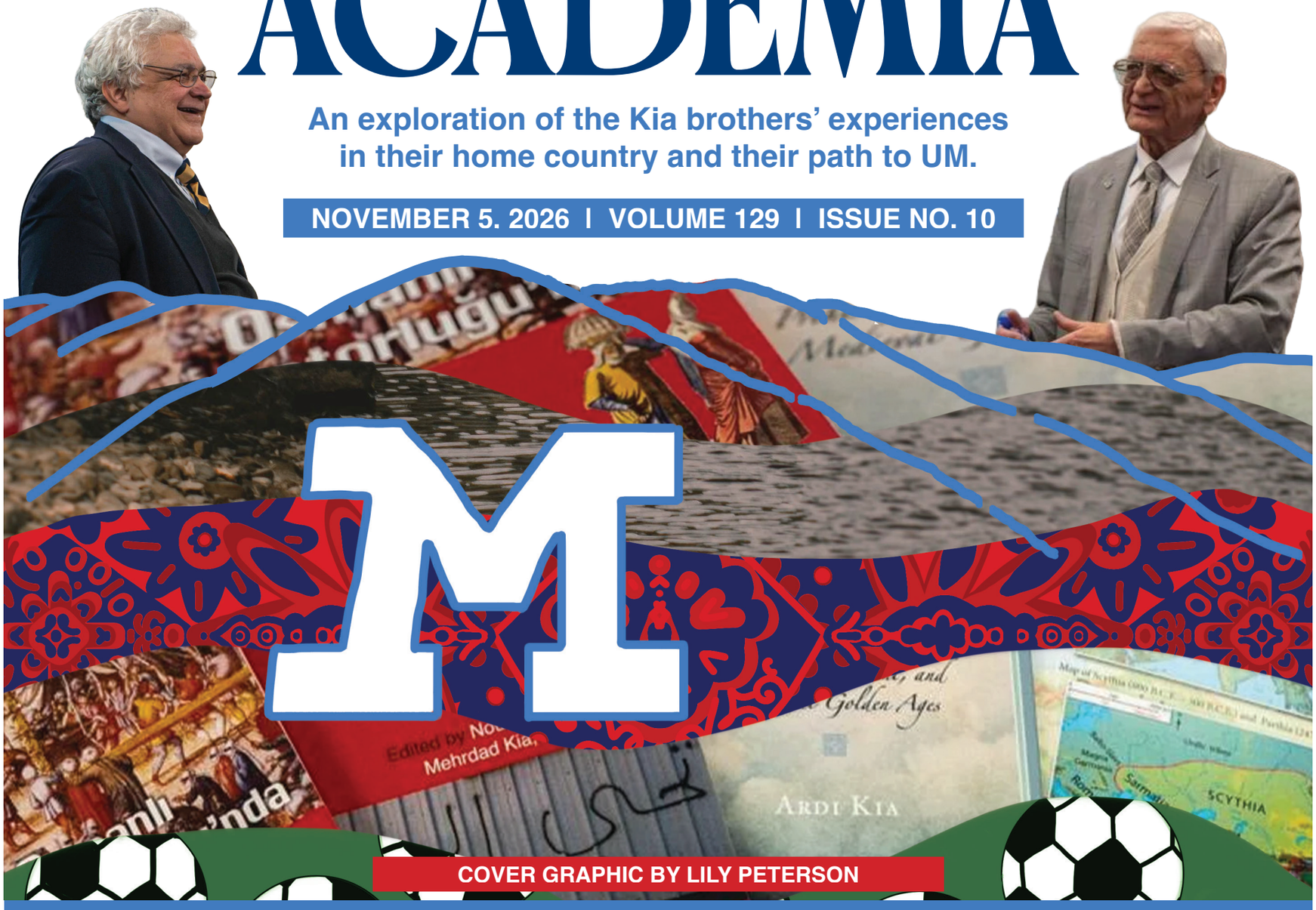
Story by
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INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIA

An exploration of the Kia brothers' experiences in their home country and their path to UM.

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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: #10 YOU SURE ABOUT THAT?



ALYSSA JO MURNION | CARTOONIST

Veterans are more than a holiday

After spending years overseas serving our country, military members should be able to return to American soil and feel protected. Instead, they are returning to little to no help from the people they signed their lives away to defend.

As someone who comes from a family with a military background in the U.S. Air Force, I understand the importance of the military. Veterans and active duty members put their lives on the line defending our day-to-day lives, and they face very real challenges. We celebrate veterans, but we should also care for them.

In a 2022 study done by the National Library of Medicine, around 60% of veterans have experienced hardship as they returned to American soil. This included adjusting to civilian life, mental health and disabilities due to their time overseas.

From 2020 to 2024, the United States' active military members went through a number of dramatic events, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Because of the conflicts, nearly 560,000 of about two million active members reported at least one mental health disorder, according to a 2026 report done by the National Library of Medicine.

Even after the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the the Department of Veterans Affairs, a department of the federal government that provides help and support, reported around 936,000 returning soldiers were diagnosed with some mental health issues, most of them anxiety related.

Even those who are not on the front lines are struggling.

The Mental Health Foundation reported in 2026 that many reasons why veterans struggle with mental health is due to being away from family and physical injuries.

Veterans have also expressed struggles caused by a wide range of federal cuts.

According to The Washington Times, 6,000 past service members were removed from their jobs in the first five weeks of the Trump administration. The Veterans Crisis Line was also destaffed after Veterans Affairs reported a loss of 30,000 employees. In addition, food stamps, which 1.2 million veterans use, have experienced funding cuts.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2025, 5.5 million veterans had a military-connected disability, which can make it hard to conduct daily activities and makes it harder to keep their jobs.

In 2018, the Department of Defense reported that 2.5 million service members who served in Iraq and Afghanistan were exposed to sandstorms, burn pits and other health hazards.

But with the funding cuts to Medicare, which is used by nearly 78% of veterans according to the American Journal of Managed Care in 2024, it's becoming hard to get the care that they need to survive.

Cynthia Aman, an Army veteran, told PBS in 2018 that all they were given to protect themselves from the fumes and sandstorms were scarves to cover their faces and it was almost as if they were eating it.

She would later go to the Department of Veterans Affairs for medical advice. However, it turned her away, claiming that her symptoms were just anxiety related.

While Veterans Affairs is integral to helping military members, the department planned to cut 83,000 jobs, according to a memo from the VA's Chief of Staff that was sent to the Associated Press in 2025.

People who served in the Gulf War during the 1990s, including my uncle, have reported symptoms like fatigue, headaches, joint pain and insomnia, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

All of these symptoms can cause trouble adjusting to civilian life outside of the military.

As someone who is proud to see pictures of my family members in uniform, I hope to see a future where they and their fellow veterans are treated with the care they deserve.

While it's important to celebrate the service of millions of Americans, we also have a duty as those who reap the benefits of their sacrifice to advocate for their lives outside of the uniform, whether through offering better medical care or providing better funding to the programs that directly support them.

- Hannah Benitez, sports editor
Like it? Hate it? Let us know.
Email us your opinions at
henry.doellinger@umontana.edu

SUDOKU

Edited by Margie E. Burke

Difficulty: Easy

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

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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:

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

Fall finale



Participants ride through the corners of the Missoula Cyclocross grand finale race at the University of Montana golf course on Oct. 28.
PARKER HOWERY | MONTANA KAIMIN

In local news...

COLBY SUKO-CLARK | NEWS REPORTER
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MISSOULA COUNTY ENFORCES KRATOM RESTRICTIONS FOR FOOD RETAILERS

Missoula County began enforcing restrictions barring retail food establishments from selling food or drinks containing kratom on Nov. 2.

The rule applies to places such as convenience stores, grocery stores and casinos, but it is not a countywide ban on kratom: smoke shops and dispensaries may continue selling it.

The county health department notified food businesses in September that kratom products were not approved for sale in their establishments and gave them until Nov. 2 to remove them, according to NBC Montana.

"It's in this kind of weird zone, right. There's not really clear regulation around it," Shannon Therriault, Missoula Public Health's environmental health director, told NBC Montana. She said there is no clear age restriction, dosage guidance or labeling requirement for kratom products.

Products made with kratom are sold in forms including teas, energy shots, seltzers and gummies, and can produce opioid-like effects. Therriault said the Food and Drug Administration considers kratom an unsafe food additive, allowing the county to apply food-safety rules to products mixed into food or drink.

The restrictions do not apply to every seller. The measure targets its sale in retail food establishments while state and federal rules remain limited.

UNIVERSITY OF PROVIDENCE TO CLOSE AT THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

The University of Providence will close at the end of the 2026-27 school year, ending the nearly century-long history of the Catholic liberal arts college in Great Falls.

