **AQUARIUS (JAN 20-FEB 18):** Jesus, is that you? Be thankful you're not the year of his crucifixion, but (allegedly) his birth. Yeah, babies can't speak, but baby Jesus is a different breed. Just as you are wise, Aquarius, you better bet Jesus was spitting straight bars of wisdom the moment he emerged from "Virgin" Mary's womb.



BARRETT CLEMENT | MONTANA KAIMIN

How can UM keep R1?

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Two years ago, the University of Montana rejoiced when it achieved “R1” research status. Plastered on the University’s website and celebrated in press releases and around campus, the top dog research status — recognizing UM as a school that produces a high volume of quality research — excited many people, from faculty to students.

UM administration told the Kaimin at the time that the University barely made the requirements for the status, and UM spokesperson Dave Kuntz said it would be “all hands on deck” to hold onto it.

But in 2023, that goal only became harder: the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the institute that oversees and awards research statuses, announced it’s changing qualification requirements for 2025, when universities across the nation undergo reviews.

Instead of its former formula — the number of doctoral researchers in designated fields and supporting faculty, alongside the amount of funding spent on research, divided by the number of tenured faculty — the institution simplified it into two categories: at least 70 students have to be on track to graduate with their doctorate at the time of the review, and spending on research has to exceed \$50 million.

Now, in the face of an academic review of programs and departments at UM that could put programs at risk of being reduced or cut entirely, some faculty and students on campus are questioning why graduate programs won’t be reviewed in the first year and how important R1 status really is to the University.

The academic restructuring plan will look at numbers, including enrollment and retention, to decide what programs to invest money in and what programs to cut back on or slowly phase out from being offered.

The Provost’s office brought the review to the Faculty Senate meeting on Feb. 8, explaining the first round of review will examine undergraduate and Missoula College programs, and graduate programs may not be reviewed until one or two years

from now.

Paul Kirgis, the former law school dean who resigned from that leadership role and remained at UM after allegations that he and then-associate dean Sally Weaver discouraged students from reporting sexual misconduct to the Title IX Office, raised concerns about excluding graduate programs from the first round. He expressed concern this exemption is only because those programs are important to UM’s R1 status.

“We’ve never had a conversation on campus about why we want to be R1,” Kirgis said at the meeting. “We are committing ourselves to a level of Ph.D.s that is well above what we have historically maintained. Even if we could, why would we?”

According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, the University awarded 49 doctoral degrees in 2021, 47 in 2022 and 68 in 2023, the highest recorded. The University will have to maintain 70 doctoral degrees for the next three years, something it has not done before.

Scott Whittenburg, vice president for research and creative scholarships, did not provide the Kaimin with the official number of doctoral degrees for the 2023 academic year since not all of them have been announced.

“We are a little hesitant to say what that number is, but I can tell you that that number is sufficient enough for us to continue to be an R1 institution,” Whittenburg said.

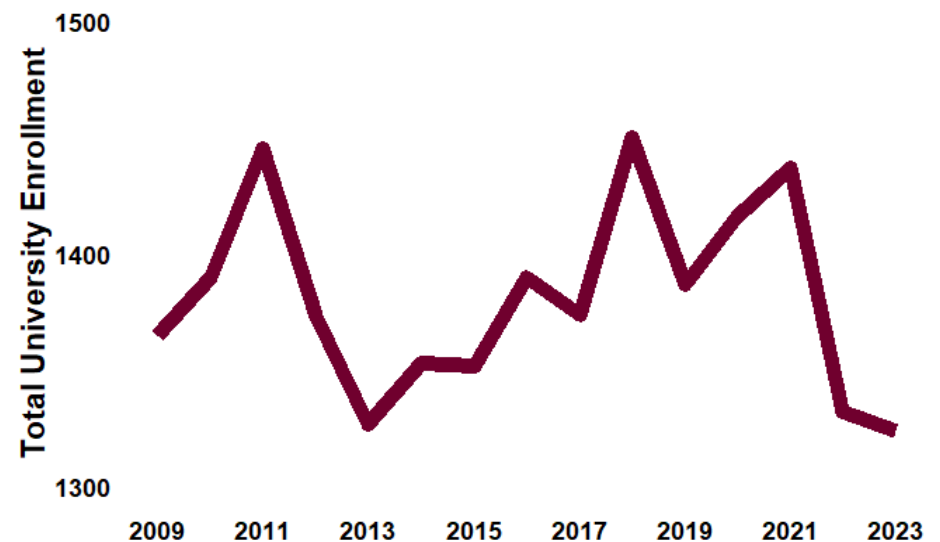
UM President Seth Bodnar said in an email to the Kaimin that the R1 status has been years in the making, creating room for not only more research to come out of the University, but also offering undergraduate students the chance to participate in “cutting-edge research opportunities.”

“UM leaders care about serving the needs of our state, nation, and world. Achieving R1 status is a successful indicator of the work that has been ongoing at UM for many years,” Bodnar said in the email.

The other metric to hit the status in 2025 — \$50 million in research spending — isn’t a problem for UM. In 2023, the University spent a total of \$134 million, according to Whittenburg, and that number is expected to rise ahead of the next review.

According to UM spokesperson Dave Kuntz, however, the decision to exclude

Fall Graduate Enrollment



Source: UM Fall Enrollment Census Reports

JUSTIN BANGTSON | MONTANA KAIMIN

graduate programs from the academic review and R1 status are not related to one another. Administration wanted to prioritize the other programs just to finish the bulk of the review by the Board of Regents meeting in May, and couldn’t do so with the graduate programs adding to the workload.

This first round of assessment, he said, is all “quantitative” right now, meaning nothing but numbers and data. The next section will be the “qualitative” aspect, examining things like how important the program is to the University’s reputation or if there are similar programs in the region. This will also include, Kuntz said, how important these programs are to maintain things like R1.

UM President Bodnar explained in an email that the University holding an R1 status is important not only for recruiting people to the University, but also for the future of Missoula and Montana.

