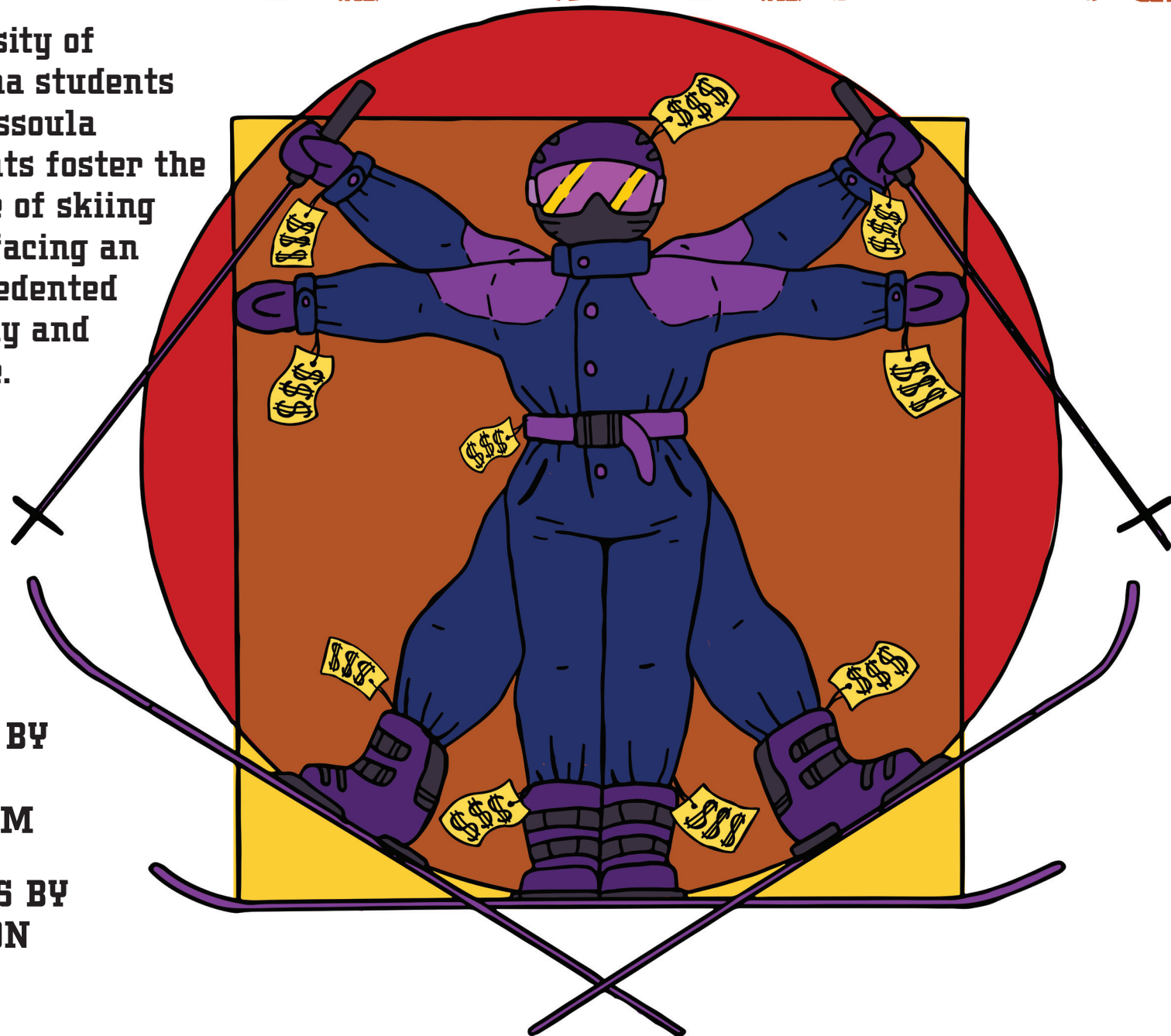


MONTANA KAIMIN

DOWNTOWNWARD

University of Montana students and Missoula residents foster the culture of skiing while facing an unprecedented economy and climate.



