

MONTANA KAIMIN

BLAZING INTO AUTUMN

After spending the summer in the woods fighting fires, some students are still adjusting to classroom life.

Story by Julian Clemmer | Photos by Mars Johnson
Cover photo contributed by Cole Saunders

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The Montana Kaimin is a weekly independent student newspaper at the University of Montana. The Kaimin office and the University of Montana are located on land originally inhabited by the Salish People. Kaimin is a derivative of a Salish language word, "Qe'ymin," that is pronounced kay-MEEN and means "book," "message" or "paper that brings news."

POLITICAL CARTOON



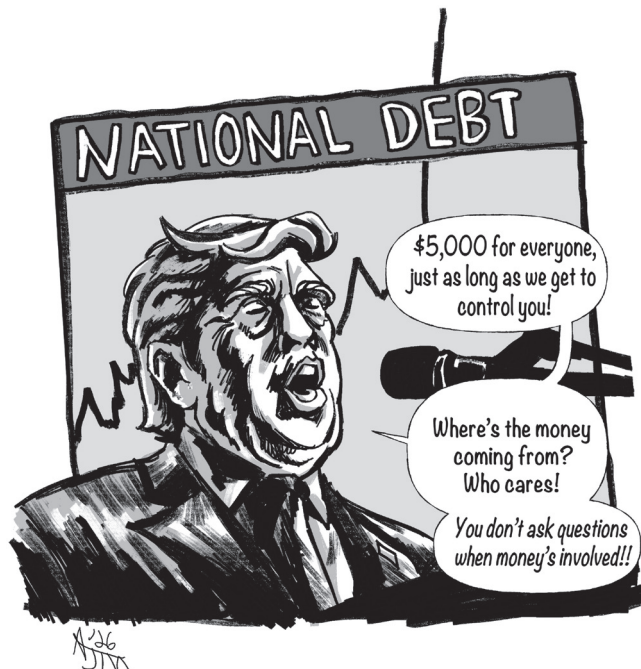
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KAIMIN KOMICS: #3 FULL-TIME FRIENDSHIPS



ALYSSA JO MURNION | CARTOONIST

AJM

It might not be our year

After having to watch the Cats go on to win the 2026 Football Championship Subdivision national championship, I was looking forward to being in the stands, cheering on the Grizzlies as they stepped onto the field and showed the state who collegiate football belongs to.

However, the season has just been a disappointment.

The first game, that first throw was a time for the University of Montana to show all that it worked on during the offseason. Up stepped quarterback Keali'i Ah Yat, who immediately gave the ball to the other team, giving away all the momentum UM had achieved from its iconic pregame show.

While UM fought its way back into the hands of a small victory with a score of 28-21, the Griz got caught by Southern Utah University in almost every category, giving away more yards and attempts at caging in the home game.

If it wasn't for running back Eli Gillman, UM would be nothing less than a measly black bear.

Gillman has nine total touchdowns to the rest of the team's six. With nine games left to play, for a team that is expected to finish second in the Big Sky and challenge for a spot in a higher conference, the Griz need to step it up.

This weekend marks the beginning of tougher competition, as the team travels to Oregon State, a PAC-12 conference team. Then it immediately heads to California to play the University of California, Davis, a team UM hasn't played since 2024.

With Montana being on the road for the next month, without the help of a packed stadium behind them, the momentum must all come from the players on the field. But if the team doesn't bring up the level of play, UM could be handing over a free win, especially if Ah Yat gets hurt.

Montana only has one main quarterback, which limits how much power it has over an opponent. With double the amount of quarterbacks, a team could run more plays, confusing the defense. This is something Montana State University runs, and it strongly works in its favor, after beating Utah Tech 54-0, a team UM only beat 35-14.

One thing Montana has over rivals Montana State is the mystery play sheet that comes along with a new man in charge, Bobby Kennedy.

However, football isn't the only side of the ball that Montana is losing its edge on, it's also being seen in Dahlberg Arena.

After losing big-name players like Money Williams, who transferred to Boston College, and Te'jon Sawyer, who graduated, Montana men's basketball could see a massive hit on its offense.

Another thing that is working against the team is its 11 out of 15 new players. With a team of fresh new faces that have yet to see Big Sky opponents, combined with a

disappointing 2025 season, the cards are not stacked in the favor of the Griz.

Sawyer and Williams combined for a little less than half of Montana's points and totaled 290 rebounds. With Montana expected to play powerhouse teams like the University of Oregon, Utah State and Arizona State, the Griz could benefit from having experience and players with high-displaying numbers.

As I enter my final year of standing in the student section, I want nothing more than to see my team decked out in maroon beating every team that comes into our path, or see Montana finally bring down the Cats. However, I have started to accept that my last year might end in heartbreak and disappointment.

- Hannah Benitez, sports editor

Like it? Hate it? Let us know.

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

Feature photo & Editorial

SUDOKU

Edited by Margie E. Burke

Difficulty: Medium

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3		9						
8				1				
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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:

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

The posters have landed?



UM junior Aubrey Cruson flips through posters at the Poster Invasion pop-up outside of the University Center on Sept. 11. MARS JOHNSON | MONTANA KAIMIN

In local news...

JACK SNOW | NEWS EDITOR
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TWO BEARS EUTHANIZED FOLLOWING CONFLICTS

The Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks department euthanized two grizzly bears in the upper Blackfoot Valley last week after the bears were involved in a series of conflicts around Lincoln.

The conflicts took place over a 10-day stretch and involved attractants like chicken coops and grain. A Fish, Wildlife and Parks statement explained that staff and community members tried to limit the attractants, but the bears showed “bold behavior” and kept getting into unprotected chicken coops near homes.

Department staff trapped the bears on Sept. 9 and consulted with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service before making the decision to euthanize them, according to NonStop Local.

Fish, Wildlife and Parks said that Montana bear conflicts have become more frequent this year, likely due to limited quantities of natural bear food like chokecherries. This scarcity can contribute to bears seeking alternate food sources, sometimes near towns.

Jamie Jonkel, a FWP bear-conflict specialist, noted that this year is “panning out to be one of the worst natural food failure years on record.”

FWP’s Bear Conflict Dashboard shows there have been 217 grizzly conflicts so far in 2026, already approaching 2025’s total of 224.

“We’ll continue to work with residents to address conflicts, and securing attractants is something everyone can do to help avoid issues,” said Kendra McKolsky, the FWP region 2 supervisor, in the statement.

“Uncontained garbage is by far our biggest issue, but over the last 20 years we have also seen a huge increase in chicken- and small livestock-related conflicts,” Jonkel said. “If you have backyard livestock like chickens or goats, it is critical that you have them

secured with hot-ground/multi-wire electric fence, and FWP can help if you have questions.”

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks issued other suggestions for bear security as well, including urges to keep garbage secure and indoors, clean outdoor eating areas after use and abstain from using bird feeders until Dec. 15.

NEW YOUTH SHELTER OPENS IN MISSOULA

Youth Homes, a nonprofit dedicated to housing and supporting youth in need, opened a new therapeutic shelter designed to serve vulnerable Missoula children on Sept. 9.

The Birnbaum Youth Home is now open to children in crisis between the ages of 10 and 17, according to KPAX.

“They can continue their education, maintain the support that they have within this community, they can access mental and physical health services and they can start to regain a sense of normalcy and belonging,” said Amy Schaer, the CEO of Youth Homes.

The shelter took \$4 million to build over two years of fundraising and construction and has eight bedrooms. It’s designed to provide emergency shelter, as well as therapeutic services, educational support and health resources.

“In just two years, we were able to mobilize, to fundraise, to plan and execute and build this beautiful home,” Schaer said. “I think it speaks volumes to the community that we live in, that people are willing to donate and willing to invest in youth.”

The facility is named for Geoff Birnbaum, who served as the executive director of Youth Homes for 42 years before his death in 2025. Mona Birnbaum, his daughter, spoke about his legacy at the opening ceremony.