“The significant growth of our research enterprise at UM has not only helped to advance the reaches of human knowledge, but it has also contributed to the creation of businesses and jobs here in Missoula and across Montana,” Bodnar said.

Since 2013, the University’s graduate

enrollment has decreased by 0.2%, peaking in 2018 with 1,450 graduate students, according to UM’s census enrollment reports. From 2022, the year UM gained R1, to 2023, graduate enrollment decreased by eight students.

“While it looks flat in the near term — and I know it’s been down year to year compared to last year — if you were to look at it in terms of the history of [UM], or even [UM’s] history of the 21st century, it’s still near all-time highs,” Kuntz said.

For biological anthropology student Haley Rebaradi, UM being an R1 university played a large part in her attending graduate school here.

“If UM was not an R1 school, I probably would’ve gone with my secondary school,” Rebaradi said.

The University, while holding an R1 status, has the opportunity to receive more federal grants to help fund the projects Rebaradi relies on to gain the experience she seeks.

“UM being a R1 University gives me the opportunity and means to apply my discipline to a wide variety of research, including public outreach to cultural projects that would not be available to me,” Rebaradi said.

Meet the Regents: Who's speaking for students?

ELLE DANIEL

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Beyond the student government and even University of Montana President Seth Bodnar, sits a seven-member governing board that gets the last word on university issues: The Board of Regents.

The Board oversees the Montana University System, which includes UM and 15 other universities. Each member is appointed to seven-year terms by the current governor, with a different student regent serving every year. The Board's duties include approving student fees, tuition rates and property issues like new building projects or renovations.

Of the seven regents, four of them graduated from Montana State University, accounting for 57% of the Board. There is not a regent from UM's main campus on the Board this year. When the Kaimin asked Galen Hollenbaugh, spokesperson for the BOR and MUS system, about the lack of UM representation, he said the Board has no official response.

It also sets MUS policies and plans for the short-term and long-term future of Montana universities during quarterly meetings. During the May 2023 meeting, tuition increases of

4% per year in 2024 and 2025 were proposed with an estimated 6% increase for out-of-state students. Todd Buchanan was the only regent to vote against them. Regents Garrett Yeager, who is the student representative, and Dean Folkvord had not been appointed at the time.

The Board also approved increased funding in 2023 for the UM's indoor practice arena from \$7.2 million to \$10 million. The practice area, still under construction as of February 2024, will be "bubble-like" in structure to allow students a place to practice indoors during the colder winter months.

In 2023, the Gov. Greg Gianforte rejected all student regent applications, leaving Board meetings without a student voice for the first time in 30 years. Candidates were not given reasons for the rejection, according to previous Kaimin reporting. Yeager reapplied for the second round of nominees and was selected in October 2023.

The Kaimin worked with Hollenbaugh to contact regent members. Regents Casey Lozar, Loren Bough, Jeff Southworth and Folkvord did not respond in time for publication.

JOYCE DOMBROUSKI

Chair of the Board Joyce Dombrowski went to MSU for nursing, receiving her Bachelor's in Science. She later received her Master's in Healthcare Administration from the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. Her term will end on Feb. 1, 2026.

Former Democratic Gov. Steve Bullock appointed Dombrowski in 2019. In an interview with the Missoulian, she said, "I have personally seen and experienced the benefits of a university education. The future of our state and the nation's health care system depend on a well-educated workforce."

Dombrowski was out of the country and unavailable for comment at the time of publication.

TODD BUCHANAN

This is Todd Buchanan's second term, and he serves as Vice Chair of the board. His first term lasted from 2007-2014 when former Democratic Gov. Brian Schweitzer appointed him.

In his two terms, Buchanan said he's seen UM and MSU's enrollment success swap, with MSU finding its footing to surpass UM. But some things, like parking and cost of attendance, are issues that are never fully resolved, according to Buchanan.

"You can't allow yourself to get frustrated that [they] don't go away because they're just persistent challenges, especially in some of these communities where density is really becoming an issue, like Missoula and Bozeman,"

he said.

Buchanan, who graduated from the College of Business at MSU in 1998, spent two years playing for the Bobcats' football team before pursuing other opportunities in student government. Those experiences, Buchanan said, empowered him to actively engage with students' criticism "[The Board] emphasizes how important it is to grab the student perspective ... [and] empower students to be at the table."

Buchanan, whose two children are preparing for college, is passionate about the Montana 10 initiative to get more students to graduate in four years without student debt.

Buchanan lives in Red Lodge, and his term will end on Jan. 31, 2028.

GARRETT YEAGER

Garrett Yeager was appointed in October 2023 by Republican Gov. Greg Gianforte.

Yeager's experience with student government put him in line for the position; he was nominated after his second application. An earlier Kaimin story reported Gianforte once visited Yeager's uncle's ranch. Yeager said despite the nerves he had, his interview with the governor was "pretty conversational."

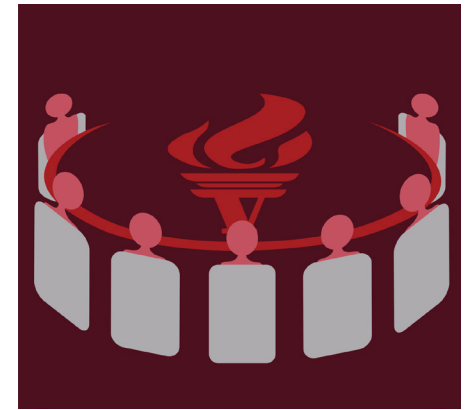
Yeager is learning how to balance his regent responsibilities while working on his major in elementary education at the University of Montana Western in Dillon. He also spends time working on his family's ranch, student-teaching and steer wrestling for the UMW rodeo team.

Yeager's sights were originally set on civil engineering at MSU, but his decision to pursue education came from his Choteau Elementary School fourth grade teacher, Rachel Christensen, who had a huge impact on him. During Yeager's senior year of high school, he was a student assistant for her class. When Yeager told her about his college plans, she told him she "saw it since day one."