University President Caroline Goulet announced the decision on Oct. 27, saying the college had exhausted all viable options after months of financial restructuring and consideration of alternatives, including a merger or acquisition.

"Our responsibility now is to care for the people who make up this university community, maintain the quality of their educational experience and provide clear guidance and support as they prepare for what comes next," Goulet said in a press release.

The school had been operating at a deficit for years, and its financial difficulties deepened after the Providence health system, its longtime partner, said it would end annual support of about $8 million by the end of 2027, according to Montana Free Press. A restructuring plan announced in November 2025 included cuts to programs, faculty and staff, and the board approved a declaration of financial exigency the following month.

The university has more than 200 staff, faculty members and adjunct professors. It said it would begin meeting with employees about compensation and benefits. Board chair Terry Cosgrove said the university is committed to honoring the school's legacy "with the same compassion, dignity and integrity that have guided the university since its founding."

MONTANA MILLIONAIRE POSTPONED AFTER LOTTERY SYSTEM PROBLEMS; TICKETS ALREADY SOLD REMAIN VALID

The Montana Lottery has postponed the start of this year's Montana Millionaire game after technical problems disrupted ticket sales the morning of Nov. 1.

Tickets purchased before sales were halted remain valid, and players who received instant-win prizes will keep them, lottery officials said. The lottery has not announced a new sales date.

The lottery attributed the problems to its new central gaming system, supplied by Bally's Intralot, which it began using in September, according to NBC Montana. Officials identified three issues: The system struggled with the volume of transactions, instant-win prizes were awarded more frequently than intended during a brief period of sales and game information did not display correctly on the lottery's website and mobile platforms.

To preserve the game's fairness, the lottery said it would add back approximately $500,000 in instant-win prizes to the tickets remaining in the game. Officials said they are working with Bally's Intralot to fix the problems, validate sales and game data and determine when sales can safely resume.

"Montana Millionaire is one of our most anticipated games each year, and we understand the disappointment and frustration this postponement has caused," Cory Bailey, the lottery's security and deputy director told NBC Montana.

Sales began at 5:30 a.m. Sunday but were halted as the problems emerged. The lottery initially said the game was not postponed while it tried to restore sales, then announced the postponement later that morning.



This week on the Kaimin Cast...

Halloween weekend brings people of all ages to the streets, from trick or treating and community events to bar crawls and house parties.

But before the streets are hit, the costumes must be prepped and readied. One house in the University district filled with girls as the three sophomore renters invited friends over to get ready together. Three girls took over one room where a desk housing all the makeup one could need and floor covered in clothes and accessories aided their costume transformations. As they got ready, they made TikToks, bantered and shared supplies.

"You're just preparing all week just to get absolutely lit with your friends in costumes," said Ella Miller, a sophomore from Bozeman.

Check out our latest podcast "Halloweekend: From getting ready to looking sexy," 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



AT LEAST 9 KILLED AS LEARJET CRASHES IN SOUTH FLORIDA NEIGHBORHOOD

A Learjet 60 carrying nine people crashed into a South Florida neighborhood on Nov. 1, killing everyone aboard, according to Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy. Authorities reported no immediate injuries or deaths on the ground.

The jet was headed for the Bahamas and had departed Austin-Bergstrom International Airport in Texas. It crashed at about 12:50 p.m. in Greenacres, roughly 7 miles southwest of West Palm Beach.

The pilot had reported ice accumulating on the aircraft and turbulence that jolted it by as much as 700 feet, according to air traffic control recordings. The jet then began a rapid descent before crashing.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said there were no immediate reports of people on the ground being hurt. "It was a cataclysmic plane crash," he told NPR. "It looked like a missile going down and left a big crater on the side of the road."

Palm Beach County authorities evacuated about 600 people from a nearby mobile-home community as investigators began examining the crash. The Federal Aviation Administration is supporting the National Transportation Safety Board's investigation.

FLASH FLOODS FORCE EVACUATIONS ACROSS THE SOUTHWEST

Heavy rain triggered flash flooding and mandatory evacuations across parts of Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico on Nov. 1, closing roads and trapping residents in homes.

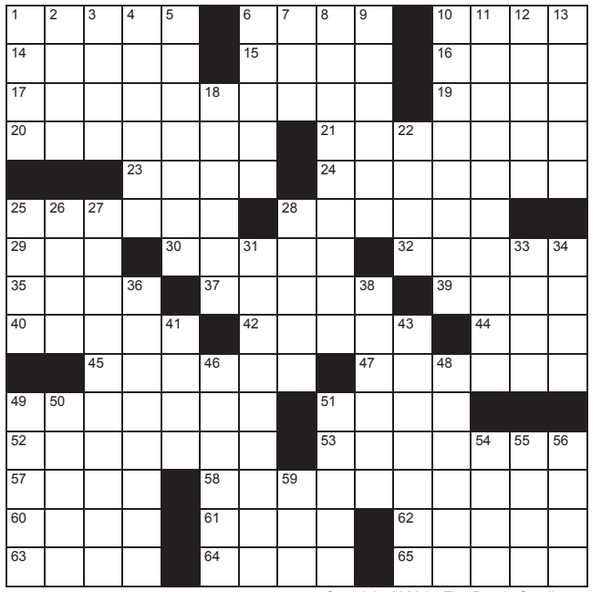
In Pagosa Springs, Colorado, the San Juan River was forecast to crest above levels reached during a devastating 1911 flood, prompting officials to warn of potentially catastrophic flooding.

Arizona communities also faced dangerous conditions. Residents near Oak Creek in Sedona were ordered to evacuate as floodwaters rose, while people were trapped in homes and emergency crews from nearby communities were called in to help. Evacuation orders were also issued in parts of Yavapai and Gila counties. Flooding forced swift-water rescues in Tucson and inundated roads in Flagstaff.

"We are getting two or three months of rain in a span of a couple of days," said Aaron Hardin, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Tucson. The weather service issued flood watches across much of Arizona and parts of neighboring states, warning that additional rain could worsen flooding in already saturated areas.

The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke



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ACROSS

1 Greet the dawn
6 Scratches up
10 Ship of Greek myth
14 Some people can't take them
15 Chills and fever
16 Sea swallow
17 Collection additions
19 Neighbor of Thailand
20 Persian Gulf nation
21 Hollywood's Portman
23 Spud's buds
24 Renowned
25 One of two evils
28 Welcomes in
29 Booze (abbr.)
30 Towels off
32 Spots to build on
35 ___ mortals
37 Per ___ (yearly)
39 Window part
40 Makes level
42 Lukewarm
44 Nashville sch.
45 Proverbs follower, for short
47 Original Mouseketeer ___ Tracey
49 Release
51 Michener work
52 Nassau's country
53 Speaking like Daffy
57 Viking war god
58 Two-sided
60 "___ Misbehavin'"
61 Ukraine city
62 One of the Pointer Sisters
63 Dog collar danglers
64 Brain scans
65 Bowling lane button

DOWN

1 "Moby Dick" captain
2 Costa ___
3 Short distance
4 Cubic meters
5 Attempted
6 Water conduits
7 Give it ___ (try)
8 Not quite winners
9 Kind of oil
10 Lost island of myth
11 Home business?
12 Often-pulled muscle
13 Beginning
18 Spoken letter "s"
22 Gets even with?
25 Weak, as an excuse
26 Mountain stat.
27 Crying shrilly
28 Pool contents?
31 Trait shapers
33 Abstract being
34 Blackball
36 Charms
38 Like some collisions
41 Con game
43 Part of Canis Major
46 On the hook, legally
48 Forcible seizure
49 German sub
50 Olympian Comaneci
51 Czechs or Poles
54 Fertility goddess
55 ___ the Great (boy detective)
56 Small fly
59 Pot-bellied pet

Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

Dorm-o-scope

RIVER BLAZEJEWSKI | ARTS & CULTURE REPORTER
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If you ask an adult to reflect on their college experience, most will likely reference at least one incident they had in the dorms. From "Smellrod" to Jesse, which dorm would you be in?



ALYSSA JO MURNION | CARTOONIST

SCORPIO (OCT. 23- NOV. 21): Scorpio, you weren't quite good enough to be Craig or Elrod. You're stuck somewhere in between, missing out on both of their events. Hey, at least you have your own dungeon, and you avoided the asbestos of the old Elrod Movie Theater. You're in Duniway!

SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22 - DEC. 21): Sagittarius, I know you've got that adventure in ya! But sometimes, things get a little out of hand. Campus police like to show up at your place at 2 a.m., and there's always that faint scent of weed drifting out your windows ... you're in Jesse!