“His drive, his commitment and his legacy are so deserving of this honor,” she said. “Our family is deeply grateful and incredibly humbled by all the friends and colleagues here today.”



This week on the Kaimin Cast ...

8.4 million acres have already burned due to wildfires across the country in 2026. The majority of these fires were in the west, where around 70% of the University of Montana’s student body lives.

Students across UM have been affected by wildfire smoke or flames, whether through their work as wildland firefighters, or simply living where fires reach. From a past fire in small-town Colorado to the fires in Spokane, Washington, that made national news, this episode runs alongside this issue’s feature, ‘Blazing into Autumn,’ to share three students’ personal experiences with wildfires and the impacts they have.

“I feel like your first thought is, ‘What about my things?’ I feel like that’s just normal for a human. It’s like, ‘What about this? What about that?’ And then you kind of kick into fight-or-flight almost. I don’t need anything, just myself and my family,” said sophomore Haley Schulte from Spokane.

Hear their stories by checking out the latest episode, “Uncontained: The lasting effects of wildfires” on 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



EPA TO DROP POWER PLANT REGULATIONS

The Environmental Protection Agency said that it is repealing regulations which limit the greenhouse gas emissions of power plants powered by coal and natural gas on Monday, and announced that it is taking steps to prevent other administrations from regulating power plant pollution in the future.

The change marks a departure from the climate protocols of past administrations under Presidents Joe Biden and Barack Obama, who focused on the regulation of greenhouse gases, according to the Associated Press.

The EPA said that repealing the regulations put into place during the Biden administration would save over \$300 billion in industry costs and help to “unleash” American energy. Looser regulations will also allow utility companies to “make the best decision for the ratepayers based on cost and cost savings, instead of being required to shut down facilities,” said Aaron Szabo, an EPA assistant administrator.

Backlash to the changes has already begun, with environmentalist groups saying the shift will come at the cost of American health and a sustainable environment.

TRUMP RESPONDS TO AI CONCERNS

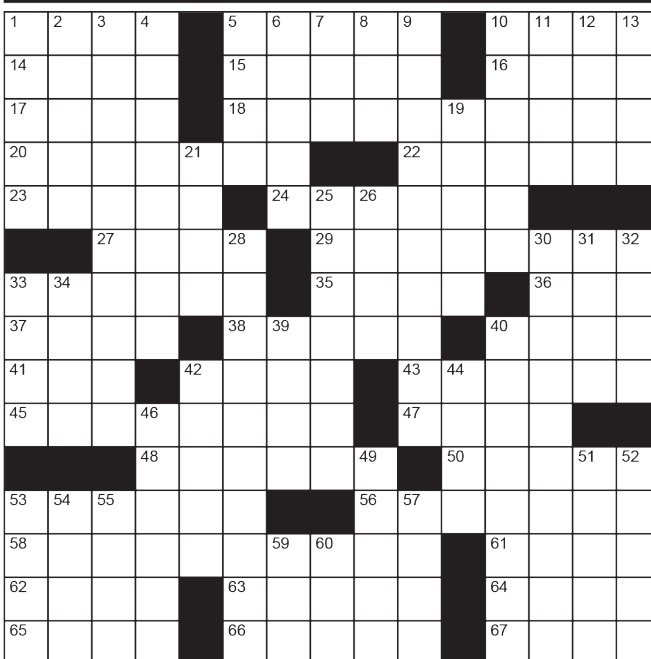
President Donald Trump dismissed concerns about unregulated artificial intelligence on Sept. 14, saying that his presence in the Oval Office is regulation enough.

In a Truth Social post, Trump stated that the only control needed for AI is “a STRONG AND SMART (High IQ!) PRESIDENT, and the U.S.A. has that, in spades!”

Trump continued the post by describing his distaste for additional regulations, according to NBC. He said that the government already has power over AI companies and that boosting the industry should be one of America’s top priorities. “There is a SICK conspiracy going on against AI and Data Centers, and the only one that is happy about it is China,” Trump said. “WHOEVER WINS AI, WINS! We are leading China, and all others, and will continue to do so.”

Those opinions don’t seem to be reflected by the American public, however, as a recent NBC poll found that 70% of adults are more concerned about AI than they are excited about it.

Trump’s post came following warnings from industry insiders, such as Dario Amodei, the CEO of Anthropic, who said that companies should “slow the pace” of AI development in a Sept. 12 essay.



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ACROSS

- 1 Doorframe part
5 ___ Gras
10 Corn keeper
14 Orchestrated reed
15 Hunter in the night sky
16 Legendary Horne
17 Weeps
18 Pioneer places
20 Masthead names
22 Woodstock wear
23 Serious offender
24 Izzard and Albert
27 Washstand vessel
29 Community program
33 Go over again
35 Heavy burden
36 Winter bug
37 Military no-show
38 Wading bird
40 Barrel of laughs
41 Toast topper
42 Bit of physics
43 Votes into office
45 Speech opener, often
47 Painter of melting watches
48 Iroquoian people
50 Weeper of myth
53 Mogadishu resident
56 Skeeter's given name in "The Help"
58 Vests, to Brits
61 Delivery vehicles
62 "Excuse me..."
63 Actress MacDowell
64 Advantage
- 65 Arsenal array
66 Tends (toward)
67 Crude wooden cross
- DOWN
- 1 IndyCar racer Newgarden
2 Domicile
3 Dwelling in a park, often
4 Award
5 Former SNL actor Jay
6 Came up
7 Tire support
8 Mother rabbit
9 Established
10 Monty Python member
11 "___ 'em and weep!"
12 Noted 500
13 Barracks locale
19 Levels
21 Certain column
25 Uniformed greeters
- 26 Sandy hill
28 Like some questions
30 Enthusiast
31 Coagulate
32 Crude homes
33 Prince of India
34 McGregor of "A Gentleman in Moscow"
39 Usual choice, informally
40 Late-game pitcher
42 Full-price payer
44 Singer k.d.
46 Deep divides
49 Place
51 "That's it!"
52 Relaxed
53 Goodie bag contents
54 Waikiki's island
55 Manner
57 Exploits
59 Washington's bill
60 Dentists' org.

Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

Pin-o-scope

NIAMH O'FARRELL | ARTS & CULTURE REPORTER
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Clothes and looks are about more than what's on the outside. Pinterest is a way to not only put your appearance together, but to help find a lifestyle you want to follow. Looks can be deceiving, and there's more to you than meets the eye.

VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEP. 22): Indie sleaze: Eyeliner, ripped shirts and DJ sets are your bread and butter. Indie sleaze is like the glittery, more feminine version of grunge. You are at your best around your friends and out on the town. Be young, wild and free, but don't forget to take care of yourself and put your wellbeing first.

LIBRA (SEP. 23-OCT. 22): McBling: Libra, you crave the Jersey Shore just as much as you crave balance in your life. Your soul is hot pink, zebra print and a whole lot of rhinestones. You add a little glitter and hair spray to everything the same way you add a little shine to everyone's life.

SCORPIO (OCT. 23-NOV. 21): Clean girl: Face masks and a good book are all you need. Your favorite activity is your overpriced pilates class followed by sushi with your friends. You know how to prioritize yourself, your goals and self betterment. Don't forget that it's OK to be a slob sometimes!

SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21): Grunge: You were just born in the wrong generation. You weren't meant for all the color and happy music of today. In your soul you're spending every weekend in a Seattle basement show listening to a small underground band called Nirvana. Eyeliner and flannel are your uniform, but don't be afraid to get your glam on sometimes.

CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 19): Cottage core: The English countryside calls your name. Life can be a lot sometimes, and you like to be able to lie back and live the simple life, but not like Paris. You want to be in your milkmaid dress and tending to your chickens while the bread you made is baking in the oven.

AQUARIUS (JAN. 20-FEB. 18): Old money: Ralph Lauren and Martha's Vineyard are calling your name. You might not have the last name of a Vanderbilt,

but you certainly like to dress like one. Gossip Girl is a guideline for how you want your future (hopefully with less drama).