He said he'd like to focus on mental health or education. Yeager, who struggled with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder throughout his elementary school years, said he'd be "in his element" with a career helping students manage ADHD or other neurodivergent disorders. For now, Yeager works as a behavioral specialist at an elementary school in Choteau. His term will end on June 30, 2024.

CASEY LOZAR

Casey Lozar, appointed by Bullock in 2018, was raised on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Polson and currently serves as the vice president and director of the Center of Indian Country Development for the Federal Reserve. Lozar is an enrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes.



BARRETT CLEMENT | MONTANA KAIMIN

Lozar has multiple degrees, including a Bachelor of Arts in history from Dartmouth College, a Master's of Education from Harvard University and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Colorado-Denver. Lozar currently lives in Helena, and his term will end on Feb. 1, 2025.

LOREN BOUGH

Raised in Highwood, Montana, Loren Bough was appointed in 2021 by Gianforte and will serve on the Board until Jan. 31, 2027. Outside the Board, Bough works as an angel investor, someone who provides new businesses with money to get them started. Bough's investments include Russian real estate ventures and Lenta, a Russian food and convenience retailer.

Bough focuses on affordable public education. He graduated from Highwood High School, located east of Great Falls, and lives in Big Sky.

JEFF SOUTHWORTH

Jeff Southworth, appointed in 2022 by Gianforte, went to MSU and his term will end Jan. 31, 2029. Southworth was raised in Lewistown, where he still lives with his family. Southworth is the president and co-owner of Allied Steel, a steel fabrication company.

According to a Montana Free Press article from 2022, Southworth donated \$1,300 to Gianforte's 2016 campaign for U.S. House representative and donated again in 2020 when Gianforte ran for governor.

DEAN FOLKVORD

Part of the family who founded the Wheat Montana Farms and Bakery, Dean Folkvord is the most recent appointee to the Board. Gianforte appointed Folkvord in January 2024. His term will end on Feb. 1, 2031.

Folkvord holds a Bachelor's in Science in Agribusiness from MSU and attended the Western College of Auctioneering.



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From left to right: Jackie Olexa, Conail Sauter, Scott O'Donnell, McKay Cheney, Sarah Hibbard, Viv Cummins and Andy Tallman. Kaimin illustrator Barrett Clement met with each player to create drawings of their characters from their two-and-a-half-year campaign.



ROLL FOR INSIGHT

In the face of real world struggles, University of Montana students use D & D as an escape

Story by Clayton Murphy, photos by Ava Rosvold and illustrations by Barrett Clement

Six ADVENTURERS

trudged their way through churning sands. Amid sharp mountains sat a crumbling amphitheater where cheers once rang out across a great city.

As the party approached the arena, hundreds of pained faces trapped in stone flanked the crew.

Lightning struck the amphitheater, sending hails of stone toward them.

Cracks ran up the arena steps and the ground splintered beneath them. The air smelled metallic.

"Fools ..."

A thick cloud of sand turned the sky black. Illuminated behind the obscured red sun, the adventurers' foe made herself known — Iymrith the Storm, a massive, horned blue dragon. Blue arcs of electricity danced along her scales.

Each adventurer dug into the sand, the cold steel of their weapons flashing with reflections of the dragon's lightning.

The dragon's jaw slowly cracked open, a blue light growing from deep within Iymrith's throat.

The dragon paused as the party's hair began to spark and frizz.

"Okay, so 18, plus four, times my multiplier of two ..."

A thick beam of white lightning swallowed the adventurers.

Behind Iymrith's blasts of lightning, along with every other interaction, battle and character, sat a quiet but commanding McKay Cheney — the Dungeon Master who pulled the strings for the group's final session of their two-and-a-half-year-long Dungeons & Dragons campaign. He was surrounded by stacks of books, dice and sheets of numbers. All of the plans to bring his and his friends' epic journey to a close hid behind a large plastic divider.

Dungeons & Dragons is a tabletop role-playing game where players create their own characters and adventure through a fantasy world. The game has seen a massive resurgence over the past few years.

D&D-based video game "Baldur's Gate 3" won Game of the Year in 2023. Demogorgons and Mindflayers entered the popular vernacular thanks to "Stranger Things." The COVID-19 pandemic saw people looking for any way to connect, and waves of new players flocked to online versions of the game. With outspoken players like Vin Diesel, Terry Crews and Matt Damon, some are wondering: Is it ... cool to be a nerd now?

D&D has more than 50 million players



Sarah Hibbard moves their character to run away from Iymrith the Dragon on Feb. 19. Hibbard, who played a human cleric, is a music education major at the University of Montana.

worldwide — a new record for the game that debuted in 1974, according to Forbes.

Some of those new players sit at Cheney's table. With the final battle against Iymrith, Cheney has seen so much growth from the characters, his writing and the players.

Twenty-one-year-old Jackie Olexa, or 400-year-old gnome artificer "Grandma Iggy," studies wildlife biology, computer science and math; she's from Bozeman. Her boyfriend, Conail Sauter, who played Khan the warrior and Harshnag the frost giant, is a media arts major from Seattle.

There's Andy Tallman (who works at the Kaimin), a 22-year-old sorcerer and journalism major from Bozeman. The bard, Lucia Dawnflaw, is played by 21-year-old Viv Cummins from Missoula. They graduated with a bachelor's in math. Scott O'Donnell, or Tuk the Orc, is from Kalispell studying social

sciences. And 21-year-old Sarah Hibbard, or cleric Finley Taylor, is from Frenchtown and studying education in theater and English.

All these adventurers, from completely different upbringings and moving toward different futures, have come together to defeat their world's greatest beasts. Through their adventures, they've attacked their insecurities and found a creative escape. That opportunity now seems more open than ever to the rest of the world.



THE DUNGEON MASTER



For Cheney, D&D has always been more than a niche pastime. It's his outlet, and for a time, even developed into an obsession.

In his second year at the University of Montana, he used his campaigns to cope

with his financial struggles and mounting class loads as a music education major. He would sit for hours developing characters and stories full of incredible detail.