CAPRICORN (DEC. 22- JAN. 19): Capricorn, you're so prepared. Your building isn't even finished yet, but you've already polished up your application to nail a room in the Business Living Learning Community, where you'll proceed to sell your friends all your handmade products. You're in Glacier!

AQUARIUS (JAN. 20. - FEB. 18): Aquarius, you help students succeed one day at a time with Housing and Residential Life. You're in Turner!

PISCES (FEB. 19 - MAR. 20): Pisces ... where are you? I mean, I guess you have gym and pool access pretty much whenever you want to. That's about it. You're in Aber!

ARIES (MAR. 21 - APR. 19): Aries, while you're that rad skater friend everyone wishes they could be a bit more like, ultimately, you need a glow up ... maybe even a shower. You're in Elrod!

TAURUS (APR. 20 - MAY 20): Your building's happening. You may not be as boujee as Pantzer, but those penthouse singles are pretty dope. You're in Miller!

GEMINI (MAY 21 - JUN. 20): Hmmm ... I wonder where that rumor started? Probably in one of those quads! Gemini, you're in Pantzer!

CANCER (JUN. 21- JUL. 22): Ok, we get it. There's no parking out of town ... but at least you have the whole place to yourself! You're at the Lewis & Clark Village.

LEO (JUL. 23 - AUG. 22): Leo, don't get me wrong, you're smart, but sometimes you get your head a little too wrapped up in academics. This isn't prep school. You're in Knowles!

VIRGO (AUG. 23 - SEP. 22): Virgo, I have to say, you're pretty dang tidy. For being so close to Elrod and Duniway, you're well organized. Just remember to loosen up every once in a while. After all, you do have a dilapidated cardboard dumpster located right outside your door. You're in Craig!

LIBRA (SEP. 23 - OCT. 22): Libra, slightly flirtatious. Wanna get outta here and go back to my place? It's only a block from downtown ... you're at ROAM Student Living!

Higher education commissioner flags 8 UM programs in review

CORBIN VANDERBY | NEWS REPORTER
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The University of Montana's Japanese, Russian and geosciences programs are among eight "red" programs flagged for review across all Montana universities.

For the last two years, the University ran its own academic portfolio review to find inefficiencies and programs that could be cut. Now, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education has started its own annual review pilot for every Montana University System school.

The University's Office of the Provost began an annual academic portfolio review in 2024, creating a system to make cuts and changes to survive the incoming enrollment cliff. The cliff is the result of the 2008 recession, which led to a drop-off of birthrates and therefore college-aged students today.

The Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education took up its own annual review process modeled closely after the system accepted by the UM provost. Joseph Thiel, deputy commissioner for academic, research and student affairs for the commissioner's office, said the review gives the Board of Regents accurate information on struggling programs across all 16 higher education institutes across Montana. Before, programs only had to be reviewed for accreditation by the Board of Regents once every seven years.

"What this is about is giving more information to the decision makers," Thiel said. "Over the years, we've made decisions without many analytics."

The basis for review differs slightly from the provost office's review, using only three statistics: the headcount floor, a three-year headcount trend and the number of graduates. If a program goes beyond the limit for one of these thresholds it is either categorized as yellow, meaning it will be monitored, or red, meaning immediate review.

When this list came out, 21 directors began petitions to get their programs off of the list. On Oct. 20, Thiel responded to these petitions in a letter.

All but one of these programs, the master's of theater, were either removed or moved from red to yellow. Thiel also reminded the University that as this is a pilot year, no action will need to be taken on these programs unless volunteered by the school.

HEADCOUNT TREND - RED PROGRAMS

PROGRAM	3 YEAR HEADCOUNT TREND %
DATA SCIENCE M.S.	+ 33%
GEOGRAPHY M.S.	- 50%
GEOSCIENCES PH.D.	- 73%
JAPANESE B.A.	- 70%
RUSSIAN B.A.	- 25%
TEACHING AND LEARNING ED.D.	- 55%
TEACHING AND LEARNING MED	- 42%
THEATRE M.A.; THEATRE MFA	- 44%

The list, last updated Oct. 22, includes eight programs categorized as red: master's programs in data science, geography, education and theater; doctorates in geosciences and education and bachelor's in Russian and Japanese.

By November, these programs will be reported to the Board of Regents and by Jan. 15, UM will have to respond. For each of the eight programs, the University has two options: submit a plan for reinvestment that will address the program's problems or a plan to cut it once all current students graduate.

Thiel said that this year, universities will still need to respond with a plan for each red program, but there won't be any follow up to make sure UM executes on it like there will be in the future.

The programs targeted are varied, with two coming from the College of Humanities and Sciences, two from W.A. Franke College of Forestry, two from the Phyllis J. Washington College of Education, one from the College of Arts and Media and one from the College of Humanities and Sciences.

But the purely quantitative nature of the review does seem to target programs with naturally low headcounts. The majority of the programs never had a headcount over 11, which can make percentage changes sound more drastic than they really are. For example, the doctorate in geosciences saw a 73% drop in headcount over the last three years, which went from 11 students to three.

After the University responds to the red flag programs, the Faculty Senate will get a chance to vote on any possible moratorium. Previously the Faculty Senate voted against all the program cuts that came last spring, but the Board of Regents and approved them regardless.

Thiel reminded everyone that this is a pilot year to test how effective the data gathering is.

"Your feedback on the metrics, thresholds, forms and calendar is one of its most useful products and we welcome it at any time," Thiel said in the letter. "Please send questions to me at jthiel@montana.edu."



UM establishes Montana's first artificial intelligence career certificate

JOCELYN HOOD | NEWS REPORTER
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Associate professor at the School of Art and Game Design Michael Cassens poses for a portrait in his office in McGill Hall on Oct. 30. Cassen's computer shows the Canvas page for the new artificial intelligence certificate.
JACKSON MAILEY | MONTANA KAIMIN

The University of Montana established a career certificate that intends to educate students about artificial intelligence this year, and students have mixed opinions.

The Human-Centered AI Career Certificate is the first of its kind in the state. Lee Banville, the director of the School of Journalism, and Michael Cassens, an associate professor of game design and interactive media, created the nine-credit certificate together and teach its three courses, all of which are taught online.

According to Banville, the purpose of the certificate is to teach students about AI and recognize that it will affect people's lives and careers, not to promote or discourage its use.

"In no way is this a sales pitch for AI," Banville said. "I'm not like, 'You know what are great? Data centers.' That's not what this program or this certificate is about at all."

Cassens said having the certificate would improve students' resumes and give them knowledge that is needed in a technologically changing world.

"You will actually come out with a much deeper, stronger foundational knowledge base of not just how to work with AI, but how to actually talk about it effectively and with people that have varied feelings about it," Cassens said.

He also said the use of AI for assignments would be required to earn the certificate. He intends to have his students use ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, Gemini, Meta and UM's model, Chat MT, to explore how they work. One thing they could be expected to do, Cassens said, is put the same prompt into many models to see how the responses differ.

Cassens said that he expects that many of his students turn in assignments that incorporate AI somehow. As long as the student can reasonably defend their decision to use AI, he said he's okay with it.

"I'm a huge fan of radical transparency," Cassens said. "If you're going to use artificial intelligence, say so and say why."

The first course is Creatively Exploring AI, which is already offered and taught by Cassens. He said it's focused on the history of AI, its hallucinations and biases, terminology, ethics and how specific disciplines could be affected by it.

The second is Calling Bullshit in the Age of AI, a journalism course that is currently offered under the name Calling Bullshit, but will change next semester. It's taught by Banville, who said it focuses on critical thinking and knowing when AI is wrong.

The third is called Human-Centered Leadership in AI, a new class that will be offered in the spring by Cassens and is adapted from a leadership class he used to teach.

"We intentionally made this certificate really grounded in humanness because that's what we do in this college," Cassens said. "We are much more concerned about how human beings fit within all this."

Cassens said the courses are made to be adaptable. As AI adapts and technology changes, so will the curriculum.

Grace Smith, a 23-year-old second-year graduate student studying game design, is already halfway through the certificate. She has taken Creatively Exploring AI and is currently in Calling Bullshit, and she said she thinks the courses are not pro or anti-artificial intelligence, but rather promote conversation about it.

"The students fill in gaps of opinion and are able to have that discourse amongst each other," Smith said.

She said she wants to earn the certificate because AI is heavily pushed in corporate America.

"Having that critical thought process background to AI itself, instead of just offhand using it for automation, gives me an upper hand for myself and for my career path," Smith said.

Kylie Heit, a 23-year-old senior cello performance major from Helena, said she doesn't like AI. She thinks that the certificate, whether neutral or not, normalizes its use. She also said the "Human-Centered" title is a misnomer.