PISCES (FEB. 19-MARCH 20): Art hoe: Clair o is always cued up on your Spotify while you sort through which shirt you're going to wear when you paint. Doc Martens and paint supplies are essential to who you are. You like retro media like polaroids and Walkmans, but don't forget to enjoy some of the good things we have in this century. Like deodorant.

ARIES (MARCH 21-APRIL 19): Downtown girl: Fall is here and so is your time to shine. Your perfect day is walking around a record store with a coffee in hand while you sport your favorite sweater. You will never be caught with wireless headphones, old wired ear buds only while you blast Ghost. You love romanticizing your life, but don't forget to come back to reality sometimes.

TAURUS (APRIL 20-MAY 20): LA POS: Your vision board is full of matcha, the beach and Erewhon smoothies. You love that Los Angeles way of life. You definitely have a picture of the Paul Smith pink wall on your Instagram. LA is great, but don't forget to step outside your comfort zone and leave your bubble.

GEMINI (MAY 21-JUNE 20): Dark academia: Your dream homework situation is writing by candlelight in an old building surrounded by dark wood. You love books and learning as much as you possibly can. You like to be the most informed so you can make the best decisions and be your best self. Don't feel like you always have to be improving, you're great the way you are.

CANCER (JUNE 21-JULY 22): Frazzled English women: There is a method to your madness! You might not feel put together, but to everyone else you seem relaxed and effortlessly cool. You aren't complete without your chunky scarf and a cup of tea while you talk to your friends about work and your love life. Take some time to relax and go easy on yourself!

LEO (JULY 23-AUG. 22): Soft girl: Light colors and sweaters are your best friend. You're sweet as sugar and look the part. Soft curls and flowers are something we can always find in your accessories. A good book with a cup of tea is your perfect night in. Stay sweet, Leo. Don't ever change.



ALYSSA JO MURNION | CARTOONIST

UM receives grant for graduate students in natural resource fields

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The National Science Foundation awarded \$5 million to be split between the University of Montana and Montana State University in August to provide scholarships to low-income graduate students in STEM fields.

The grant will be divided between UM's natural resource graduate students and Montana State University's graduate engineering students. UM will have over \$2 million to support four cohorts of students in a scholarship program that will span six years. Each student in the program is expected to get up to \$14,000 in scholarships each year.

Libby Metcalf, the dean of the W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation and a co-principal investigator on the proposal team, said the goal is to use the funds to improve student retention.

"It's not great when a student starts in a program and then they drop out," Metcalf said. "We don't want that for anyone, so this funding is intended to help provide the framework for students to be supported along their master's journey."

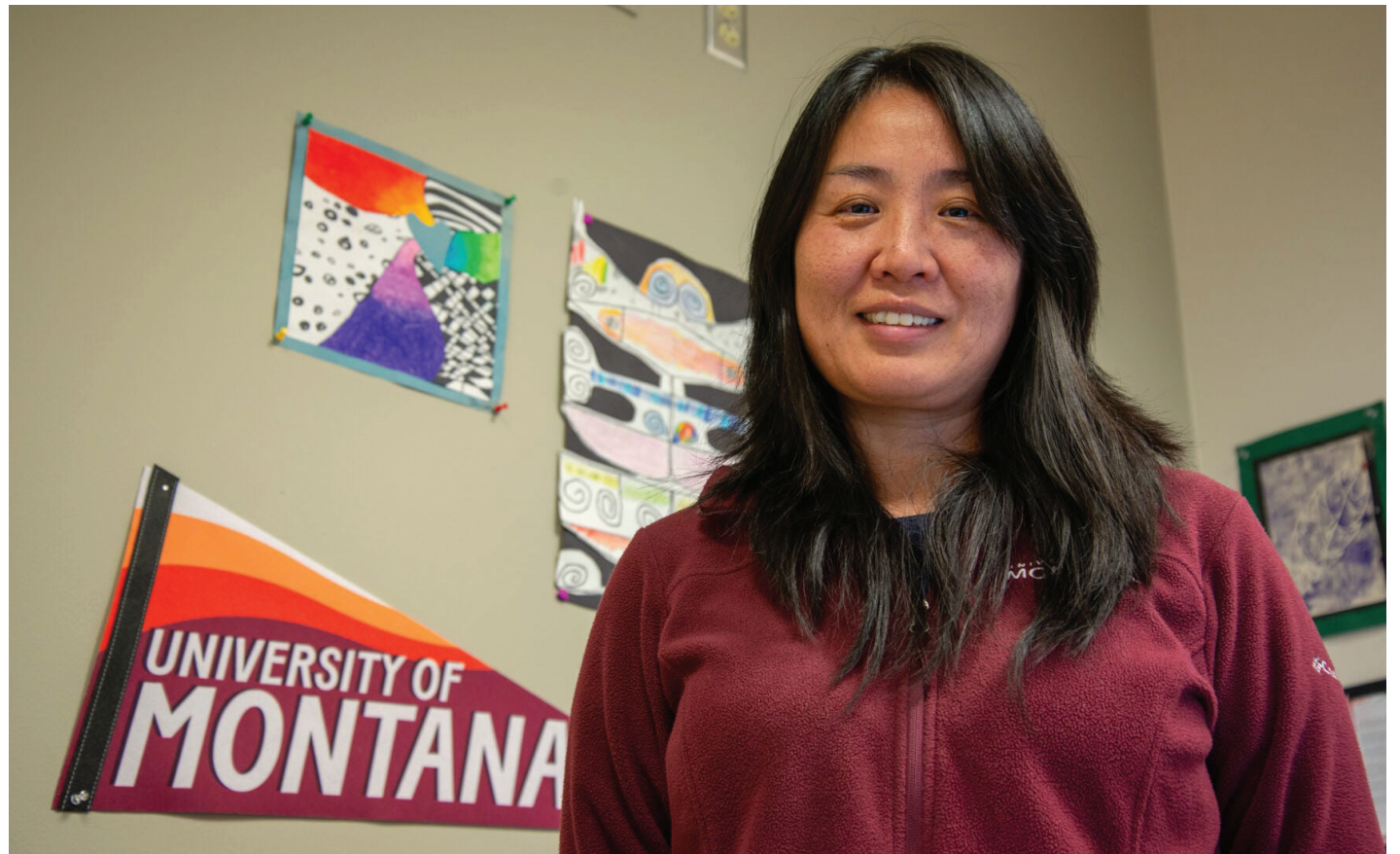
Ke Wu, the dean of the graduate school and another co-principal investigator on the grant team, said that students in the scholarship program will have less need to work a job while attending school. The program will also grant more access to mentorship advising, peer-to-peer mentorship, tutoring and connections to business, industry and internship opportunities.

There are about 150 graduate students in natural resource fields at UM, according to Metcalf. Whether each student is eligible for the program and considered low-income will be determined by their FAFSAs and the financial aid office.

"People think when you become a graduate student, you have more things available to you," Metcalf said. "Actually, it's harder as a grad. There are a lot of resources [for undergraduates], and as you get into graduate education, there tends to be less and less. We want to change that."

Part of Metcalf's job on the grant is measuring student success, a requirement for federal funding.

"That's the interesting part to me," Metcalf said. "How do we determine if the



Ke Wu, dean of UM's graduate school, stands for a portrait Sept. 14 in her office in the Davidson Honors College. Wu was a co-principal investigator on the grant team.
MARS JOHNSON | MONTANA KAIMIN

students were successful?"

Some things she might track are graduation rates, whether students got jobs, whether they felt supported during their education and if they felt like it was worth their money.

Paul Lukacs, the associate vice president for research and creative scholarship, initially worked on earning the grant before handing it off to Metcalf and Wu. Ryan Anderson, an associate professor in the chemical engineering department at Montana State University, is the lead of the grant for graduate engineering students there.