Cheney started playing after what he called a "classic" introduction to the game — a front-row conversation during his high school Japanese class. He remembered catching side-eyes and hesitation after a dinnertime admission to his parents.

"You know that's a slippery slope, right?" his mom said.

His family was religious and remembered the "satanic panic" that swept the United States in the 1980s. There were massive controversies about alleged satanic rituals and worship plaguing preschools, popular books and heavy metal music, filling religious Americans with fear. D&D found itself right in the middle — many accused the game of

promoting themes of witchcraft, murder, suicide and pornography.

His parents were eventually convinced Cheney wasn't practicing the dark arts and let him continue his roleplaying.

"I think it went from a cult to a cult following," Cheney said.

He's been in UM choir since his freshman year and has recently gotten back into musical theater with performances at the Zootown Cabaret and UM.

His group tries to meet most months, when they crowd around one of the tables in his apartment complex's common room. Cheney is frustrated with how difficult it is for him to find the time — the game does so much for him. It's a release, an escape.

The first session Cheney ever played was based on the D&D rulebook "Storm King's Thunder" — the same material this campaign



LEFT: Conail Sauter poses as his character Harshnag, a frost giant. On Feb. 19, during their final game, Harshnag towered over the other players on the board and attempted to slay the dragon. **MIDDLE:** Jackie Olexa and Scott O'Donnell played Grandma Iggy and Tuk the Orc in their campaign. Olexa and O'Donnell are long-time friends and both used the game as a creative outlet and a break from reality. **RIGHT:** Dungeon Master McKay Cheney holds his dragon, Iymrith, that he created for the final game of his two-year Dungeons & Dragons campaign. Cheney has seven years of experience playing D&D and some of his sessions have lasted up to six hours.

draws from. But the missions that have taken them two-and-a-half years took Cheney six months. There wasn't nearly as much detail — that campaign was played straight from the book. Now with seven years of experience, Cheney thinks his players deserve more.

"I don't like the way that little side quest goes, because you just go down here, you find out someone's dead, and you come all the way back, and you've traveled over a couple hundred miles just to do that," Cheney remembered thinking.

"That's stupid," he said. "I'm gonna give them a better reason."

OPENING THE KEEP

D&D's resurgence is a change Cheney has seen happening since he started playing. In his first year at UM, he felt confident in his passion for the game. Instead of a secret, deplorable nerd hobby, the immersive role-playing acted as a conduit for friendships in college.

Cheney, like most of the crew, is a fourth-year student at UM. But that's where their similarities ended. Sure, they all shared a

passion for slaying monsters and going on daring quests, but the group was full of all sorts of people.

This was Jackie Olexa's first ever campaign. She had four characters, all of whom ended up getting killed along the way. Her final character, Grandma Iggy, the 400-year-old gnome artificer, served as the group's knowledgeable elder and a mother figure to Tuk the Orc, played by her longtime friend Scott O'Donnell.

When writing a new character, she found a tendency to branch off of some of her own real-world characteristics. But as she cycled through characters, she chose to challenge herself with writing people who were more of a departure from her personality.

Olexa loves her hardcore, structured STEM education, but everyone needs a break. D&D became a place where Olexa could dabble in magic and bending reality.

"I rarely can turn my brain off of that," Olexa said. "So this I found, I wouldn't call it escapism, but an outlet. Just a way to express myself creatively in a different form than the ways I'm used to doing it."

Sauter, Olexa's boyfriend, played a frost giant named Harshnag for the final session.

Right before the group approached the desert, his previous character, Khan, was killed. It was a painful moment — with Khan's death went years of development and connection.

Sauter has struggled with independence most of his life. Months of thought didn't make his move from Seattle to Montana any easier, but Khan could never be pinned down.

Sauter didn't necessarily intend to create a character that compensated for his insecurities, but he looked up to Khan and found confidence in the character.

"Especially now, at the end of the campaign, two-and-a-half years have gone by," Sauter said. "I feel like that and other things in addition have helped."

In a way, the campaign had gone beyond common interest. They left the sessions feeling relief, even if they weren't sure what the relief was from.

At Johns Hopkins University, its counseling center has begun to use roleplaying games like D&D as a sandbox for therapy. In a press release, JHU staff psychologist William Nation said the roleplaying setting can provide distance between players and real-world issues, avoiding the hesitations of a one-on-

one therapy session.

After sessions, Nation and his patients discuss what happened during the adventure, and talk about how their in-game reactions may relate to real-world issues. One of Nation's players said the strategy helped to navigate his social anxiety.

Cheney and Sauter gained confidence in their writing. Sauter and Olexa sent these extensions of themselves into rigorous tests and trials, and feel they've emerged victorious. With a sudden rise in popularity, all Cheney sees are more chances to initiate adventurers and build more worlds.

And if they can immerse themselves and solve thought-provoking problems, that's all the better.

WIZARDS, HEROES AND A POLITICAL UPRISING

D&D ended up being a rare occurrence for Cheney to express himself creatively. His experience in music education at UM has left him surrounded by creative energy, energy that he has to squish into easy-to-understand

boxes and spread to the masses.

Here's an iconic baroque piano piece. Now boil it down for a group of third graders. Don't play the piano, analyze it. Even in musical theater, Cheney is given a script to recite verbatim. No room, no freedom. "Be professional," he's told.

With so much artistic input, Cheney needs to put it somewhere. Cue 12 hours of preparation for what could be six hours of play. The adventurers find a town and Cheney flips through 40 pages of vivid descriptions — an armory, rolling hills, local species of birds, dialects and accents. But there was a point where it became too much.

"I got really into it. I was like, 'everything has to be perfect,'" Cheney said. "It got to the point where I snapped out of it. I'm like, 'what have I been doing?' I've been using every free moment that I have. It was bad. Then I found that 'hey, I need to face my problems.'"

He would work on his campaign at home, during class, over dinner. He lived in stress, burnout. It was ceaseless, attacking him from all angles — school, home, relationships, everything falling on him at once.