"There's nothing human about AI," Heit said. "AI should not be taking away our arts."

Heit also said she doesn't think any classes should require the use of AI, like the certificate courses do.

Andrew Bert, a junior anthropology major from Cedarburg, Wisconsin, said he sees potential in the new certificate program.

"Teaching people about how to use AI, how to use it correctly, and how to use it sustainably might be really good and it might help a lot of people," Bert said.

Bert said he uses AI for research and to condense information for him, but he doesn't use it to "completely do everything."

Banville, the director of the School of Journalism, said that he doesn't think many students will be interested in earning the certificate.

"I think there's a lot of fear and animosity towards artificial intelligence right now and I'm not saying it's misplaced," Banville said. "I think that there are real questions that need to be asked about it."

He said that the School of Journalism offered a free, one-day, one-credit course on AI last spring and about 15 students, much fewer than he expected, showed up for it.

Banville said he hopes that the certificate will be more successful in finding an audience and that students will not want to turn away from talking about AI because of the politics of data centers.

"Whether a data center gets built in Bonner or not, these tools are out there and they are going to change your life," Banville said. "I just want you to be ready and have the tools to decide how and when and when not to use it."



Mehrdad and Ardi Kia's various books on Oct. 30.

INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIA

An exploration of the Kia brothers' own experiences in their home country and their path to UM.



Dr. Ardi Kia teaches his Central and Southwest Asian studies program on Oct. 27.

STORY BY JULIAN CLEMMER
PHOTOS BY BRAYDEN VALLOW

Two brothers attended school in a chapel on a hill in Tehran in 1963. Like their peers, they came from the tightly packed neighborhoods of Iran's capital. Their teachers were Italian and Irish Catholic priests. After class, church fathers would take off their clerical garb and don athletic wear to play soccer with their pupils.

Now, from their main classroom in Stone Hall, those brothers, Mehrdad and Adeshir ("Ardi") Kia, teach their own students. Although they are not dressed in robes of the Catholic faith and do not play soccer with their students on the Oval, their office contains cushioned chairs with walls and shelves decorated with handicrafts from across the world to make office hours with students more comfortable.

The Kia brothers are professors of history and anthropology at the University of Montana, and the directors of the Central and Southwest Asian studies program. "You don't really think of a place like Montana having so much student interest, but there was," Mehrdad said.

Mehrdad first came to Montana in 1989 as an applicant to the history department after graduating from the University of Wisconsin- Madison in 1986. "I had interviewed elsewhere, and I had job offers," he said. "The day of the interview, [I was] a bit nervous, so I got up early."

After getting ready, he stopped to admire Missoula's scenery. The mountains and the Clark Fork River made him feel at home. "It looks like Northern Iran," he said.

For the Interview, Mehrdad gave a presentation on his area of historical expertise.

"I couldn't believe it, [the room] was jam-packed," he said. "People from all different departments had come, and they asked very good questions." From this interview, Mehrdad eventually secured the job.

Ardi joined him a few years later. "After I finished my education, I got so frustrated because I was working on my dissertation for four or five years," Ardi said.

Ardi's opportunity came through a conversation with a UM professor. "I was walking around and I went to the art building," he said. He ran into James E. Todd, a former UM arts professor and the namesake of the James E. Todd building on campus.

After a conversation with Todd, Ardi learned that the current art history teacher was leaving. Art history was one of his degrees, along with anthropology and philosophy.

Todd introduced Ardi to the rest of his department after this meeting and secured a job at the University with this connection. After being hired for the position, Ardi began teaching art history. After a few years, Ardi branched out to more classes in the liberal arts department.

Mehrdad mostly teaches through lectures, though he gives exams periodically throughout the course. Kendrick Laidlaw, 19, is a sophomore anthropology major who had taken two classes offered by Mehrdad. "It's like one continuous story," he said. "Each class is not separated. They're all part of the same story, just different aspects of it."

In his class, Mehrdad is accompanied mostly by a basic slideshow with visual aids and quotes pertaining to the lecture. The class is made through the lecture itself. "It's passionate, you're just captivated the entire class," Laidlaw said.

Mehrdad teaches mostly in the history of Iran and the surrounding areas, and is able to make time periods unfamiliar to an American audience fascinating.

Through his own personal experiences and historical research, Mehrdad not only gives historical facts, but also the emotional weight of the topics. Mehrdad makes sure to emphasize pivotal facts and decisions made by historical figures through his voice, sometimes raising his voice to a shout when necessary, something that has caused him to get noise complaints.

The storytelling makes Mehrdad's class into a performance that is equal parts informative as it is educational.

Ardi will often hold class in the conference room where his office is, complete with the flags and artwork of Central and West Asian nations. The room comes with more comfortable office chairs for students while they attend the lecture. Ardi is known to methodically teach his class on his knowledge of Central Asian cultural history.

The early years

Growing up in Iran, the Kia brothers had a unique education. In their primary schooling, a group of educators came together to create a different curriculum than other schools in the area. "It was called progressive school," Ardi said. "The curriculum that they had was way different."

The school used a more modern teaching style than the curricula of other schools in the area.

This group of educators was led by the brothers' father, who was also a college professor in Iran. "He was the youngest and then he was voted by the rest of the professors to be the principal," Ardi said.

After primary school, the brothers went to an Italian Catholic school in Tehran known as the Andisheh Don Bosco school. Although Catholics make up a tiny fraction of Iran's large and majority Shiite Muslim population, these schools still provided an education to students outside of their missionary work.

Although it was a Catholic school, the institution accepted students regardless of religion, which allowed the Kia brothers to attend despite being from a Muslim family.

"It was a very interesting experience because you were exposed to standard Persian Iranian teachers, but you also had fabulous Armenian and Assyrian teachers," Mehrdad said. "You had Italian teachers, you also had Irish teachers."

Mehrdad remembers how his first teacher at the school was always in control of the class. "I will never forget him, Aloyan, he was Armenian," he said. "He was like a father, he took care of his class just to make sure that we were on top of things."

The student body mirrored the faculty's diversity. The school reflected the larger, more cosmopolitan culture of Tehran, Iran's largest city.

In their school, students of all backgrounds learned the same curriculum and participated in the same events, regardless of their ethnic or religious identity. Mehrdad learned about the religions of his fellow students only when they were absent from class for various religious and cultural holidays. "It was an exposure to all these traditions," Mehrdad said.

Aside from academics, Don Bosco school offered plenty of extracurricular activities. "We were both crazy about soccer," Ardi said.

Soccer was one of the interests that united the students and faculty of the school. "The coach, Father Umveto, was a fabulous coach," Mehrdad said. "We all owe a lot to his discipline."

Like many young men who played soccer in Iran, the Kias were very competitive. "I almost played all positions, even for a few minutes I was in the goal," Ardi said. "But I didn't like to be goalie."



Dr. Mehrdad Kia teaches his Crusades Through Muslim Eyes class on Oct. 29.



Dr. Mehrdad Kia emotes during a portion of his Crusades Through Muslim Eyes class on Oct. 29.

Tehran's soccer competitions were tough. "I injured myself numerous times because I loved to score goals and get hit left and right," Ardi said. "I think I broke my nose 23 times. It got to a point where I couldn't breathe anymore, so I had an operation on it."

Mehrdad was similarly aggressive in his playstyle. "I never played defense," he said. "If I did, it was because someone else was injured."

The team's effort often paid off. Don Bosco's soccer team managed to win several district championship games in Tehran.

Along with sports, the school offered a robust music program. "A lot of [the teachers] were fantastic musicians," Mehrdad said. "Father Domvitore was brilliant."

As a Catholic school, the priests and teachers would sometimes integrate their religious practices. "Probably the saddest day of my experience there was when the news of the assassination of President Kennedy arrived," Mehrdad said. "For the first time I saw a Catholic ceremony, and the playing of the beautiful instruments."

After Ardi left for college in America in 1968, Mehrdad went to a different school called Iranzamin, a secular international school in Tehran. "The founder of the school was Richard Irvine, an American," Mehrdad said.

Mehrdad learned a lot from a variety of Iranian and American instructors at the school. "The guy who sat next to me was from Czechoslovakia, it was 1968 when the Soviets invaded," Mehrdad said. "Here is this student sitting next to me sobbing. Why? Prague had been invaded and occupied by the Warsaw Pact."

"It's like one continuous story," student Kendrick Laidlaw said. "Each class is not separated. They're all part of the same story, just different aspects of it."

These early years growing up left both brothers with a profoundly international way of thinking as they were shown firsthand how people from all over the world and diverse backgrounds were able to coexist. "We live not only in this country, but we live in the world," Mehrdad said.