STORY BY
AIDAN
GRAHAM

PHOTOS BY
WESTON
FUDGE

STOP



6 PROGRAM CUTS CONTINUE
COVER GRAPHIC BY BARRETT CLEMENT

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FEBRUARY 5, 2026 | VOLUME 128 | ISSUE NO. 16



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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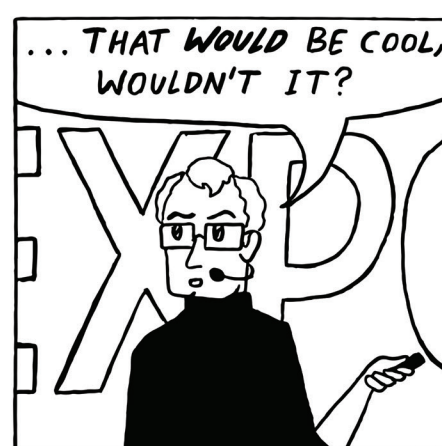
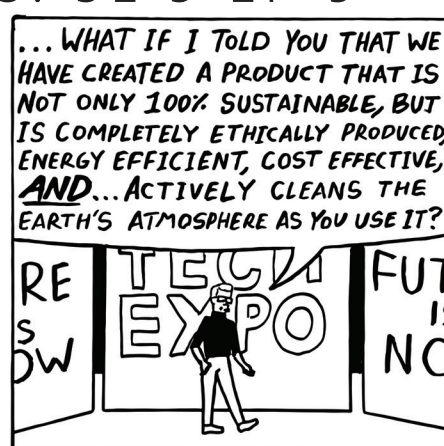
WELCOME BACK TO:
SPOT THE TERRORIST!



CAN YOU SPOT THE TERRORIST?

*BARRETT
2026*

KAIMIN KOMICS: SE 3 EP 9



BARRETT CLEMENT | CARTOONIST @FUNNYFERRETSTUDIOS

BARRETT

We need the humanities now more than ever

In constantly changing political, economic and environmental circumstances, the world needs the humanities more than ever.

It's tough to concretely say what the humanities are, but the Humanities Indicators Project defines the term as "the knowledge, skills and activities that help people interpret and engage with language, culture, history and the ongoing search for meaning and connection in human life."

This includes school subjects like writing, language, literature, history, philosophy, music, film, theater, dance and visual art. These disciplines help us learn about the world we created and answer questions about the essence of the human condition.

Since computers and the internet came onto the scene, society has put increasing emphasis on technology over the humanities. One symptom of this is the declining number of college students majoring in humanities subjects.

In 2020, less than 10% of all bachelor's degrees were awarded in humanities fields, an all-time low, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. From 2012

to 2020, college history programs lost one third of their majors, while college engineering and medical programs grew by 56%.

Of course, the money factor shouldn't be discounted. Students with a degree in science, technology, engineering or math have higher median earnings post-graduation than humanities students. But salaries shouldn't be the only way we value college degrees.

Through humanities subjects, students learn important "soft skills," like evaluating credibility of sources, research, organization and communication skills, both written and verbal. Students learn about historical and geographical context and consider perspectives that aren't theirs, giving them empathy for real-world situations.

But at the University of Montana, humanities programs are at risk of loss of funding. The master's in English literature, Irish studies, women's gender and sexuality studies and Chinese minor programs are all facing cuts. The University has cited financial issues and declining enrollments

as the catalyst.

The UM Hurling team held a protest in front of Main Hall on Jan. 29 in response to the discontinuation of the Irish studies program. Some members of the Academic Standards and Curriculum Review Committee also expressed outrage at the proposed sunseting of the Chinese program. English students hung up posters on Monday encouraging people to sign a petition to protest the program cuts. "Critical thinking and moral responsibility are needed now and forever," the poster said. "Don't let the humanities die."

Technology is changing the world faster than we can keep up. With AI images and videos, we're going to lose the ability to tell what's real and what's not. This is why we need the humanities to slow us down so we can evaluate what direction we're going, and if it's worth it.

One way to engage with the humanities in everyday life is to read, but many Americans don't make reading a habit. According to a recent YouGov poll, 40% of U.S. adults didn't read a single book in 2025. From 2003 to 2018, the average time people spent per day reading for fun dropped from 22 minutes to 16 minutes, according to Humanities Indicators. For comparison, people spent three hours watching TV and half an hour using their computers in 2018.