"Sophomore year I was struggling to pay bills, I guess is the main thing," Cheney said. The memory aches. "The previous semester I had taken 12 classes. It was weeks without a break."

Often, Cheney still sees himself escaping to D&D. In that world, there's power. Power for change, power for expression and a freedom to be whomever you want. To experiment, to believe.

"A character could be who you want to see in yourself," Cheney said. "It's something you may fear about yourself. It could be someone that you aspire to be, or someone you fear of being."

D&D's base material can be stretched so far, so creatively, that Cheney believes these campaigns are close to an entirely new medium — one that can act as more than entertainment.

One of the party's favorite moments emerged early in the campaign — Cheney introduced a violent horde of goblins, something right out of the source material. The horde plundered, killed and moved on. The group, scouting out the carnage, ran into Beedo, a soldier from the goblin enclave.

At this point in the campaign, the group could have decapitated the goblin and rescued the village. Instead, a member of the party reached into her satchel as Beedo shook with fear. She pulled out a slice of ham.

The next 30 minutes were spent feeding and lecturing the malnourished Beedo on humanity.

Family. Love. Purpose. The little green soldier sat with tears in his eyes.

Beedo led the group to the goblin hideout in Dripping Caves, where more persuasion led to a goblin uprising against their tyrannical leader and the freeing of captive humans.



Iymrith the Dragon stands in the arena ready to attack the players. Dungeon Master McKay Cheney hand-painted this session's villain.

Cheney was impressed. His party molded the story, and he got to challenge himself.

Cheney isn't a licensed therapist, nor does he have interest in becoming one. But he thinks having D&D as a medium to interact with different people for hours leaves him and other players feeling refreshed, sometimes with a tearful release. Sometimes it would even resonate with the players' real lives.

In one of their first sessions, Cheney introduced Zephyros, a Cloud Giant wizard. Like the goblins, the wizard came right out of the "Storm King's Thunder" gamebook. He was written as a very minor character, serving as a sort of tutorial for beginning players. But Cheney saw promise under his massive gray wrinkles.

Zephyros helped guide the adventurers on their path for the first two years of the campaign. He gifted Khan a ring that summoned a bird so the party could communicate with the Cloud Giant.

For those two years, the giant motivated the group to keep on the trail — the fate of the world rested on their shoulders. Olexa and Sauter grew especially fond of Grandpa Zephyros and paid him visits often.

It had been two months since they heard from the wizard. Curious, the group traveled back to his tower. Maybe he was nose-deep in research and the group could have another opportunity to show its respect for his presence.

Blood pooled on the pristine tile floors

of his marble tower. A hooded rogue wiped streaks of crimson from his blade as the giant crumbled to the floor.

Tears fell on the marble floor, then on crumpled character sheets.

Sauter remembered a hole — maybe he remembered leaving Washington. The training wheels were gone. They were truly, utterly, on their own.

That afternoon, they let Khan's bird fly into clear skies one last time.

They weren't mad at Cheney. It was technically his decision, but in that moment, all their rage was focused on Zephyros' hooded murderer. He was left in a smoldering gray smear on one of the walls.

After their retribution, Cheney received condolences for the heart-wrenching death. This group of people found genuine connection to those couple pages of text and shed tears after his death. Cheney knew the character meant something to his players, but he didn't expect how moved they'd be.

THE FEROCIOUS CLASH

Bloodied and torn, the blue dragon brimmed with static energy. Iggy wiped a streak of blood from her forehead. In the group's final stand, her feet found solid ground and dug into the sand. Her right hand shook above her forehead, her left under her stomach. As the two pushed toward each other, a small spark grew in brightness and size.

Her left leg slid backwards. Her hands, now inches apart, pushed out from her chest and sent a fireball screaming through the thick clouds of sand. Dust caught fire as the shot tore a path of clean air through the storm.

The fireball crashed into the dragon's silhouette. Stumbling, Iymrith shook the earth with a shrill scream. She lurched backward and hung her head. Iggy exhaled and turned to look at Tuk.

As they locked eyes, Iggy winced.

A single blue lightning bolt sliced through the gnome, filling the air with ash and a metallic tinge. Blue arcs danced around a smoldering hole in her abdomen. The gnome shuddered and fell.

The table was silent. Olexa exhaled, as she did the other four times she perished.

Tears streamed from Tuk's bruised face. His bare feet dug into the sand, dashing toward the dragon. Sand became scales as he mounted the dragon, cleaving her wing off with a single, enraged blow. He reached recklessly for another sword, hacking into the other wing. Slashing and chopping at the tendons, it fell to the ground.

Viv Cummins' bard's grin turned to grinding teeth as she transformed into a contrail of bright white light, beelining to the dragon's jugular.

"That hits!" shouted a voice from the darkened sky. "Well done."

Fists flew into the air. McKay grinned, stacked his papers and laid back in his chair.

Student-directed play '12 Angry Jurors' explores the morality of justice

KAIRI LISING

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Beads of sweat roll down the young man's brow. His shirt collar chafes him more and more with each passing moment. The single oscillating fan in the corner of the room produces barely a whisper over his clammy face. And now 12 jurors have to decide whether to put him to his death.

A student director leads theater and non-theater majors in telling a story about morality, justice and reasonable doubt. "12 Angry Jurors", a version of "12 Angry Men" by Reginald Rose, is a play about a jury's deliberation over whether to give the death penalty to a teenager charged with the murder of his father.

Emi Cerro, a University of Montana sophomore theater design and technology student from Port Orchard, Washington, is a part of Griz Downstage, UM's theater club. The club aims to provide performance opportunities to students whenever it can. Griz Downstage produces a play every year and ideas come from members. "12 Angry Jurors" was suggested, and Cerro knew she wanted to direct it.

"This play has been one that has followed me around for years," Cerro said. "I originally read it in my eighth-grade drama class. I have had so many encounters with this script beforehand that I felt confident I could take it on."