Years later, after moving away from Iran, Ardi returned to Iran with his mother to visit close friends. "It was shocking. Everything had changed so drastically," he said.

He went after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, when the secular government that Ardi and Mehrdad had grown up under was replaced by a theocratic government led by the Iranian Clergy.

During this trip, Ardi went to see if the places he knew and frequented as a boy were still there. Unfortunately, the Don Bosco school was gone. The school was closed down in 1980, and the building was destroyed by several airstrikes from the Iraqi Air Force during the Iran-Iraq War.

Madison to Missoula

The Kia's collegiate journey both began in the same place. Iranian students often sought education abroad at the time, and the brothers were far from the first in their family to go to college in America.

The pair attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a very large and competitive school both then and now. Ardi, older by three years, was the first to attend.

"Madison was a real tough place," Ardi said. "You had to have a major and a minor for Ph.D.," Mehrdad said.

It had been a family tradition to get their education in America. Ardi remembers going to the airport as a young child to see his uncle off as he was going to America.

"I was next to my grandfather," Ardi said. "He was clapping and tears were falling, he was so happy about my uncle leaving."

This was a moment of pride for the Kia family, as getting a foreign education was seen as an excellent career opportunity and a reward for hard work. The Iranian government, at the time, made this possible and attractive by promoting higher education and helping students earn degrees inside and outside the country.

Ardi didn't quite understand what was happening. "I started crying thinking that he was crying, then [my family] promised me 'If you don't cry, you can go to the United States to see your uncle,'" he said.

Ardi originally was planning to go to school in Washington, D.C., and make contact with his uncle, who was in Madison, Wisconsin.

During a phone call with his uncle, Ardi was encouraged to go to Madison and attend college there.

From there, Ardi started his academic career at UW Madison. "The rumor about Madison was it was Mad-city or Mad-town, a party town," he said.

Even though Ardi heard about the lively party atmosphere in Madison, there was a lot of work to be done academically. He remembered that when midterm grades were released and sent home to parents, many students got angry phone calls demanding an explanation for poor grades.

"We got the message that you gotta study and go to the class," Ardi said.

Mehrdad was always interested in history and literature, and he followed his older family members' example by going to college in America in 1972.

He was primarily interested in the University of Indiana in Bloomington because of its literature program.

The reason Mehrdad chose Madison was because of its impressive history department and some very famous professors. "It was a tough program to get in, but I decided to roll the dice. You might fail, you might gain something," Mehrdad said.

Starting out

Mehrdad was interested in many historical subjects, from the French Revolution to American foreign policy.

To teach these subjects, UW-Madison employed renowned professors well known in academia.

Professors who taught the Kia brothers included Maurice Meisner, a leading scholar of the Chinese Communist Revolution and author of many books on

its history. Professor Harvey Goldberg was a leading scholar of French history and one of Mehrdad's teachers. The building that houses the UW-Madison history department currently bears his name.

One of the most impactful professors was John Smail, a historian and professor who specialized in Southeast Asia.

"[He was] a true gentleman and a brilliant scholar," Mehrdad said.

Professor Smail taught a popular class about Vietnam and its struggle for self-determination against former occupiers like France, China and the United States. "I didn't realize it was 800 or 700 something students," Mehrdad said.

Seeing potential, Smail offered Mehrdad the opportunity to be his teaching assistant and give lectures whenever Smail could not make it.

"It was an honor to TA for that class," Mehrdad said. "I learned a great deal about the world."

Foremost, Mehrdad found his interest in history not only as a school subject, but as a way to contextualize his world and where he came from. "The more I looked at the history of the region, I became more fascinated with the transition from pre-modern to what we call the modern era," he said.

Mehrdad grew up in the aftermath of the Iranian intellectual class's development from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century. "In a way, I wasn't so much interested in history," Mehrdad said. "I was kind of tracing my own intellectual roots."

After Iranian defeats at the hands of Russia, the government realized it was far behind European nations. This spawned a movement of Iranian students going abroad for education and returning with ideas of the enlightenment and early liberalism from Europe.

"For the first time, you had the rise of a new intellectual class which is not clerical," Mehrdad said. In a way, the ideological revolution partly enabled Mehrdad to get an education from more modern-minded teachers and attend international schools in Iran.

These early thinkers were among the first in Iran to question Islam's role in government and what secular governance could look like. "They were basically examining the whole issue of what is the whole relevance of Islam," Mehrdad said. "Can Islam adjust itself to modernity and change?"

Ardi focused more on critical theory and philosophy, focusing on historical trends and the transition from feudalism to early-stage capitalism. "It affected my perception on many things," Ardi said.

Ardi remembers the Anthropology teacher Louise and George Spindler, a husband and wife duo who would occasionally banter when sharing a lecture hall. Ardi's philosophy teacher, Donald Crawford, encouraged him to get a degree in philosophy after Ardi showed his understanding of the subject.

Ardi similarly got his start in a university occupation at Madison, working at the school library while working on his dissertation.

Other works

Apart from teaching, the brothers have both written extensively.

Mehrdad has written multiple books and articles about the history of the Ottoman Empire and the ancient Achaemenid Persian Empire, along with more contemporary pieces about more recent Iranian history and the rise of Arab nationalism in the Middle East.

Mehrdad is most proud of his work on the Kurdish revolutionary Ismail Agha Simko, a tribal leader active from the 1910s to the 1930s. Mehrdad found previous works on Simko assumptive and lacking historical context. His work on Ismail Agha Simko and the Campaign for an Independent Kurdish State, is considered to be a foremost scholarly work on the time period and the figure himself.

Mehrdad has also published works on the Ottoman and Achaemenid Persian empires, as well as the rise of nationalism in the Middle East.

Currently, Mehrdad is working on a book about Reza Shah Pahlavi, an Iranian military general and the Shah of Iran from 1925 to 1944. Shah is the Farsi word for king and has been used denominatively for millennia; Reza Pahlavi was the first shah of the Pahlavi dynasty, the last royal dynasty of Iran until the monarchy was overthrown in 1979. Mehrdad considers him to be the father of modern Iran.

Iran and its current Islamic government have been at odds with America since its inception. Mehrdad hopes his class can provide his students with a more thorough understanding of Iranian history for his students will give them a better grasp on why current events are happening. "If you have no historical background, you're walking with a blindfold," he said.

While current events can be analyzed, Mehrdad is quick to point out that not enough time has passed for an objective study on recent history. "We talk about it in a more abstract sense," he said.

Ardi has written about the anthropological, cultural and societal study of Central Asia throughout different time periods. One of his more famous works, "The Artistic Traditions of Inner Eurasian Cultures, Prehistoric, Ancient and Medieval Golden Ages," was an exploration and brief catalog of art found in numerous archaeological dig sites across Central Asia.

"In the ninth and tenth century, this was the center of the world," Ardi said.