I truly believe writing is the most

important skill one can develop. It doesn't matter what you do with your life — writing will always be a part of it. We communicate through writing. We use writing to wrestle with our innermost thoughts. We write in our professional lives, whether it's for daily emails, brief text messages or in-depth studies.

There's value in studying these subjects just for the sake of studying them — they're the soul of humanity. And that's why there is absolutely no room for AI. Brains need to be exercised and fueled just like any other part of the body, and some of the best, most basic nutrients for it are reading and writing. Why would we throw away our power of learning and engagement for ChatGPT to do it for us? It's supposed to be hard. We're supposed to get frustrated. That's how we learn.

To be engaged in learning of any kind is an exercise in patience and practice. And if we practice the humanities and learn from other cultures, we're more likely to understand who we are, where we came from and where we're going.

- Mariah Henry, copy chief

Like it? Hate it? Let us know.
Email us your opinions at
elle.daniel@umontana.edu

Building the ball



Forestry majors Cayesh Hendrickson-Sperry, left, Evan Sandberg, middle, and Richie Young help build the Foresters' Ball in the Schreiber Gym on Feb. 2. The 107th Foresters' Ball will be held on Feb. 6 and 7. JACKSON MAILEY | MONTANA KAIMIN

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

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

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Edited by Margie E. Burke

HOW TO SOLVE:

Each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9; each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each set of 3 by 3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

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

In local news...

JACK SNOW | NEWS EDITOR
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MISSOULA CHOOSES NEW CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

Missoula County named Jessica Yang as its next chief financial officer, replacing former CFO Andrew Czorny.

"Finding someone to replace Andrew Czorny, with his experience and knowledge, was a major undertaking," said Missoula County Commissioner Josh Slotnick in a statement. "We are excited about Jessica's background managing complex financial systems and the energy and ideas she will bring to the role."

Yang has served as director of finance for the Missoula YMCA since 2024. Her main responsibility will be to oversee the county's Financial Services Department, according to the Missoula Current.

"I'm honored to join the team and work every day to manage our resources responsibly while supporting a community I care deeply about," Yang said.

Yang earned both an undergraduate degree in business administration and a Master of Accountancy degree from the University of Montana.

POST MALONE AND JELLY ROLL SUMMER TOUR

Musical artists Post Malone and Jelly Roll announced Missoula's Washington-Grizzly Stadium as one of the venues for their upcoming tour.

The show is part of Post Malone and Jelly Roll Present: The BIG ASS Stadium Tour Part 2, which follows a successful initial run, grossing over \$170 million, according to NBC Montana.

The pair will be performing at stadiums and festivals across the U.S. and Canada.

Their Missoula performance is currently scheduled for July 21, but

tickets will be on sale Feb. 10, with artist presales starting on Feb. 6.

MONTANA DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION ANNOUNCED AWARD WINNERS

The Missoula Downtown Association gave out its 2025 annual awards to people and businesses who contributed to Downtown Missoula throughout the past year.

The Dan Cederberg Downtowner of the Year award went to Karen Sippy, who has spent years volunteering to plant trees and bring art projects to Missoula, according to the Missoula Current.

Funk It Coffee and Thrift won the Downtown Business of the Year award for its contributions to Missoula and status as a beloved community space.

MONTANA PALEONTOLOGIST NAMED IN EPSTEIN FILES

Famed Montana paleontologist Jack Horner, known for his work as a consultant on the "Jurassic Park" franchise, was among the names mentioned in the latest release of Jeffrey Epstein files.

In an 2012 email to Epstein's assistant, Horner thanked him for his visit and for "the girls."

"Jeffrey and the girls were very gracious hosts as were Brice and [redacted]," Horner wrote in one email.

Horner served as the curator for the Museum of the Rockies for 30 years, and previously taught at Montana State University.

Horner said in a 2016 People Magazine story that he was let go from the Museum of the Rockies after engaging in a relationship with a 19-year-old MSU student. Horner was 70 at the time.



This week on the Kaimin Cast ...