The play presents the 12 diverse perspectives of jurors and how they clash. In the first vote, every juror votes guilty except for Juror 8. She insists on a discussion before the group sends him to his death as reasonable doubt still exists. Just like the play, the group of actors has differing ideas on their processes.

"It has been an absolute delight working with theater majors and non-majors alike," Cerro said. "I feel that the more diverse and different perspectives in the rehearsal hall, the better, as it can help create an environment based on growth and learning with the script."

Codi Donniaquo, a freshman musical theater major from Hinsdale, Montana, gained a new outlook from the experience.

"Theater has all these terms that become

second nature, so when we had to explain the terms to the others, it was kinda crazy," Donniaquo said. "It made me realize that I was like that once. It's just so cool seeing people's progress."

Donniaquo plays the Foreman, the head juror. The character is very different from other roles she has played.

"My typical roles are more mellow and laid back, but the Foreman holds a lot of authority, the stakes are very high," Donniaquo said.

Cerro has helped her throughout the process. "She's so understanding. She's always doing check-ins to make sure people are okay," Donniaquo said. "She even turned the lights down in the rehearsal room because I had a migraine."

Kaylee De Montigny, a second-year musical theater major, also plays a role they don't typically pursue.

"I usually play men and bimbos, and Juror 5 is a more serious role," De Montigny said. "I'm trying to find the levity in it."

De Montigny had heard of the play, but never interacted with it and wanted to participate because Cerro is a friend of theirs.

"It's cool to see them in a different light," De Montigny said.

For Cerro, directing the play is a learning experience. They've learned a lot from the role of Juror 8, who stands firm for what they believe in throughout the play.

"I never thought I would find a similar story in myself, but that is what directing is. It is voluntarily putting your voice out there. I am grateful that I have had the chance to do so," Cerro said.

The play presents a moral dilemma to the audience, whether or not the kid is guilty and whether there is enough worthy evidence to send him to die. Being in the play, members realize that it doesn't matter if the kid is guilty, but whether they have enough information to convict him beyond a reasonable doubt.

"Every story isn't one-sided," Donniaquo said.

"12 Angry Jurors" premieres in the Masquer Theatre on March 1-2 at 7 p.m. and March 3 at 4 p.m. with free admission.



Rehearsal scenes from Act 1 of "12 Angry Jurors", a play directed by Emi Cerro. The free-admission play is set to be performed by Griz Downstage in the Masquer Theatre on March 1-2 at 7 p.m. and March 3 at 4 p.m..

CHRIS LODMAN | MONTANA KAIMIN



Emi Cerro after rehearsal on Feb. 21. Cerro is directing "12 Angry Jurors", a play set to be performed by members of Griz Downstage, a University of Montana club focused on theater performance for performing arts students and non-theater majors. CHRIS LODMAN | MONTANA KAIMIN

New animated comedy tackles anxiety (and coherent time travel)

KEELY PROEBSTEL

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Gone are the days of the stoner-slacker animated comedy. It's 2024, and we're here for protagonists who are girlbossin' it a little too close to the sun.

"The Second Best Hospital in the Galaxy" comes off like a blend of formulas we've seen work before. Take the sci-fi shenanigans, sex-and-violence comedic base, the general attitude towards life of "Rick and Morty" and mix it with the girl-friendship vibes and focus on mental health from "Tuca and Bertie". The result is a show that is determined to skewer sci-fi tropes, gross you out a little and make you want to call your bestie.

The story follows Dr. Sleech (Stephanie Hsu) and Dr. Klak (Keke Palmer), two best friends determined to make their workplace the "first" best hospital in the galaxy. Sleech is as avoidant as it gets, determined to dodge any kind of emotion in pursuit of scientific advancement. Klak is the literal poster child for anxiety (seriously, her therapist/mom wrote multiple bestsellers about her). It's a fun dynamic, although for many of us, it might become a little too relatable at times.

The show is a joke-a-minute affair that's surprisingly heavy on continuity. Each episode focuses on a specific case, whether it's time surgery (that's surgery, but in a time loop) or a sentient exploding fungus spore. Besides that, there's an overarching plot about an anxiety-eating worm, which Sleech and Klak could potentially use to create a cure for anxiety (and get some serious cash for the hospital) or accidentally destroy society with.

"The Second Best Hospital in the Galaxy" features a star-studded cast, with Palmer as Klak, Hsu as Sleech, and Natasha Lyonne, Maya Rudolph, and Kieran Culkin in supporting roles. Series creator Cirocco Dunlap wrote

for Lyonne's Netflix series "Russian Doll," and the gentle dissection of sci-fi media conventions clearly carries over to this project.

The art style can be a little jarring, especially at first. Think of it as going to your friend's party with a bunch of people you don't know; it's weird and a little off-putting at first, but after an hour or two, you're pretty comfortable. The world-building can also be a little unsettling, as the show isn't interested in holding your hand and explaining that this is a future, alien-y world where weird stuff happens. It just throws you in the deep end and expects you to tread water. It's familiar enough to make sense, but out there enough to make you glad your fast food doesn't scream in pain while you eat it.

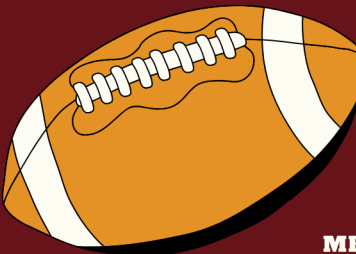
Beneath the cynical sci-fi veneer lies a compassionate focus on mental health. Anxiety is a core theme of the show, and not just how it affects us as individuals, but how it affects our careers, relationships and friendships. Klak and Sleech both find themselves making mature, difficult choices about their mental health. Sleech can't avoid having problems and feelings, and Klak has to manage just how much her anxiety changes her life. Despite the characters being coded towards their early thirties, the mental health challenges the show tackles are important and relatable at any age.

"The Second Best Hospital in the Galaxy" isn't a perfect show by any means. Some of the plots can be cringe-inducing, and the rapid-fire format of the jokes means quite a few just don't land. But it's a fun show, cleverly playing with tropes and building a colorful, exciting and often terrifying world. It's also an insightful, compassionate show with a lot to say about mental health. It probably won't end up a classic of the niche animated sci-fi workplace comedy genre, but it's worth four-ish hours of your time.