While science, technology, engineering and math programs thrive financially, many humanities and liberal arts programs have been cut or paused by the University. In 2026, Chinese and Irish studies minors were put on moratorium, and the master's programs for economics

and literature were cut.

Zhen Cao, a 68-year-old associate professor of Chinese, said he will be out of a job by summer once the remaining Chinese students have been taught out.

He said that the University "absolutely" prioritizes STEM funding and doesn't make sound decisions about what to cut, because humanities and world languages are interconnected with STEM.

Wu said she doesn't think that STEM is financially prioritized by the University.

"I think the University support for STEM or social sciences or arts and media are at the same level," Wu said. "I don't think the University's supporting one more. The opportunities for certain programs from outside funding are significantly different."

The \$5 million grant is funded federally, not by the University, and Wu said not many outside organizations fund

liberal arts and humanities departments.

"I'm continuously looking at the opportunities that our student populations don't necessarily have," Wu said. "I just don't want the non-STEM students to feel like they get left behind."

Marton Marko, an associate professor of German, said he is hopeful for the future of humanities funding, whether it be from the University or outside sponsors.

"This recent receipt of this fantastic National Science Foundation grant is a sign of the kinds of things that can be done anywhere on campus," Marko said.

Once the six-year program is over, Metcalf said the graduate school will be better than before.

"Hopefully, we'll have learned a ton," Metcalf said. "But more importantly, hopefully, we'll have a system for how we encourage students to take that next step in graduate education."

The Lodge receives national awards

COLBY SUKO-CLARK | NEWS REPORTER
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The Lodge Dining Center won an award for the best new dining center from the National Association of Colleges and Universities Food Service National Convention in New Orleans this year.

The center has been on the University of Montana campus for two years and has already won sustainability awards and the best new dining facility award at the NACUF national convention, which meets every two years.

"We were always striving for these awards from day one," said Trail Bundy, the assistant director of strategic marketing for Campus Dining. In fact, Bundy had been applying for awards since The Lodge opened and makes sure that The Lodge is up to the standards of the national level.

"We are winning awards for stuff we already do, and that's what is important," Bundy said. Two of the main

factors were the efficiency of the Lodge and the variety of food available.

"I have nothing but positivity to give The Lodge," said Troy Collins, an 18-year-old wildlife biology major. He also noted that he thought The Lodge was perfectly placed.

"There were actually talks of moving it to a tiny corner of campus, but we got together and decided on the building in the middle of everything," said Richard Huffman, director of campus dining. The Lodge now sits near the center of campus with a clear view of the Oval.

"We wanted a lot of light for the students, because the Food Zoo was in the basement, and there was no light," he said, referring to the previous dining facility.

The transfer from the Food Zoo to The Lodge took place on July 24, 2024. That day, a thunderstorm wiped out the power for three days in a row, which meant that The Lodge was without lights when it first opened.

"That blackout prepared us for the future. Like now, in the case of a

blackout, we are open to every student to have a safe place to be," Huffman said. However, that was not the only issue The Lodge faced when it first opened.

"There was a trial period of finding enough staff members, and we were understaffed for the first little bit," Huffman said. The Lodge adjusted as needed and now serves around 4,500 meals a day, according to its estimates.

"The Lodge is a love letter to Montana, incorporating the flow of rivers and restaurants of Montana," Tony Martinez, the sous chef for the center, said.

The food choices of The Lodge include a restaurant inspired by a now-closed Chinese restaurant in Butte, Mediterranean dishes, steak and late-night meals like burgers.

"The Lodge was meant to have something for everyone," Martinez said.

The places were chosen to flow well for students, and were made to have all the food being prepped in front of them. Martinez noted that many students would question the quality of food at the Food Zoo and wanted to stop the rumors

of the food not being fresh.

"This was a trial-and-error process to get the new food system working, and in the second year, we are mitigating the challenges as much as possible," Martinez said. He also noted the work of sustainability and the purchasing of all local ingredients as a staple of The Lodge.

"We value integrity over the awards, and it really took a team," said Kacey Blair, the director of residential dining. That includes the voices of the students. Blair has stressed the importance of the satisfaction tablet at the entrance of The Lodge as they look at every single person's feedback to fine tune the experience.

"Our culture is our hospitality, and the ability to break bread with strangers gives The Lodge that hospitality," she said. They have changed the times certain restaurants are open because of the students' input.

"We have a passion for service, and we are supportive of our work and want to support the students," Blair said.

CRACK SABBATH

Montana's premier BLACK SABBATH tribute band

Featuring classics from the first six albums (the OZZY era)

THE UNION CLUB

THURSDAY SEP 24TH

7PM

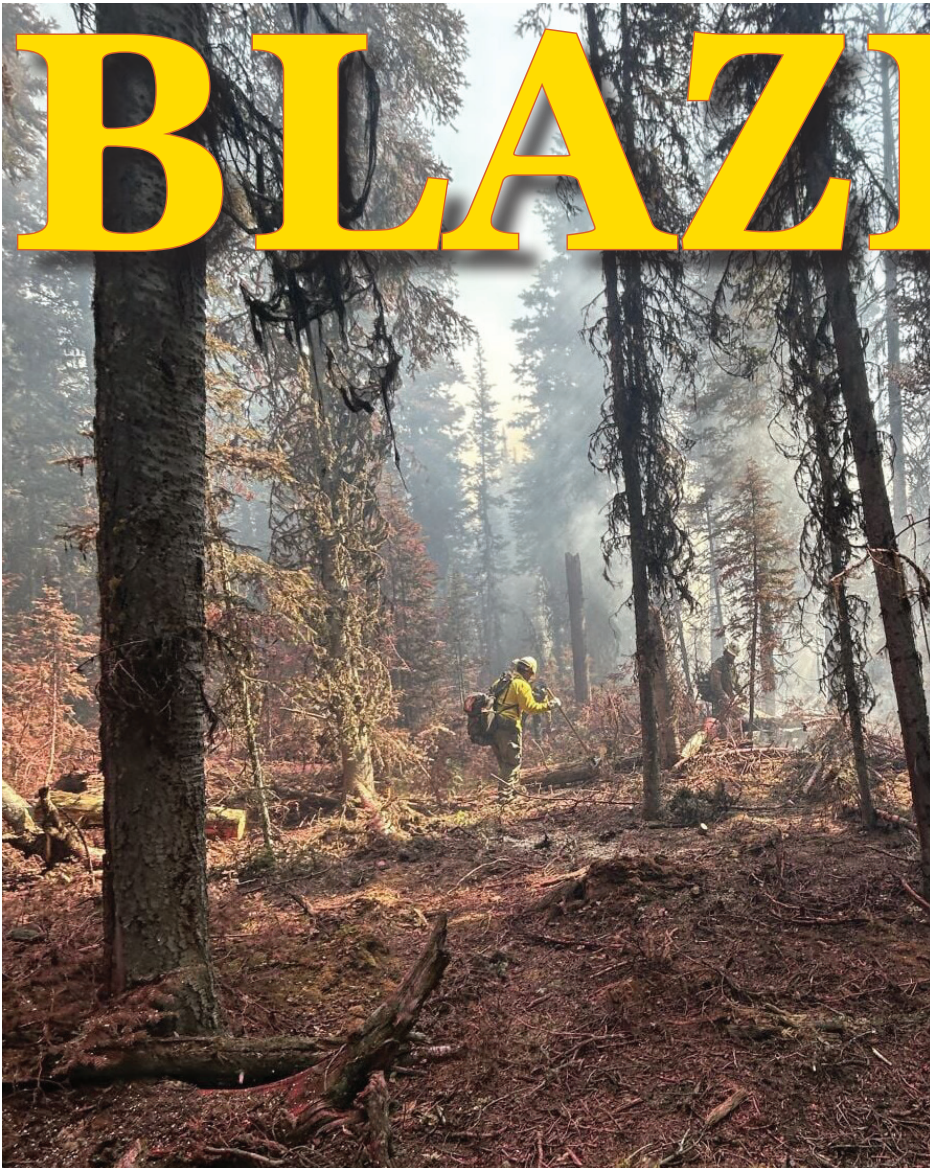
NO COVER

WITH NAKED LIMBS, SERPENTINA & .REPETEND

I'm Ozzy Osbourne
and I approve this
message



BLAZING IN



After spending the summer
some students are still



TO AUTUMN

mer in the woods fighting fires,
ll adjusting to classroom life.