University of Montana classes have been back in session for three weeks, and the campus continues to see a lack of snow. Missoula, a town often snowy and cold, has had a warm spell.

The La Nina winter, an atmospheric oscillation, brought the precipitation, but the cold did not follow. A change in climate and patterns is occurring, and this means a change in what Missoula can expect from winters.

"We are seeing somewhat of that where the mean temperature is warming. But we're also seeing a shift so that the extremes happen more often. And so normal conditions happen less often and more extreme warm and extreme cold happen more frequently," said Anna Klene, a professor of weather and climate.

- Grace Golbach,
audio editor



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



ELLE DANIEL | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
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WINTER OLYMPICS 2026

With the first week of February comes the kickoff for the 2026 Winter Olympics. Held in Milan, Italy, the month-long gauntlet of sporting events runs until Feb. 22. While qualifying events started this week, the opening ceremonies will take place on Friday, officially beginning the international competition.

This year, there are 116 medal events and nearly 3,000 athletes vying to win them.

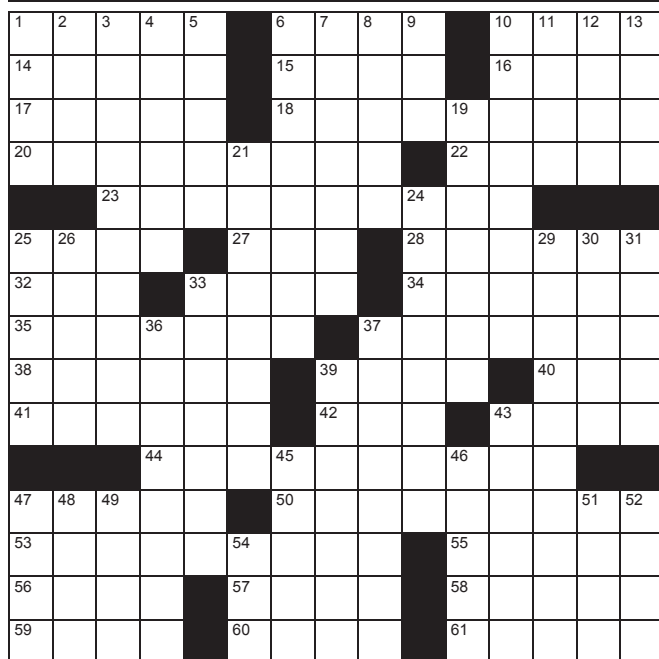
Among them is Zoi Sadowski-Synnott, competing for New Zealand, who was the first female snowboarder to land a triple cork 1440 in slopestyle. Figure skater Adeliia Petrosian is expected to be a wild card in the women's figure skating. The 18-year-old Russian was cleared to compete as a neutral competitor separate from Russia. The country is unable to compete due to the ongoing conflict with Ukraine.

In men's sports, the Canadian hockey team includes Sidney Crosby, Cale Makar, Nathan MacKinnon and Connor McDavid. It's the first time since 2014 that the team will feature stars from the National Hockey League. Other athletes to watch include Yuma Kagiya from Japan, a figure skater who took home the silver medal in the 2022 Olympics. He'll go up against American skater Ilya Malinin, nicknamed the "Quad God" after being the first and only skater to land a quadruple axel jump in competition.

GAZA CROSSING TO EGYPT REOPENS

Closed since May 2024, the only border between Gaza and Egypt reopened on Monday. The crossing, located in the southern area of Rafah, will allow Gazans to return in limited numbers after fleeing at the beginning of the conflict two years ago. There are also plans to allow for sick and wounded Gazans to cross for medical treatment.

A small minibus left from a Palestine Red Crescent Society hospital in Khan Younis carrying five patients. According to an article by the New York Times, the opening of the crossing is in part symbolic, a next step in the fragile cease-fire between Israel and Hamas.