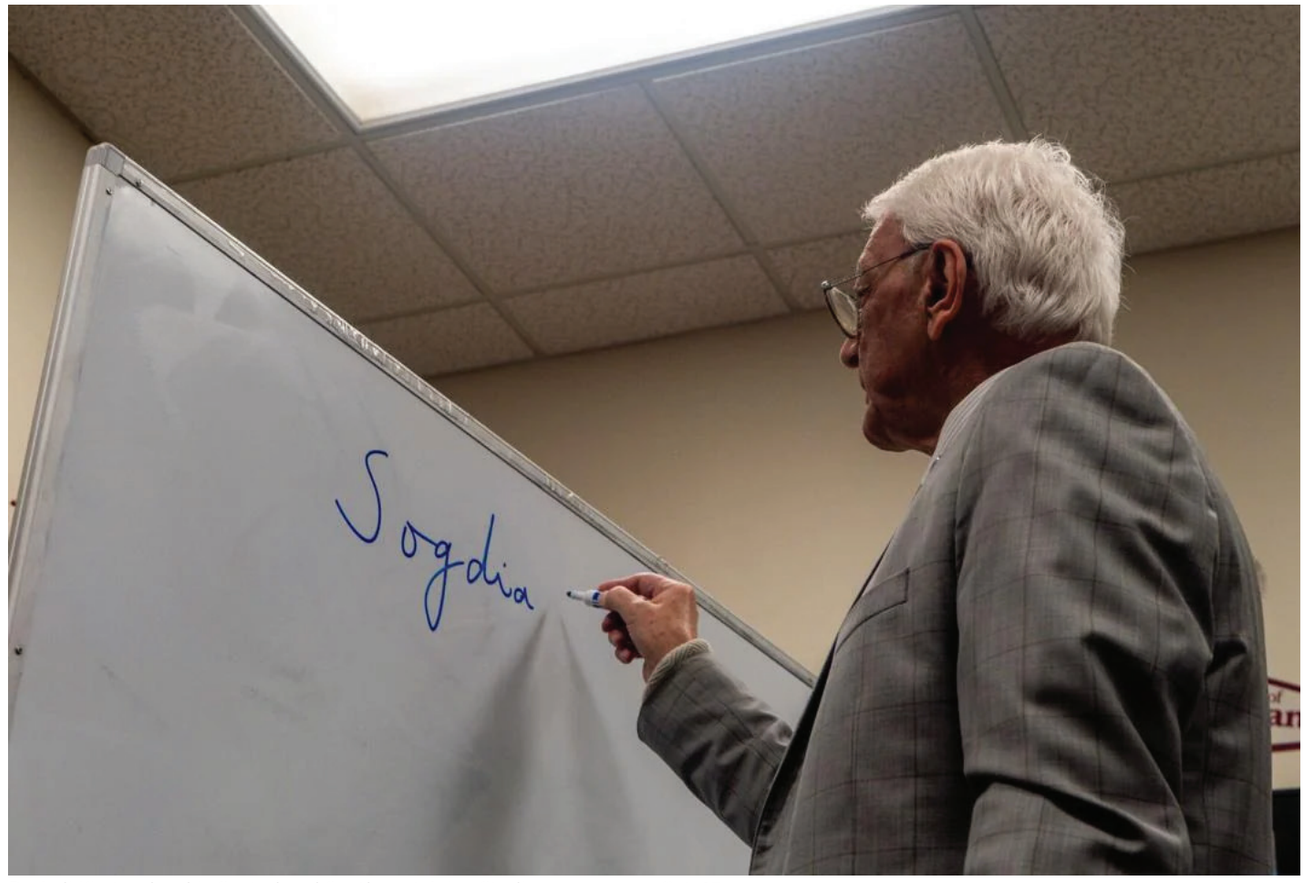
From the beginning of recorded history, Central Asia has been a melting pot of cultures, as it served as a crossroads for European and Middle Eastern societies to access the trade goods and artisanal products of East and South Asia, and vice versa. This cultural exchange made Central Asia rich in archaeological and artistic traditions.

Ardi found many Central Asian studies to be lacking due to the absence of Western works and Soviet censorship, as the majority of Central Asia was under Soviet rule until its fall in 1991.

Because of this, Ardi and Mehrdad laid the foundation for the Central and Southwest Asian Studies program. The program started small but has grown.

While both Kia brothers continue to work on publishing scholarly works, things change from first drafts to the final edits, and nothing is set in stone, date- or time-wise. While not in class, they enjoy the scenery the town and landscape of Missoula have to offer. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, they can be found teaching classes in Stone Hall on topics ranging from the history of the Silk Road to the Crusades.

In addition to teaching, the program also hosts an Annual Central & Southwest Asia Conference at the University, usually during the spring semester in the first week of April, where several panels of scholars, educators, and even former and current diplomats from countries across Asia come together to discuss current events and their historical backgrounds along with their ramifications for the future. The event is open to the public and students, and non-students alike are encouraged to attend.



Dr. Ardi Kia teaches his Central and Southwest Asian Studies program on Oct. 27.

Wildwood delivers on themes of love and loss

NIAMH O'FARRELL | ARTS REPORTER
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"Wildwood" (2026) is a stimulating and visually pleasing film that will leave you holding your loved ones closer.

The film was created by Laika Studios, recognizable for acclaimed claymation films such as ParaNorman (2012), The Boxtrolls (2014) and, most notably, Coraline (2009).

The story follows a young girl, Prue, as she tries to rescue her little brother, Mac, after a murder of crows takes him into the enchanted woods. The film adapts a book of the same name by Colin Meloy, a University of Montana creative writing alum born and raised in Helena.

The opening scene shows a young boy on his balcony staring into a mountain range that looks remarkably like Glacier National Park.

The movie begins with Prue babysitting her little brother. Like fairy tales of old, she's told not to leave the house because her dad fears the woods. She takes her brother out anyway on her bike to downtown Portland. What follows is a scene in which the clay animators create a vibrant and realistic-looking replica of downtown Portland for the characters to explore, giving a colorful background to ease the audience into the darker themes of the rest of the film.

While the plot was engaging, certain parts dragged. One lengthy scene follows Curtis, one of Prue's classmates and Septima, a rat Curtis befriended while trying to escape the cages they were put in. Scenes like these ultimately felt unnecessary and out of place.

One of the most striking parts of the movie was the final battle scene in which Prue gathers an army to help her get her brother back. Mac's voice acting was so realistic it felt slightly disturbing, almost to the point of making the viewer want to intervene.

In the final confrontation scene, Prue, like a true Oregonian, free solos her way up the side of a mountain to confront Alexandra Svik, the former governess of the woods whose grief from the loss of her child has driven her to use her forest creatures to kidnap Mac. The animators captured the desperation, fear and anger Prue felt all at once as she pleaded and fought for her brother's life.

The film's fantastical yet macabre themes reflect the work of the titular novel's author. Meloy, in addition to writing, is the founder of renowned Portland alternative rock band, The Decemberists, who assisted in the soundtracks production. The band would additionally contribute "The Better Part of Bravery" to the film, an original song touching on the themes of hope, acceptance and letting go.

While the film has become critically acclaimed, box office openings have been lackluster for the size of the production. With a current worldwide gross of $35 million, compared to the production cost of over $100 million, the film's profitability is unlikely. However, Laika Studios founder Travis Knight, financially backed by billionaire Nike co-founder Phil Knight, continues to use Laika as a testament to the painstaking effort in human creation. In a time of rising AI and the dwindling of the arts, a film like Wildwood is a breath of fresh air.

Together, Laika's dreamlike stop-motion style is able to bring alive the haunting woodland and somewhat timeless motifs Meloy has become known for among his works. The movie is about love, loss and the importance of showing up for the people you love. Worth the watch as long as you have a box of tissues to go with it.



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KAIMIN
ARTS AND CULTURE

THIS WEEK

AIDAN GRAHAM | ARTS & CULTURE EDITOR
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MUSIC

Folk: Evan Honer — 11/7, *The Wilma,* 7 p.m., all ages, $42
An American singer-songwriter and independent musician known for blending modern outlaw country, indie folk and alternative pop.

Rock: MARIS — 11/10, *Top Hat*, 7 p.m., all ages, $25
L.A. based, Missoula-born indie-pop artist MARIS arrives at Missoula's Top Hat for a homecoming show.

Rock: Big Mosquito — 11/11, *Zootown Arts Community Center,* 7 p.m., $10
A local ska-punk band featuring Ten Day Bender and Mild Mannered Janitor. Moshing is highly encouraged.

SPECIAL EVENTS

WBCN and the American Revolution — 11/5, *Roxy Theatre*, 5:15 p.m., $10
How a Boston rock and roll radio station defined a generation of music, giving a platform to dissent, counterculture and the civil rights movement of the '60s and '70s. Followed by an open discussion with executive producer Robert Sennott.

Butterfly House Happy hour — 11/5, *Missoula Butterfly House*, 6-8 p.m., 21+, $15
An evening filled with butterflies, animal encounters, science exploration and themed activities featuring drinks from Draught Works Brewery.

First Friday — 11/6, *Downtown Missoula*, 5 p.m.
A free art walk across Missoula's downtown, featuring open exhibits and live music throughout local businesses.

Snooze Fest — 11/5, *Zootown Arts Community Center,* 7 p.m., $15
Local film festival featuring the absurd, the horrifying, and the hilarious, showcasing micro to low-budget films made by Missoulians and their strange imaginations.

ON CAMPUS

UM Choir, Tiny Plot of Earth — 11/6, *Dennison Theatre*, 7:30 p.m., free student entry

A choral performance celebrating our role as stewards of the world around us. Featuring works by Jennifer Lucy Cook, along with Berko, Makaroff, Tuomi, Forrest and the Podd Brothers.

Opera Theater performance — 11/11, *UM Music Recital Hall*, 7:30 p.m., free student entry

An evening of staged opera scenes and musical theater pieces performed by student vocal ensembles.

WEEKLY ROTATORS

DJ Kris Moon — Every Saturday, *Badlander Complex,* 10 p.m., $5

EDM and pop remixes featuring a mix of modern and early 2000s hits

Jazz Night — Every Thursday, *Old Post,* 6 p.m.

A live jazz band in the Old Post central dining room.

Live Music — Friday and Saturday, *Union Club,* 9 p.m.

Live music and dancing at the Union Club bar and grill, bands to be determined, 11/6 and 11/7.

Karaoke:

Union Club — Mondays, 9 p.m.

Sunrise Saloon — Tuesdays, 8 p.m.