Story by Julian Clemmer
Photos by Mars Johnson

A

fter her first summer firefighting, Tegan Holme has returned for her second year at the University of Montana.

Holme is eager to return next summer as a seasonal firefighter, one of the premier summer employment options for students interested in forestry and other conservation fields. However, career advancement in fire management may stall until after her graduation, because the annual fire seasons have changed.

WHERE IT STARTED

At first, Holme didn't know what she wanted from college. But after an older high school friend in her hometown of Bonney Lake, Washington, recommended the University of Montana, Holme found herself where she needed to be.

"I knew whatever I was going to do, I wanted it to be outside," the 19-year-old forestry major said. "And forestry seems

like a pretty great way to be outside all the time."

Holme found the opportunity to be a seasonal firefighter by coincidence during her freshman year.

"I went to the Forestry Club because my friend dragged me even though I didn't necessarily want to go," Holme said. Through this meeting, she connected with other forestry majors and learned about seasonal firefighting.

The club offers several ways to network with other students and faculty, both inside and outside the

forestry department. It also offers students a place to find summer jobs in multiple conservation fields, something Holme took advantage of.

During the academic year, when students are away from the fires, they can join the Student Association for Fire Ecology and Management, known colloquially as "Fire Club." Its president, 20-year-old Cole Saunders, is a junior majoring in forestry who also worked as a seasonal firefighter near Helena.

The club connects students with peers and professionals in fire management

TOP LEFT: Firefighters tend to the Ant Park Fire on Aug. 31. **CONTRIBUTED | COLE SAUNDERS**

TOP RIGHT: Tegan Holme takes a break on South Campus Field on Sept. 10.

BOTTOM LEFT: Holme takes a selfie while fighting the Elkhorn Hot Springs fire on Aug. 9. **CONTRIBUTED | TEGAN HOLME**

BOTTOM RIGHT: Holme repairs her bike outside Phyllis J. Washington School of Education on Sept. 14.

and participates in prescribed burns on lands owned by partnered organizations or the Lubrecht Experimental Forest, a plot of forest 30 miles east of Missoula owned by the University.

Each fall, Saunders' club helps students through the complexities of federal government job websites to apply for seasonal firefighting jobs at multiple government agencies. Saunders plans to pursue a career in fire management, but feels that seasonal firefighting will look good on his resume, regardless. "If anything, it shows that commitment to hard work," he said.

Saunders and Holme were both active in the Forestry Club the previous year. "She was one of the people that we identified as someone that was really hard-working and really enthusiastic with all the clubs," Saunders said.

Fire Club places great importance on helping students apply for summer jobs, not only for the networking potential, but also for financial reasons. Seasonal firefighting can help students pad their wallets before the fall. Holme was paid a starting hourly rate of \$20.73.

"I know I have rent paid for the year, I know I can get food, I know I can splurge on myself," Holme said. As good as the money is, the job is incredibly dangerous and physically demanding.

This wage can increase with experience and overtime. According to the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, firefighters receive a 10% wage increase while actively responding to an emergency, including wildfires. Combined with overtime, this can get students far more than the base starting wage.

GETTING PREPARED

Before training begins, prospective firefighters must be in good physical shape, both in strength and stamina.

Over the summer, the pack that Holme would carry while traversing rough terrain for miles on assignments could weigh between 30 and 45 pounds. During the school year, Holme strengthened herself by running and going to the gym so she could handle the long wilderness hikes while carrying equipment.

Back in May, Holme rode down to Dillon from Missoula with five other rookies to begin training for the summer ahead. Others were returning to the University of Montana Western campus for their required refresher courses.

Holme and her peers lined up to check in and socialize with other rookies from different units. After check-in, orientation included a quick

lecture and a Q&A session.

The next day, lectures began at 8 a.m. and filled the trainees' schedule until the last two days. Those were reserved for field training in the local area, where Holme and other rookies learned the fundamentals of firefighting, how to properly use equipment and how to respond to emergencies.

While most of the training went smoothly, the group got a taste of what it is like to work in unpredictable weather conditions.

"There was a major storm, so we didn't spend the night out there," Holme said. "Everybody got drenched, all our stuff got soaked, my radio broke."

Despite the downpour, Holme and others practiced every skill they could, except for the controlled burn, and focused more on emergency training.

Once rookies completed their required training, they received a red card, the official certification that allows firefighters to be hired by various crews.

After Holme was certified, she joined an engine crew that worked with the state's resources and conservation department. Her specific unit worked around a specialized fire truck which was stationed in Clearwater, between Missoula and Lincoln.

Hand crews are the base of wildland firefighting and are trained to perform fundamental firefighting duties. Engine crews, the type Holme worked for, are based in a specialized fire truck. They use water contained in the engine to help extinguish fires and dampen areas ahead of fires to reduce available fuel.

Helitack crews deploy from helicopters, so they can more easily build firelines in hard-to-reach areas. They can also attach a bucket to the underside of the aircraft to drop water or flame retardant on fires.

Hotshot crews and smokejumpers are among the most demanding jobs in the field, requiring much more training. They are sent to more dangerous and remote fires and must often work faster than other crews.

DUTIES OF THE JOB

During fire season, after getting into her unit, a typical day for Holme involved waking up early, getting briefed on new training or assignments, working out for an hour and then daily training.

In the afternoon, her crew patrolled its assigned areas, checking for possible fire starters. Patrolling is much less intense during wet periods, but increases significantly during drier times when the fire danger index is



Carl Seielstad poses for a photo in his office in the College of Forestry and Conservation on Sept. 4.



Tegan Holme tosses a Frisbee at practice near Dornblaser Field on Sept. 10.

higher. During this time, fires become more common from human error or lightning strikes

Seasonal firefighters live in temporary housing provided by their employer so they can stay close to the field and their equipment. "You're living together in bunks, which adds to the fun. It almost feels like a summer camp," Holme said. The close living arrangements and long hours create strong bonds. "You have to get along not just for the sake of getting along, but you are responsible for each other when you're out on a fire too," she said.

Most of Holme's coworkers were college students or college-age. "Even when you were on duty, it felt like a bunch of friends hanging out," Holme said. During off hours, the crew always shared meals and spent downtime together in the living quarters.

Holme remembers the Landers Fork

Fire vividly. While it wasn't the first fire Holme served on, it was one of the more eventful ones. Holme's crew, the Clearwater-Lincoln unit, got a call over the radio from its sister unit about a fire near Lincoln. The radio chatter increased as the crew got closer. As they approached the scene, Holme could see a thick and dark mass billowing up from the fire burning through live wood and brush.

The higher-ups already on scene briefed the team. The crew had to go through private property to get the engine into place, and despite being on a tight timeline, they had to get permission from the owners.

Holme drove the engine while another firefighter made sure the path was clear. At the staging area, she joined the other crews to dig a fireline, which clears the area of burnable vegetation and creates a barrier against an encroaching fire.

Then, a few hours later, spot fires around the periphery began to flare up. Holme stopped digging and manned the engine hose to tackle them.

Trees fell around Holme as she worked. Though some were likely felled intentionally, others were hollowed out by the flames. While Holme and her group worked to refill the engine's water in the nearby river and hack away at a fireline, other crews buzzed overhead, dropping water on the fire.

"Feeling the sprinkle and the mist of the water from the bucket drops is such a crazy feeling," Holme said.