Rating: 6.5/10

● **WOMEN'S** ●

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Four Montanans attempt to set a pickleball world record

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On Jan. 20 at 11:35 a.m., on a court inside PEAK Racquet Club, four Montanans finished their final pickleball match after more than 27 hours of consecutive gameplay. They hope their efforts set the world record and shared the moment with dozens of onlookers.

The four players — Dave Cook, 56, Joe Fraser, 56, Dory Lerew, 43, and Mike Nys, 53 — are awaiting approval from Guinness World Records to officially claim the world record for the longest continuous game of pickleball. If granted, it would be one of seven world records set in Missoula, according to Guinness World Records.

The idea for a pickleball record was sparked after Cook saw a video of some people in Spain attempting to break it. Inspired, Cook started to get the initial paperwork done.

The initial submission for a world record must include an estimate on how much you could beat the record by. Cook and Nys tried to research the time they had to beat, but were unable to find it.

"[Cook] finally had to ask them if there's actually a record holder and that's when we found out the people from Spain didn't do something right," Nys said.

Guinness told them there was no record for the event at all and replied with an arbitrary 24 hours as the goal to hit. Cook said they would break it by two hours, and heard back from Guinness two weeks later with approval for the attempt.

Strict rules surround breaking a world record, and if there is not an adjudicator from Guinness present, a continuous video of the full playtime must be submitted along with photos, which is the route this group took. There had to be two witnesses at all times and they could only work in four hour shifts, Cook said. The group also had to have an umpire with some "pickleball cred," Cook added, so it wasn't a random person.

During the world record event, players were allowed to take a five-minute break every hour, and break time accumulated if they didn't use it right away. At the end of play, however, the time used for the breaks would be subtracted from the total time played, the group said. Breaks could be used for snacks, sleeping or using the bathroom. Getting a drink of water between points was allowed without having to take an official break.

"If they approve us, we'll not only have broken the world record but we'll be the first ever to hold the record," Lerew said.

While waiting for approval, Cook went to work on building his team, turning to the community of pickleball players that had



From left to right: Dory Lerew, Dave Cook, Mike Nys and Joe Fraser on Feb. 21 at the same court where they attempted to break a pickleball world record, which is currently under review by Guinness World Records. All of them have over five years of experience playing the sport, with Nys playing the longest at 23 years. **CHRIS LODMAN | MONTANA KAIMIN**

met before any courts were built in Missoula, when play was still on tennis courts or inside school gyms.

"I wanted to sort of pick people who had been longtime players or meant something in the community," Cook said.

Most people waved off Cook's idea, saying they would come watch for an hour or two instead. When he approached Nys and Fraser with the idea, they were up for the challenge. Lerew, however, was recruited to help gain volunteers and attention surrounding the event.

"I was like, Dave, I love the idea but I want to do it," Lerew said. "I was like, 'Put me in coach.'"

The four moved to the Missoula area after going to different colleges across the country, including Montana State University graduate, Nys, and University of Montana graduate, Fraser. Cook attended Indiana University and Lerew went to Albion College in Michigan before moving to Missoula.

Once the crew was selected, preparation for the day began. Volunteers, umpires, cameramen and snacks all had to be organized with the event.

The group had only one practice session using all of the Guinness rules. They played for six hours and used the same format as gameday, four hours playing with a 20-minute break.

"During that six hour training session, we paced ourselves," Lerew said. "We took it pretty easy for those six hours."

No other training took place outside of the singular session.

When Jan. 19 finally came around they were ready to step up to the challenge. Starting at 8 a.m., the group was locked in for 120 games in a row, only slowing down play once to figure out the next break.

"I won't mention names, but two of the people who weren't [Lerew] and I insisted on going hard for 27 hours," Cook said.

The day was live-streamed for those who couldn't make it, and friends and significant others made appearances. A crowd of Cook's preschoolers even attended in support.

Physical therapists from Active Physical Therapy & Sports Injury Center were there to tend to any injuries or cramps that came up throughout the extensive event, and each of the players visited them throughout. The group wore calf sleeves and some even brought multiple pairs of shoes to switch out during the event.

They took the first 20-minute break after four hours of play.

"The bottoms of my feet felt bruised and beat and I'm like I've got to get off my feet but go to the bathroom but try and get something to eat but drink as much as you can," Cook said. "But then I kept saying 'Mike how much time now?' because every time we got on break he'd set a stopwatch."

Each of the four brought their own snacks, including no-bake protein balls, gelatin energy shots, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and even coffee for the first morning. They had a

nutritionist provide a list of snacks for the day to keep their energy up. They kept quick grabs like energy gels and jelly beans were in their pockets as in-match snacks, too. At one point, a volunteer even provided steak and sweet potatoes, all cut up for quick grabs at break.

"We were very lucky to have as many great volunteers as we did. That helped out immensely," Fraser said.

During gameplay, music and movies like "Step Brothers" and "The Princess Bride" played in the background to keep them awake and alert, and if that didn't work, a nice pelt with the ball would do the trick.

A hit called a Nasty Nelson, an attempt to hit your opponent on a serve, was used once to wake up Nys as he was falling asleep on the court, Lerew said.

When it was around the time the group aimed for, talks about finally stopping began.

"If [Fraser] had said we have to play for another two hours then I would have been like 'OK, then that's what we have to do,'" Lerew said. "I can dig deeper, we can keep going. But if it's like, we can be done after this game... that sounds even better."

The group finally decided to stop after playing its 120th game.

"Then we looked at 27 hours and then, well, we're in the middle of the game. Let's finish this game. So it was sort of arbitrary, you know, it felt like enough," Cook said.

They finally stopped playing after 27 hours, five minutes and 32 seconds on the morning of Jan. 20. The official record sent in to Guinness, that factored in break time, was for 25 hours, 23 minutes and 52 seconds.