The Badlander — Wednesdays, 8 p.m.

Thomas Meagher Bar — Sundays, 9 p.m.

Trivia:

OddPitch Brewing — Mondays, 6 p.m.

Katie O'Keefe's — Mondays, 8 p.m.

Thomas Meagher Bar — Tuesdays, 7:30 p.m.

Old Post — Wednesdays, 7:30 p.m.

Draught Works — Wednesdays, 7 p.m.

Cranky Sam Public House — Wednesdays, 7 p.m.

Western Cider — Thursdays, 7 p.m.

Dram Shop Central — Sundays, 6 p.m.

How the Field of Screams competes with worldwide haunts

RIVER BLAZEJEWSKI | ARTS REPORTER
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Scare actors present the rules to a new crowd at the Field Of Screams before they enter any of the attractions in the Boneyeard on Oct. 30. **PARKER HOWERY | MONTANA KAIMIN**

In a small field near Victor, Montana, lies a renowned, unsettling surprise.

For the past 27 years, Quinn and Sandy Kirkland have been running Field of Screams on their 10-acre property. The business, once small, has grown into a local and international staple, outcompeting other "haunts" such as Universal and Disney World to win the Haunted Attraction Association's Legacy Haunt Award in 2025.

"There's die-hard fans that travel from Washington and Oregon to be here. I just met some people that had come from Florida to visit family, so they figured, 'Why not stop by?'" Kirkland said.

The venue offers three haunts, including the staple corn maze, a haunted house pass and Kirkland's most recent surprise: the Deadline haunt, debuting this year. This haunt uses tactile-oriented horror. You're blindfolded, grab a rope, and the only rule is you can't let go till you make it to the end of the line.

"People that come out here want to do everything," Kirkland said. "I've had folks who've already been 10 times this year."

After entering, the audience gets to briefly meet the scare cast before they take to the field.

Visitors then navigate the cornfields as cast members stalk and scare them. Guests squeeze through dark rooms where things brush up against them and horns blare in the background, and they have to navigate spaces so thick with smoke that they can barely see their own hands. "Everyone put a ton of thought and detail into their costumes, bringing their characters to life," one reviewer wrote in 2023.

Kirkland said they'll often get inspiration from other haunts. For instance, he and Sandy were going to attend a haunt in South Carolina this fall, but decided instead to invest in a new animatronic.

Field of Screams buys its costumes from TransWorld's Halloween & Attractions Show in St. Louis, the world's largest trade show dedicated entirely to the haunted house and Halloween industry. At TransWorld, each costume can cost upward of $500. He feels it's worth the cost, as the quality stitching can help costumes last five years or more.

The business uses local props, too. Along the route, visitors pass through an old Corvallis school bus.

For viewers, the maze passes by in roughly 30 minutes. Yet, for Kirkland, everything down to the fencepost is a never-ending process.

He and his 130-person crew, which includes his 16-year-old son, Ethan, began work for this set on Nov. 1, 2025. He says they've already begun work on next year's set.

"The work never stops around here," Kirkland said.

So how do they keep up with other big-time haunts?

"It's really about actor training," Kirkland said. "We train weeks, months in advance. It's like a family, we call it the 'scream team,'" he said.

In an industry where the hours are rough and work is difficult, Kirkland stressed the importance of incentives. At the end of the maze, a wall displays the characters from the evening and viewers can vote for the one that scared them most. The next night, the top five actors get bonuses. Kirkland said they'll often host community dinners with the entire cast.

"It helps a lot of actors return," he said.

Ethan Kirkland, otherwise known as 'Vermin,' has been a scare actor at Field of Screams for 11 years now, starting when he was 6. However, Vermin said he's the only kid in the Kirkland family who wants to stay in the business. He plans on taking it over when he's older.

"It's very challenging. You're working in so many different environments, and you have to know so many different skills," Vermin said.

Despite the challenges, the scare industry can be highly lucrative. Kirkland said they staff around 100 employees at any given time and bring in 700 customers on Friday night. At $45 per "Ultimate Scream Pass," that's roughly $30,000 in a night.

"I heard of it passing by en route to a hike. Our aunt offered to pay for our tickets. I definitely want to drag more people out here next year. It was super fun," said Ayiana Guzman, who took her younger cousin, America Hoeldt.

"Our daughter works here, so we're just checking it out, having fun with the family," Mark Jessop said.

If you're someone whose senses are easily overwhelmed, you'll find the event crazy. However, it sounded like Kirkland has even bigger plans for next year.

"People love it — it's very basic this year, but next year, be ready," he said.

From locker room to barbershop

MARIN ANDERSON | SPORTS REPORTER
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Isiah Childs left, a former Grizzly running back and linebacker, lines up Grizzly long back Styles Goodman in the football locker rooms on Oct. 15. Childs is a barber in Coeur d'Alene at Maverick's at the Den, but he commutes to Missoula to give haircuts to the football team. **MARS JOHNSON | MONTANA KAIMIN**

Isiah Childs didn't know what life was like outside of football.

After he was injured in 2024 during his last game for the Griz against Montana State University, he was left uncertain about his future. The former University of Montana linebacker and running back had spent so much of his life dedicated to a laboring, physical sport.

"After I graduated, I had to figure out what I was going to do with my life," Childs said. "After I got hurt, I had been cutting hair for a while. So, I decided, 'Why not get into it?'"

With a degree in hand, Childs moved to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and began working at Mavericks at The Den, a local barber shop. While it wasn't his first dream in life, he knew that it was the path that he felt he needed to take.

Childs is no stranger to cutting hair, especially that of his teammates. He discovered his love and passion for both football and haircutting early in life.

From middle school to high school, he continued doing the two things he loved: football and haircuts.

After graduating high school and getting recruited to Akron University in Ohio, he knew that he wanted to continue his side hustle. Unfortunately for Childs, his freshman year was during the peak of COVID-19.

"No one could go to get a haircut or anything because everyone was out," Childs said.

Childs transferred to UM in 2021, where he brought his football and barbering skills with him.

"I kept it up as a hobby and then coming up to Montana, everyone would see my haircuts," Childs said. "I cut my own hair, and they'd be like, 'Oh, man, that's super good.' Word just spread from there."

Childs' barbering was not something he initially considered pursuing. He thought it would just be a side hustle until he obtained his master's degree or played football professionally.

"I just kept it up as a hobby, and it was like something that made me happy," Childs said. "I thought, 'Let's do it.' It's brought me so many opportunities in the past."

Trimming hair is what brought meaning back into his life. According to Childs, he, along with several other football players, have gone through an identity crisis.

"A lot of guys are like, 'I don't know what to do after football.' And that for me, I still wanted to be in football, but how can I be in it," Childs said. "It opened my eyes to show me that I'm more than an athlete. I can use my athletic background to help pursue my end career of barbering."

It is extremely important to Childs for not only football players, but athletes from all over to realize that their whole life isn't just their sport.

"People work so hard for four years in their sport, and then after they graduate, they don't know what to do," Childs said. "You're more than an athlete at the end of the day. You're a human being. But human beings all have feelings and needs and things they desire."

Since leaving the team, he has found a new home in Coeur d'Alene, where he resides with his wife and has a successful career.

As he frequently returns to Missoula to offer his hair services, Childs cuts the hair for the majority of the football team, including linebacker successor Styles Goodman.

"I'm very particular on who I let cut my hair. So I took a chance, and now he's been cutting my hair for the past five, six months now," Goodman said. "I'm from Austin, Texas, so there's a bunch of diversity, and it's easy to find a barber for your hair down there. Here, it's not so easy, so seeing him and him being able to cut my hair the way that I wanted, it's a blessing."

For people like Goodman, having someone who can cut your specific type of hair is essential. Especially when they're someone that makes you feel comfortable.

"He's easy to talk to, and I have a good relationship with him. Whenever I need a haircut, he's there for me," Goodman said. "It's a very cool big brother effect. It's a full 360, and if I have football questions, I can ask some football questions. If I have life questions, I can ask him life questions."

Childs' passion for cutting his football teammates' hair isn't just because he loves barbering. Back when he played football for UM, he had the motto: "You look good, you feel good. You feel good, you play good. You play good, they pay good."

This quote comes from University of Colorado Boulder coach Deion Sanders, but it resonated deeply with Childs.

As a ritual, Childs would cut his hair before every game. Although his face and hair were covered by a helmet, he appreciated a clean cut and shave.

"You look in the mirror, and you feel fit and put together," Childs said. "It's like a psychological effect that helps you out, and it's just those little things that may help you make a football game better for yourself."

According to Childs, you don't need to be in your own space to cut hair and help people look good, feel good and play good.