After eight hours of fighting the flames, the crew returned to its home base near midnight. For the next two days, Holme and other rookies went back to the scene to finish up the remainder of the fire. Investigators did not identify the fire's source. It burned 2.36 acres before being fully extinguished.

BACK IN THE CLASSROOM

Holme had a hectic end to summer. On her second-to-last day on the job, she had gotten off a 14-day fire assignment. After concluding the assignment, Holme drove over to Missoula to drop off some things she needed for the start of the school year and then drove back to her unit. "I went back to work for a half day and then two days later I was a full-time student again," she said.

She found the shift from working outdoors to the monotony of scheduled classes and the predictability of university life uncomfortable. The transition from constantly being on her feet to sitting for extended periods was a jolt to Holme's mind and body. As is often the case, Holme realized how much she enjoyed firefighting after she left the job for school.

"I thought people were exaggerating when they said it was kind of rough transitioning from working all summer to back to school," Holme said. "But honestly it kind of hit me hard."

Holme enjoyed the mix of uncertainty and routine seasonal firefighting offered her. "That's why I joined fire," Holme said. "I like the spontaneity of it, not knowing which days you're going to get a fire."

Holme is taking 16 credits this semester. While the classes are much easier for her physically, the mental change wasn't. "I was used to waking up early at that point because I had to all summer," she said. "But waking up that early just to sit for hours at a time was pretty rough."

Sophomore Michael Carden, 21, had

an even shorter turnaround from his job fighting fires in southern Colorado. "This year I was actually a couple days late. I missed most of my first days of class. [I] showed up late, and had to move into my apartment before getting to come to school," he said.

Full-time fire positions are often filled by people who got their start through seasonal firefighting. Carl Seielstad, a professor of fire sciences and associate dean of the forestry department at the University, got his start in the field of fire sciences as a seasonal firefighter.

"It's the gateway into the organization," he said. "They all come through these seasonal positions." Seielstad started on an engine crew,



Tegan Holme attends a climate and society class in the Forestry Building on Sept. 2.

then finished his firefighting career in a leadership position. "The seasonal firefighter is the backbone of the fire management organization," Seielstad said.

A CHANGE IN THE SEASON

Part of fire science is studying how fire changes and how to respond accordingly. While fires in Western Montana have largely stayed the same since the 1980s when an unprecedented uptick in large wildfires burned millions of acres, other areas have seen an increase in fire size and scale. "The last three years in Canada, the fire seasons have been incredible, like unprecedented," Seielstad said.

New technology like drones, instant

communication via satellite internet and even thermal imaging have made identifying and managing fires more efficient, but many of the systems have stayed the same. Crews that Holme worked on were still digging firelines in the same way that Seielstad's crews did 20 years ago.

While the character of fire has stayed mostly the same in recent history, other factors haven't.

"These urban conflagrations that we read about in the newspaper where thousands of homes are burning in one event, that's happening with more frequency," Seielstad said.

Seielstad believes this is a two-sided

gotten longer, and because the human resource side of hiring firefighters has gotten more difficult, agencies have become less student-friendly," Seielstad said.

Engine and hand crews are still hiring students, but more advanced positions, which require a larger and later time commitment, have become out of reach for many students. "Gone are the days where you can be a first-year and a smokejumper," Saunders said.

Because of this unwritten rule, many student firefighters find their progression in these organizations stalls until after they graduate.

"You gotta be fit, you gotta be strong, and you gotta be a bit hard-headed," Seielstad said. "By discriminating against students, you're turning away some of your best prospective future workforce."

Getting promoted is also harder — reduced work hours prevent firefighters from completing taskbooks. Taskbooks are a collection of jobs that seasonal firefighters must demonstrate they can do to be considered for higher positions. Once firefighters complete these tasks, a higher-up signs off on the book.

While Holme didn't have any taskbooks open her first year, she plans on opening some in the coming years. "Once I'm out of school and I work full-length fire seasons, it will be no problem," she said.

Carden has also struggled to climb the experience ladder while in school. "Having called some of those crews, I have been told flatly that 'We won't accept any students,'" he said.

INFERNOS TO EXAMS

Both Carden and Holme miss the routine of outdoor work contrasted with the constraint of exams and labs.

While student firefighters are back in class, the fires still rage, and their former crewmates are still working hard to put out fires. "Right now, my crew is up here in Montana working, and I'm not there, which kind of sucks," Carden said.

Holme is ready for next season, already planning for next year and participating in the ruck marches that members of the Fire Club organize three times a week at 7 a.m. so she can maintain her high cardio for next season. Combined with other Forestry Club and Fire Club activities, Holme is ready to pick up where she left off next fire season. "[Fire] assignments get exhausting, but it's so fun for me," Holme said. "It's not hard to want to be there."

Tails meets tales at Missoula library's 'Read with Dogs'

SABRINA PHILIP | ARTS REPORTER
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In the Imaginarium on the third floor of the Missoula Public Library, a room sits waiting for wagging tails, stories and excited smiles.

Each week, two or three handlers visit the library with dogs from therapy programs and sit on separate sides of the room. One dog is designated as a group dog, allowing multiple children to read and listen at once. The other is an individual station preceded by a sign-up, allowing kids who are self-conscious about reading to be alone with a dog to practice.

"Read with Dogs" is a weekly program that supports children's literacy with the help of furry friends at the library.

"The whole concept of reading with dogs has been around for many, many years," said Linette Greene, a youth service librarian. "We used to do it at the old library. We started back with this one in the summer of 2022."

The dogs come from different programs around Montana, including Canines-4-Christ, Alliance of Therapy Dogs and Pet Partners. Greene explained in order to be a therapy dog "in the public at the library," a dog must have passed an evaluation from a therapy dog organization.

All dogs must re-evaluate every three years and must achieve the highest score possible, Greene said. In a facility with children, dogs must prove they are not going to be startled by erratic behavior.

"It takes a really specific temper," Greene said. "They have to really enjoy being out in public and they have to really enjoy greeting strangers. They have to be very calm so if a kid accidentally sticks a finger up their nose or something like that, they won't snap."

Greene said she has seen many successes in the program, including helping to teach English to a young student who came to the program with a classroom tutor. The student, she explained, was from another

country with low English proficiency.

"He missed a lot of academic work because he had been in a refugee camp and moved around a lot, and he was behind grade level," Greene explained. "He loved to come because his mom won't let him have a dog. We would encourage him to read, and after three years, he not only was reading fluently, but he was reading to other little kids, and using different voices and the whole nine yards."

Greene said that with kids who are more reluctant to read, she encourages them to show dogs the pictures and make up the story because "dogs don't know how to read." Participants' ages, she said, "can be everything," and often involve a mix of babies, teenagers and adults.

"There's a lot of research that shows

that dogs help, especially kids who are reluctant readers," Greene said. "Dogs help you feel less stress. You don't feel as self-conscious reading to a dog, and a lot of the schools especially will reward behavior with time with the dog. I think it's just a natural thing. People like dogs and people like reading."

On Sept. 8, there were three dogs present in the Imaginarium. Handler Sasha Zemanek, from Alliance of Therapy Dogs, brought her two dogs, Huckleberry and Barry. Zemanek has been doing therapy work for 43 years.

"It's the expression on kids' faces when they see the dogs," Zemanek said, explaining her favorite part about bringing the dogs to read. "It's been shown that when you read a book to a child, the blood pressure

with the dog goes down."

Zemanek shared her experience with being present at midterms for the University of Montana and Missoula College, and shared the benefit of therapy dogs for university-age students.

"I think a lot of the students miss their dog, miss their pets and they just want to cuddle up to a dog," Zemanek said. "Whether it's golden or an itty bitty, it doesn't matter. They're really stressed during their midterms and finals. I can see sometimes they just relax, and it makes them feel good [and] makes me feel good."

Handlers Kimberly and Greg Dowling from Pet Partners also brought their dog, Kenai, to the event. Their dog, which they share, is part of a crisis response team, and has been at fire camps and grief events at local schools.