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ACROSS

- 1 Religious groups
6 Exhausts
10 Gardner et al.
14 Squirrel's snack
15 Pelvic: Prefix
16 Netanyahu, informally
17 Golfer Palmer, to pals
18 Play down
20 Type of squash
22 Egg-shaped
23 Where the stars shop
25 Impose ____ on (outlaw)
27 Mine find
28 Bad atmosphere
32 Bell and Barker
33 Louder, in music: Abbr.
34 Chocolatier's machine
35 First hymn of a Mass
37 Manor workers
38 Brosnan TV role
39 Scads
40 Prefix with system
41 Big Apple river
42 Kimono sash
43 Put ____ in it: 2 wds.
44 Trucker's turf
47 Swiss miss of kid lit
50 Many-sided
53 On a downward slope
55 Old-womanish
56 French city once known for silk
- 57 "Welcome to" sign abbr.
58 Bamboo lover
59 Go on and on
60 Sgts., e.g.
61 Classic watch maker
- 24 "Survivor" idol
25 Simple-living sect
26 African language
29 Rising sharply
30 French thanks
31 Fiery felony
33 Cleansing procedure
36 Junk mail addressee
37 Olympic racers
39 Home of the Maple Leafs
43 Not written in key
45 Protestant denom
46 Slack-jawed
47 San Francisco's Nob ____
48 One-named Irish singer
49 Wedding words
51 Grocery chain
52 Hamburger grade
54 Former DWTS judge Goodman

DOWN

- 1 Swedish auto
2 Beige shade
3 Showed a difference
4 Moon of Neptune
5 Golfing legend Ed
6 "Les Diaboliques" actress Simone
7 Hints at, with "to"
8 Peter, in Poland
9 Shipwreck signal
10 Most importantly
11 "____ Las Vegas"
12 Beat anagram
13 Filly's father
19 Cold war foe
21 Adjust, in a way

Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

2016-o-scope

KAIRI LISING | ARTS & CULTURE REPORTER

kairi.lising@umontana.edu

The world is on fire and there's no escape. Well, actually, there is one thing. Regress back 10 years where everything felt awesome-sauce? Call this a #ThrowbackThursday. That's what 2026 is all about: mourning how good we had it. We were free then. Now all we have is nostalgia.

AQUARIUS (JAN. 20-FEB. 18):

You were that bitch. 2016 was your year of peak aesthetics. Chokers, millennial pink, skinny jeans and bomber jackets flooded your Instagram profile, all of it edited with oversaturated filters and cropped to a 1:1 Instagram square. You were the blueprint.

PISCES (FEB. 19-MARCH 20):

You were the rest of us were enjoying the last year of freedom, you were in the studio on your grind. SoundCloud was your canvas and your rhymes were your paintbrush. It was also something you never failed to mention. We got it then, we get it now. Please put the mixtape away.

ARIES (MARCH 21-APRIL 19): Back then, you thought you were the coolest kid in school, which isn't entirely wrong. You were the one kid who could hit a perfectly executed water bottle flip every time. Lunchtime was your time. Friends and foes would gather around the cafeteria tables to watch you show your skills. Let's be honest, you were so much cooler then.

TAURUS (APRIL 20-MAY 20): There's no shame in being a trend follower, and a trend follower you were. Pokemon GO was the driving force behind your 2016, and you made it your personal mission to complete your Pokedex. Well, let's just say you were the reason why there's a no trespassing alert when you open the app.

GEMINI (MAY 21-JUNE 20): You're used to being stiff and stubborn, so you were doing the mannequin challenge back in the day. I'm sure all your friends loved the million retakes while they had to hold random poses in your mom's basement just for a shaky video. You're persistent, I'll give you that.

CANCER (JUNE 21-JULY 22): #RIPVine. Back in the glory days, you could be found quoting your favorite Vines at the top of your lungs. Now it just leaves you with unanswered questions: You got a bae, or nah? What's

9+10? What are those? Road work ahead? Yeah, I sure hope it does.

LEO (JULY 23-AUG. 22): While everyone else was out enjoying what 2016 had to offer, you were locked in your room watching Hamilton animation videos on YouTube. Your obsession started slow, just listening to the musical every now and again. Then it consumed you. Fan art and fanfiction everywhere. Everyone else caught on later, but you were in the room where it happened.

VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEP. 22): Ten years ago, we had something real. Something worth our time. Stranger Things first came out and the world went crazy, you alongside it. Rewatch after rewatch, the show consumed your mind.

Thousands of theory videos later and now it's all over. Was it worth it? You already know the answer.