"I tell people you're your own boss with barbering. As long as you got your chair, equipment and a person, you can do it anywhere," Childs said. "So that's the beauty of being a barber is you can help people out anywhere."

Since middle school, cutting hair has been a release and a love for Childs. Now, he gets to spread that joy, as well as his linebacker legacy at UM.

"Find your meaning outside of your sport that makes you happy, so once it's done, you have something to fall back on," Childs said.

Lady Griz set for 2026-27 season



Avery Waddington and a teammate play defense during a practice in Dahlberg Arena on Oct. 29. Waddington was recently named in the Preseason All-Big Sky conference team after leading the Lady Griz in points, steals, rebounds, assists and blocks in her junior season. **EMBRY ERICSON | MONTANA KAIMIN**

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The University of Montana women's basketball program is ready to begin its new season after a disappointing 2025-26 campaign.

The Lady Griz were picked to finish second in the preseason Big Sky Conference polls last year, but finished eighth. This year, the team was picked sixth, and second-year head coach Nate Harris said the team spent the offseason trying to find an identity.

"I think we tried to be good at a few too many things last year and we just needed to hone in on who we are," Harris said. "To that end, we had to continue to improve our depth and our ability to attack and be aggressive."

Harris was hired in the middle of the 2024-25 season and has started to build his style of coaching into Lady Griz basketball. Harris said the style he thinks the team will play with this season is one he can identify with better, which makes him excited to coach.

He said that the new style will look different to Griz fans, as the team plans to put more emphasis on the defensive side of the court, and is excited to see the team compete.

"People will see that this team rebounds significantly better," Harris said. "They'll see a team that's more physical and competes harder and plays harder. I'm excited to watch them go against other people here in the coming weeks and get an opportunity to really show that."

Harris is also ready to see fans back in Dahlberg Arena.

"We have a passionate fan base that knows basketball," he said. "If you miss a blockout or have something go wrong, our fan base knows about it and they're gonna let you know about it because they want the Lady Griz to be successful."

One of the most successful members of the Lady Griz recently is Avery Waddington, who was Second Team All-Big Sky last year and a member of the Preseason All-Conference team this year. While the preseason award is nice, Harris said it doesn't matter to him.

"I'd rather her win some postseason awards because that means that we probably had some success," Harris said. "It's a cool thing, but it won't win us any games."

Waddington agreed with Harris' sentiment.

"I got the honors last year too, and we sucked," Waddington said.

The Lady Griz went 9-22 last year, its lowest win total since the 2016-17 season and second lowest since 1977-78. Its eighth-place finish in the Big Sky was also its second-worst result in program history.

Waddington said she is looking forward to one simple thing: winning.

"Last season wasn't a lot of wins. This season I'm expecting us to win," she said.

Waddington added that she's excited for games to finally start again.

"Every time we practice, I'm like 'One day closer, one day closer,'" she said. "Nothing is better than the first home game and the fans all there. I get goosebumps every time."

Waddington spent the offseason working on a few parts of her game, including ball handling, rebounding and being more aggressive to score. She feels that she is starting to become a leader on the team.

"I feel like I am definitely the lead-by-example type of person," she said. "This year I've stepped into a bigger role with so many younger people. [I'm] trying to find my voice and be more vocal. I think every practice is a little better. I'm working on it."

Harris agrees that she is becoming a leader in games and practice.

"She's somebody we're depending on to show up every day and be consistent," he said. "She's been a consistent force for us for a long time, but I think she's been a consistent practice player for a longer time."

Harris said that she has grown a lot as a person in his time coaching at UM.

"[She's] come a long way in three years, but I think she's really locked into what she wants and how important this is," Harris said. "She's being more demanding, she's being more assertive and her upside is huge. We're going to get closer and closer to seeing what that bar is for her."

Montana's first Division I game is on Saturday at Brigham Young University. The team will be back in Dahlberg Arena on Nov. 13 to take on the University of Houston of the Big 12 Conference.

SPORTS BRIEFS

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BACK TO WINNING

After returning from its bye week, the University of Montana Grizzlies won its game against the Eastern Washington University Eagles 42-33 on the famous red turf of Cheney, Washington.

UM's offense saw multiple big plays throughout the game thanks to quarterback Keali'i Ah Yat, who threw 327 yards and four touchdowns

Wide receiver Brooks Davis was honored by ESPN's College Football show for getting Montana on the scoreboard within 14 seconds with a 75-yard pass from Ah Yat.

The Grizzlies were able to keep the Eagles within a score of one for most of the game until UM was able to secure the win in the fourth quarter.

Ah Yat found Davis for the third time, with a 61-yard pass, which was converted for the touchdown.

But it wasn't just the offensive side of the ball that proved crucial for the Griz. The defense put up 11 sacks, a new program record, on the Eagles. The defense also held Eastern Washington to only 379 total yards, a stark difference from the 481 yards UM let up against the University of Idaho.

"I'm just so proud of this team and this coaching staff because, when you look at the way we started, we were just getting sacks and doing all these different things, playing with freshman corners and our sixth and seventh-string safeties at times in the game," Bobby Kennedy, head coach of the football team, said. "[These players] love Montana and they believe in each other."

Montana will return to Washington Grizzly Stadium on Saturday to take on the 2-7 Portland State team.

LAWRENCE'S 100TH WIN

While everyone else was out celebrating Halloween weekend, the University of Montana's volleyball team was too busy celebrating its three-set win over Southern Utah and coach Allison Lawrence's 100th career win.

Montana was able to secure its second-best hitting percentage of the season, 27.9%, with help from its 51 kills and just 17 errors.

The team started the night off strong, ending the first set with a score of 25-17. But the Thunderbirds made sure to put the pressure on the Grizzlies in the later sets as the scores tightened.

Gracie Cagle and Annika Wright each recorded 21 assists during the night, which helped Montana get into a good rhythm.

"I'm proud of the way we started the match. I thought we came out really loose and aggressive," head coach Lawrence said. "We were in our highest gear and that was great to see."

Currently, with three weeks left in the schedule, Montana holds the last postseason spot in the Big Sky with a record of 3-9 in the conference.

Missoula cat rescue holds adoption event at PetSmart

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Tucked in a corner between aisles, families crammed together under the fluorescent light of Missoula PetSmart on Sunday in hopes of adopting a cat. About 20 cats and kittens meowed, growled and stared at the unfamiliar faces.

Missoula Advocats, a nonprofit cat rescue organization, holds adoption events for stray cats at PetSmart every Sunday. The nonprofit was founded in 2024, and does not yet have the funds for a permanent shelter. It depends on a foster model to hold the cats and care for them until they are ready to be adopted.

Those who wish to adopt a cat have to apply. If approved, they can meet the cats at the event and take one home on the same day. Co-founder Tasha Bradshaw said the adoption event model gives Advocats the ability to have more discretion in the adoption process.

"That way we ensure they're going to the best home and the best fit," Bradshaw said.

Since July, Advocats has had 129 cats adopted, already approaching its 2025 total of 200 adoptions.

"We love it when they go in pairs," Bradshaw said. "Because single kitten syndrome is definitely a thing." Single kitten syndrome refers to a set of behaviors caused by a kitten that grows up without its littermates. Some behaviors include hyper-attachment, rough play and failure to use the litterbox.

Another service the nonprofit offers is trap, neuter and release for feral cats. The nonprofit catches the cats and takes them to be spayed or neutered, a surgical process which prevents the feral cats from reproducing. The cat's ear is clipped before release to mark them as sterilized and prevent them from being taken in for a second, unnecessary surgery.

Feral cats have to be released because they are born and live outdoors and are not socialized with humans. In contrast, stray cats can be caught and put up for adoption because they are abandoned socialized cats.

According to Valayna Cannon, a University of Montana graduate and Advocats volunteer, there are around 10 colonies of feral cats in the Missoula area, including Frenchtown, Huson and Lolo, that they are trying to reduce through the program.

"I actually got involved with volunteering after they helped with a colony near my house," Cannon said.

Year by year, as funding increases through donations and fundraising events, Advocats is able to grow its trap, neuter and release program. In 2024, it spayed and neutered 259 cats. Then, in 2025 it did the same to over 300 cats.

Ultimately, Bradshaw said, their goal is to create a better world for cats and cat lovers.

"Less cats on the street, more cats in loving homes," she said.



ABOVE: Tasha Bradshaw, left, looks through adoption papers while Valayna Cannon holds Zoro, a cat up for adoption with Missoula Advocats on Nov. 1.

BELOW: Kaylee, a teenager visiting PetSmart, pets Zoro, a cat up for adoption by Advocats.



A tabby cat relaxes in its cage at Missoula PetSmart at the Advocats adoption event.