"I think we all probably now, in retrospect, appreciate that we did play mostly competitively," Nys said. "The next morning, we had been going for 20 hours and people are like 'wow, they're actually still playing.' And that was probably the biggest thing is people didn't see, us just out there popping the ball back and forth. Because I don't know, I mean, we would have still done it, but it would have been excruciating."

After the event, Fraser didn't go to bed until about 10 p.m. and got up the next morning to teach beginner's pickleball. Nys ran a half marathon the following weekend. Cook took two naps and went on with business as usual. Lerew was unable to use her standup desk for a few weeks.

The approval of the record is going to take time. Guinness said it would reply in about three months with the results of the event after sifting through all the footage, pictures and data from the witnesses and umpires. Those submissions amounted to about 200 different pieces of information, Cook said.

"I hope we can make the record and I hope nobody beats us before they go to print with the next book," Lerew said.

Hurling toward victory the Irish way

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After moving to Montana as a Fulbright scholar to help teach Irish in the University of Montana's foreign language program, Abaigéal Drummy wasn't sure what aspects of her culture she would find more than 4,000 miles from home. Through UM's exchange program, she was encouraged to go to one of the college's hurling team practices, hasn't missed one since.

"I'd actually never played hurling at home," Drummy said. "I first started here, so in a way, I'm becoming more Irish in Montana."

In 2013, Naoise Waldron founded the hurling team alongside Brian Barry, an Irish exchange student, according to a UM press release.

Hurling is the national sport of Ireland, with roots dating back to 1272 B.C.E.. Played with a wooden stick known as a hurley and a small, hard ball called a sliotar, hurling is a sort of mix between field hockey, lacrosse and soccer. Using the hurley to hit the sliotar, players drive the ball to the goal, or net post, to score points. According to returning player and treasurer Caitlyn Sena, hurling is "everything Americans love about sports. It's fast-paced, close-contact, high-scoring and high-stakes, everything we like about sports like football."

Since its founding, the team has acquired four national titles, making it not only one of the most successful sports programs at the University, but one of the most successful hurling teams in the country. In less than a month, the team seeks to gain its next national title at the 2024 National Collegiate Gaelic Athletic Association College Hurling Championship in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Because of the Irish Studies program's connection to other exchange students, the hurling team has historically had a large number of international students, notably from countries such as the Czech Republic, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and New Zealand.

"It's a beautiful fusion of cultures happening here at the University," coach John Birch said.

Drummy said she and her Irish exchange student teammates find that it's "really great to have an Irish-American community away from home. The team is fantastic



Griz hurling team coach John Birch battles player Christiaan Cumming for the ball while practicing in the Schreiber Gym. The team meets twice weekly to practice in sessions that are open to anyone who wants to learn more about the traditional Irish sport. **MADDIE CRANDALL | MONTANA KAIMIN**

because it gives people the opportunity for people to actually engage with our culture and our heritage."

Drummy said she's found friendships in the team and would be "lost" without them.

Sena thinks one of the main reasons for the team's welcoming atmosphere is because of hurling's inclusivity to all genders. In Ireland, when women play hurling, it is called camogie, but many teams in the United States are co-ed, including UM.

"Generally, hurling teams have only a couple women, however, our team has over half," Sena said.

Sadhbh O'Leary, an Irish exchange student, said typically in her home country "the lads would never pass to the girls

because 'the girls would never score,' but there's none of that here." While she found being in a co-ed sport to be intimidating at first, she said it now tends to make her less self-conscious about her skill level.

Starting this year, Sena sought to expand UM's access to Irish culture and opportunities by opening up the opportunity for another traditional Irish sport, Gaelic football. After their first tournament, UM shocked the competition by winning their first Gaelic football game. Soon, the team will compete in nationals alongside the hurling team.

"We have such an inclusive team. I think everyone is nervous to come and try hurling, because it's a sport not everyone is familiar with," Sena said. "However, after

"I first started here, so in a way, I'm becoming more Irish in Montana."

— Abaigéal Drummy

the first training, people pretty consistently say 'That was so fun! Everyone was so nice,' and I think that's what keeps people involved."

In a special celebration of St. Patrick's Day, the team is playing at Washington Grizzly Stadium on March 10 at 1 p.m. in a match against the Thomas Meagher Hurling Club.

Missoula butterfly house brings in crowds

WORDS BY AVA ROSVOLD
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The Missoula Butterfly House and Insectarium opened its doors on Dec. 5, 2023. In just three months, the butterfly house has welcomed over 22,000 guests, according to Operations Director Stacy Carr-Poole.

The butterfly house is home to insects of all kinds, with everything from millipedes to monarch butterflies. At the Missoula Butterfly House and Insectarium, kids and parents can learn about the importance bugs have in the environment and get up close with all kinds of creatures.

The butterfly house sees many families, but also attracts college students with events like Bugs and Brews. This lecture series is accompanied by beer and cider for guests 21 and older, and allows visitors to wander through the butterfly house after hours.

Butterfly house members Erin Hamilton and Shawn Seagraves visited on Feb. 24 and said, "The butterflies are very lovely... you can have fun here as an adult and it's a good place to put your money by helping an organization like this that's a sanctuary for butterflies and other insects."

Hamilton Seagraves' membership, which costs \$35 per individual adult, gets them free and unlimited admission to the butterfly house.

For more information on upcoming events and butterfly house hours, visit missoulabutterflyhouse.org.



ABOVE: A staff member holds a dead blue morpho butterfly. Operations Director Stacy Carr-Poole said their butterflies live anywhere from one to five weeks.

AVA ROSVOLD | MONTANA KAIMIN

LEFT: The Strandvold family shows their daughter, Elowyn, 2, a grasshopper at the Missoula Butterfly House and Insectarium on Feb. 24.

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FAR LEFT: Tim Caramore shows Tessa Caramore the picture sheet of different butterflies and moths that are in the atrium on Saturday Feb. 24.

RENNAL-HAJ | MONTANA KAIMIN