"It makes our dog really happy," Kimberly Dowling said. "He enjoys it, so we enjoy it, and it's just really fun to interact with the kids. Some will sit down and read, or let you read with them, and some will read directly to the dog and it just makes literacy a very comfortable thing for kids. Plus, they usually are really interested in the different types of dogs that you're visiting, and it's always fun to talk with them about that."

Kenai had one interested customer on Tuesday, 2-year-old May Lea and her mom, Catherine. May, according to her mother, has been coming to the event before she could walk, and continues to come, in part due to their obsession with the library and its events.

Catherine said her daughter "loves talking about the dogs and coming to visit the dogs and petting the dogs," saying it's a win for both of them for multiple reasons.

"I think any chance to introduce new books in a new environment that's already fun for her is a win for me," Catherine said. "I think it's helpful for her, and it definitely is helpful in making her more comfortable around dogs too."



Therapy dog owners Greg Conan and Kimberly Dowling pose for a portrait with their dog Kenai on Sept. 11 at the Missoula Public Library. **PARKER HOWERY | MONTANA KAIMIN**

Missoula community helps build 'Soft Monuments'

NAYLA SCHMIED | ARTS REPORTER
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Large-scale textile installation artist Amanda Browder is leveling out artistic hierarchy as she invites Missoula residents to contribute to her "Soft Monuments" project.

Browder sat at a table covered in fabric, clothespins and sewing machines in the Knowles Art Gallery, as she continued her work on her latest project "Soft Monuments," a section of the class she is teaching at the University of Montana as an artist in residence. The project will wrap parts of the Brunswick, a downtown art gallery, and the University of Montana Music Building in colorful cotton fabric before Thanksgiving, but its impact on the community has already started.

Browder's installation is all about contribution from the community. She only works with donated fabric. When she first started "Soft Monuments" in mid-August, bins were put up all around Missoula that will continue to accept material donations until mid-November.

"The idea is that you're pulling history from textiles into a site-specific piece of artwork in the city where the fabric came from," Browder said. A main component of her work is to let the public engage in the creation of the monument. According to Browder, her organized public sewing days bridge the intimidation that people feel about participating in contemporary art.

"It is for everyone. All ages. No experience necessary," Browder said. Locals can sort fabric, plan, sew or just hang out and make new friends.

According to Browder, piecing fabric together creates a sense of multiplicity and puts everyone on the same level. "That building gets smaller, and more attainable, and it kind of inspires you to go bigger," Browder said in regard to what people feel when they see their finished project covering a building.

The installation's size will depend on the amount of fabric they receive. The projected need for textile on the Music Building alone will be roughly 50 to 60 feet wide and around 40 feet tall. This is a feat that can only be achieved through the community's support.



Sewist Amanda Browder teaches freshman UM student Sevren Dykstra how to use a sewing machine on Sept. 11. **PARKER HOWERY | MONTANA KAIMIN**

In addition to community donations, Browder receives support from the University's Flagship Fund. The fund provides one-time support for ideas that address emerging needs and benefits both the University and the Missoula community. Jennifer Combe, a professor of art and game design at UM, applied for the grant because it called for enhancing wellbeing on campus.

"At first I thought, 'Do I have enough energy to take this on?'" Combe said as she reflected on the early days of the project. Despite doubts at the beginning, her enthusiasm for "Soft Monuments" is now evident. Combe said that she recognized the illuminating power of working across different hierarchical levels and recounts the first day of setup, where Browder, professors, students and janitors all came together to make it happen.

"It's kind of a full-circle moment to be able to come back to the University and do a class, and a residence program," Browder said. As a Missoulain herself, now living in Brooklyn, New York, Browder has traveled all over the world to places like Belgium and Tokyo to make massive fabric installations. However, the start of her art career leads right back to Missoula. "The mountain has always been a major force," Browder said. She explains that growing up in Missoula, the directions people would point to for instruction were always major mountains.

When she started teaching at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2001, her

flat surroundings made her think about human scale. By creating collaborative artwork with people of different social standings, Browder flattens the power structure of society and celebrates civic pride. This, along with teaching how to follow through on a project, is what Browder exemplifies to both the public and the students in her course.

Browder also chooses her installation sites with a purpose. The Brunswick building was chosen as it houses artists' studios and a gallery on the first floor. The owners provide affordable spaces, which support local artists.

The Music Building was chosen due to its high visibility to the public as the area sees significant traffic, including people traveling past campus by bus.

"The building itself is shaped like a grand piano, so it will be kind of like a cover," Addison Thomsen, 19, a music composition major at UM, said about the project. According to Browder, the combination of the two buildings will encourage people to move between spaces and connect the University with the broader community.

Public sewing days are listed on Browder's website. Browder and Combe highly encourage individuals as well as any University departments like geosciences, elementary education and Native American studies to reach out to organize or join a sewing event. Every single person in Missoula can contribute to this creative experience and make themselves an artist.

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Women's golf tees off new season

MARIN ANDERSON | SPORTS REPORTER
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With the swing of a club and crack of a ball, the University of Montana women's golf season begins. Bringing seven girls and high expectations, the Griz are ready to take to the fairways.

On Sept. 7, the Griz traveled to Colorado to compete in the University of Northern Colorado Bear Brawl. Although they placed last, the girls are optimistic about the tournaments ahead.

"We've been here since August, so we've definitely developed those friendships that will keep getting stronger," senior Kate Bogenschutz said about her teammates. "To see how a supportive and passionate group of golfers is going to help us become even better on the golf course."

After past seasons featuring fluctuating cohesiveness, the team has formed a stronger sense of community in just two months, Bogenschutz said. "We have a lot of amazing girls on the team this year, which is awesome, and our dynamic is great, so our culture this year has definitely grown since past years."

The University of Montana golf team has much more to offer than custom golf bags and Missoula's scenery. UM offers a strong support system and fans, according to Bogenschutz.

"Being able to golf at college and especially in Missoula, it's such a college town, and they have so much support for their athletics," Bogenschutz said. "We were practicing out here [at the Missoula Country Club] yesterday, and we had a little kid come up to us and say, 'Go Griz.'"

To freshman Zoe Bar-Or, the women's golf team came with awe and familiarity. "When I went through my recruiting process, I fell in love with the school itself and my team was super welcoming," Bar-Or said. "I had already known one person on the team, Hope [Torres], and I just loved the state of Montana, the school itself and the program [it] had to offer."

With a seven-woman roster and a physically demanding sport, injuries are an inevitable fact of life.

According to Bar-Or, there were six of the seven girls in Greeley, with junior Anna Stensrud being out with a hurt

back. Although struggling with a knee injury, junior Bella Johnson prevailed in Colorado.

"Bella was in a lot of pain at her first event. It was hard for her to walk around, especially on the 36-hole day," Bar-Or said. "But she was a trooper and she ended up finishing the tournament."

Luckily for the golf team, greener fairways are on their side. "They'll both be back soon," Bar-Or said. "They're just not qualifying today and I assume they'll both play as individuals in the event that we have next weekend and the rest of the events this season."

With an interesting dynamic and two new teammates, Bar-Or and Ellie Sticha, Bogenschutz stated the team's freshmen are great. "They've brought so much talent too, but also their personalities are amazing," Bogenschutz said.

"The sky's the limit for both of them. They're both gonna be great, being able to see how they kind of transition into college golf."

Although the first tournament, Bear Brawl, did not go according to plan, Bogenschutz is ready to bring the competition to Missoula.

"It was the first one of the season, and we're not necessarily treating it as practice, but learning from it and getting better as the season goes," Bogenschutz said. "I haven't had a home tournament here since my freshman year, so I'm excited to host at the Missoula Country Club."

Nonetheless, Bogenschutz stated the girls are ready to dominate the rest of the season together. "[We're] creating a tight-knit group of us that all get along and support each other," Bogenschutz said. "It's making us really optimistic to see what can happen this year."



UM women's golfer Hope Torres prepares for the qualifying round at the Missoula Valley Country Club on Sept. 11. **BRAYDEN VALLOW | MONTANA KAIMIN**

A look ahead at the 2026-27 Griz basketball schedule

DILLON RICHARDSON | SPORTS REPORTER

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The University of Montana men's basketball team released its full schedule last week, highlighting visits to multiple top-100 programs as well as 15 home games.

For the last three years, the Griz have finished as winners or runners-up of the Big Sky Conference under head coach Travis DeCuire, who is entering his 13th season in maroon and silver.

The schedule for this year brings new challenges for UM, which will play two more conference games, including one in early December, as well as facing its first seven Division I opponents on the road.

The season starts on Oct. 24 in an exhibition game against California State University, Bakersfield in Dahlberg Arena.

A visit to the University of North Dakota will be one of the first winnable games for UM, as the Griz are 13-3 since 2014 against the former Big Sky team, with the Griz winning 10 of the last 11 matchups.

In the 2025-26 season, the Griz were led to victory in many games by Money Williams, including the win over North Dakota, where Williams had 30 points. After the season, he transferred to Boston College, so UM will have to look at returning and new faces to carry the offensive burden.

UM's two National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics opponents visit late in the semester, with Carroll College visiting on Nov. 23, and the University of Providence coming on Dec. 21.

It will be the first time since 2022 that Montana Technological University will not play UM, which marks the second time that the Orediggers have defeated UM and then are left off the schedule the following year.

The final five non-conference games for UM are a mix of tough challenges and even matches. The tough games will be when UM visits Arizona State University and Utah State University, as one team is from a power conference and the other has missed the NCAA Tournament just once since 2019.

The more manageable games for the Griz come in the form of home games against the University of South Dakota and Pepperdine University, as well as California Polytechnic University on the road.

South Dakota has only faced UM once in the past decade, with a Griz win at home in 2024. The Coyotes are coming off a 12-12 season that saw the team finish



The Big Sky Conference trophy is paraded around by Grizzly basketball players following their 83-72 win against Eastern Washington University on March 3, 2025. **MARLEY BARBOEISEL | MONTANA KAIMIN ARCHIVE**

fourth in the Summit League, the team's best finish since the shortened 2020-21 season.

The Coyotes will not be returning any of their top five scorers from last year, so the highest-scoring returner will be Vince Buzelis, who averaged 7.1 points per game last season. Only three members of the 2025-26 team will return this year for USD.

Pepperdine has been on the decline over the past few years, as the Waves went from fourth in the West Coast Conference in 2020-21 to last place in the conference last year. The team also went 2-11 on the road. When Pepperdine visits UM, it will be the first time in over two years that it will play a game outside of the Pacific time zone.

The Griz will take on Cal Poly to round out the non-conference road schedule on Dec. 12. It will be just the second matchup against the Mustangs since the 90s. The Griz are 4-0 all time, and defeated Cal Poly 90-82 last year.

Cal Poly's team will look very similar to last year, as only one starter from last year transferred away. In the 2025 matchup, it was Williams who once again led in scoring for UM.

Oddly enough, the conference schedule actually starts before the non-conference schedule ends, as UM travels to Northern Arizona University on Dec. 3. The full

conference grind starts on New Year's Eve when the University of Northern Colorado comes to Missoula.

The Big Sky has a new look this year, as California State University, Sacramento departed and Southern Utah University and Utah Tech University joined the conference this summer. This means two more conference games to bring the total up to 20.

Games to watch in conference play will be Montana's rivalry games, which include Eastern Washington University on Jan. 16 and Feb. 11, the University of Idaho on Jan. 14 and Feb. 13 and Montana State University on Jan. 23 and Feb. 27.

Another interesting matchup will be against Northern Colorado. The battle of the bears has been high energy whether in Missoula or Greeley, as both teams have been in the mix for the regular season title the past couple of years.

The final conference game is on March 1 at Southern Utah.

Starch Madness will also look slightly different this year due to the extra team, as now the 10 and 11 seeds will face off, and the winner will play the nine seed. From there, it is the same structure as previous years, with play-in games for the bottom four remaining seeds, then a standard single elimination, eight team bracket to decide who gets to compete in the 2027 March Madness tournament.



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BIG SKY HONORS

Running back Eli Gillman and punter Everett O'Donnell each earned the title of Big Sky Conference Player of the Week after helping the Grizzlies to beat Utah Tech 35-14.

Gillman also broke two University of Montana records and posted his third-best rushing game, with 147 yards and three touchdowns, last Saturday. He received the honor of being named the Football Championship Subdivision Offensive Player of the Week for the second-straight week.

During the game, he pushed the Montana school record for career rushing touchdowns, with 62, along with a record for career points among non-kickers, finishing the game with 372.

The only player who is left ahead of Gillman for the title of the Big Sky all-time total touchdown list is Cooper Kupp, who finished his career at Eastern Washington and went on to win the Super Bowl this year with the Seattle Seahawks.

O'Donnell was given the title after pinning Utah Tech deep within its own half of the field with several big punts. It is the second time this season that a Montana special teams player has earned the position, and it's the first time in O'Donnell's career.

BAD WEEK IN MICHIGAN

After winning two out of three games in Oregon, the University of Montana volleyball team headed to Rochester, Michigan, to compete in the Golden Grizzly Invitational, which is hosted by the Oakland University Golden Grizzlies.

However, the result was not the outcome Montana hoped for. Falling to all three teams, the University of Eastern Michigan, Oakland University and the University of Alabama, Birmingham, 0-3.

The Montana Grizzlies finished all three games with a combined 103 kills and 60 errors. Meanwhile, its opponents finished for a combined 141 kills and 41 errors.

UM will go back on the road for the fourth straight week as the team travels to Spokane, Washington, to take on North Dakota State University, Seattle University and Gonzaga University for the Gonzaga Tournament.

Currently, Montana holds a 3-5 record going into the tournament and hopes to bring home some wins before taking on the Montana State Bobcats in Dahlberg Arena on Sept. 22.

Speed dating event joins punk rock and burlesque fans

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Weird Montana Records hosted its annual Punk Rock Speed Dating on Sept. 11, an event that combines punk rock and burlesque elements.

The event was held in Monk's Bar, an appropriately lit event space, and people began walking excitedly for a night of fun and entertainment.

The night's burlesque performers started with a pickle-themed performance from Avery DeLight and a song-based performance from Maeve N Voyage. People began their five-minute speed dating rounds and their journey to meeting new people.

At first the conversations were slow. People were pushed out of their comfort zones and put into a one-on-one with people they had never met. However, as time went on, the room grew louder. By the second round, the room was full of conversation, laughter and excitement.

With performances spaced out during the event, the room continued to carry a feeling of comfort and excitement. Overall, the event was flowing and the participants were showing many signs of satisfaction and enjoyment.

Event coordinator Duane Raider gave his insights into the performance of the

event and its overall success.

"Looking back at the cards and everyone who was there, I would say socially, very successful. Everyone had a really good time," Raider said.

This being the third year of the event, Raider and his coworkers looked to bring back Rosie La Secco. La Secco had hosted the two years before and was brought in after her previous performances.

La Secco felt the evening was an opportunity for different communities to meet. "We're really kind of trying to cross-pollinate, if you will, a few different DIY scenes," La Secco said.

La Secco has been in the burlesque world for many years now. Getting her start with the Cigarette Girls, La Secco talked about her journey and her excitement with projects like Punk Rock Speed Dating.

She first switched to making music after dancing for 18 years to try something new. "I thought it was important for me to really grow as an artist, I guess, and I did," La Secco said. "I did exist in that punk scene for quite a while, which was my favorite form of expression."

La Secco hosted and performed that night, putting her abilities on display that she has honed through the years.



Participants during a round of speed dating at Monk's Bar on Sept. 11.



A participant fills out their name tag for the event.



Maeve N. Voyage performing her song-based burlesque dance at Monk's Bar.