LIBRA (SEP. 23-OCT. 22):

You spent 2016 trying to get your Instagram followers up. Before the sophisticated algorithms of today, we had one method of being seen: hashtags. Let's be #real. It never worked, but that didn't stop you from trying. #swag #YOLO #goalsAF #beastmode #squad #bae

SCORPIO (OCT. 23-NOV. 21):

The same year Trump was elected (for the first time) was the same year we heard the phrase "fake

news." As someone who is the human embodiment of "hear me out," you went down the pipeline. Legend has it you still don't believe any news. I'm surprised you even have this paper in your hands right now. Keep reading! There's good stuff in here.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21): You were the worst part of 2016. I'm just kidding, but seriously. Why did you feel the need to don a clown mask and terrorize the locals? At any moment, we could find you on the side of the highway dressed like a circus freak. I'm sorry, but you were not scaring anyone.

CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 19): When you look back at all your photos from 2016, one thing remains constant. The puppy dog Snapchat filter. It was in. Every. Single. Photo. Almost as if it was superglued to your face. I would call you basic, but let's be real, we were all doing it.



BARRETT CLEMENT | MONTANA KAIMIN

UM's Chinese program faces cuts



COLBY SUKO-CLARK | NEWS REPORTER
colby.sukoclarck@umontana.edu

Professor Zhen Cao teaches students the symbol for "news" in CHIN 101 in Eck Hall 334 on Feb. 2. WESTON FUDGE | MONTANA KAIMIN

As the University of Montana's provost office continues to propose department cuts, the Chinese minor program is next on the Faculty Senate for potential removal from UM.

The Chinese minor program has been at the University since 1972 and would add to UM's growing list of cut departments. These decisions could change the dynamic of the University as more programs are dropped, which could lead to changes in credits and the requirements of other programs.

The Academic Standards and Curriculum

Review Committee held a meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 27, which included a 30 minute presentation by Zhen Cao, who is in charge of the Chinese language program. His presentation aimed to discuss the Chinese minor and whether or not UM should drop the program.

After Zhen's speech, the review committee had a five-minute discussion before ending the meeting. The discussion will be left on the docket for future meetings to come.

UM's Chinese program had seen strong numbers until 2015. Recently, he said, the Chinese program had 36 students. "It may not

be as high as 2015, but it's close," Zhen said.

Zhen went on to compare those numbers to other programs. "Russian has 40 students, we have four less, and they have a two-person faculty," he said.

The Chinese program also has some strong history. "I helped start the program at MSU," Zhen said, but while UM helped Montana State University start its own program, only UM is canceling it, which could affect enrollment numbers.

"There are students who come from Minnesota just for the Chinese major," Zhen said. This means that students who want to

go to Montana for Chinese will now be going toward MSU instead of UM.

Students currently enrolled in the program will be phased out over the next few years to have the opportunity to finish the minor. Classes will still be taught until then, but new students will not be accepted into the program. This is to make sure that the University sticks to its promises to the students that came to take Chinese.

"That conversion from the 100-level to the 200-level intermediate coursework is where we see a significant drop in student enrollments," said John DeBoer, the vice provost of academic

affairs. This drop-off rate has concerned the provost's office enough to decide to place the Chinese program on a moratorium. This gives the University the option to bring back the program.

The reason is to make sure that the University holds up its end of the bargain to students. "If we are advertising a program, we are making a promise that the program will be available, and students will be able to complete it in a timely manner," DeBoer said. "If we decide there is not sufficient demand or students aren't completing the minor, we have to make a decision about whether to continue."

However, this isn't the first time that the Chinese program has been on the chopping block. This is the fifth notice that Zhen has seen, but this one was slightly different. "Normally, the notice happens by the end of the autumn semester, but it was emailed on Jan. 7," Zhen said. "I thought I survived another semester, and then, I didn't."

While not typical, it is still possible for cuts like these to happen. "They can cut them up until the first week," DeBoer said.

The timing isn't the only thing out of the ordinary. "It's not a proposal, it's a notice," Zhen said, "I got a notice, classes cancelled." This is different from the other notices that Zhen has received since he started working at the University, which were only plans about the future of the program rather than dropping it outright.

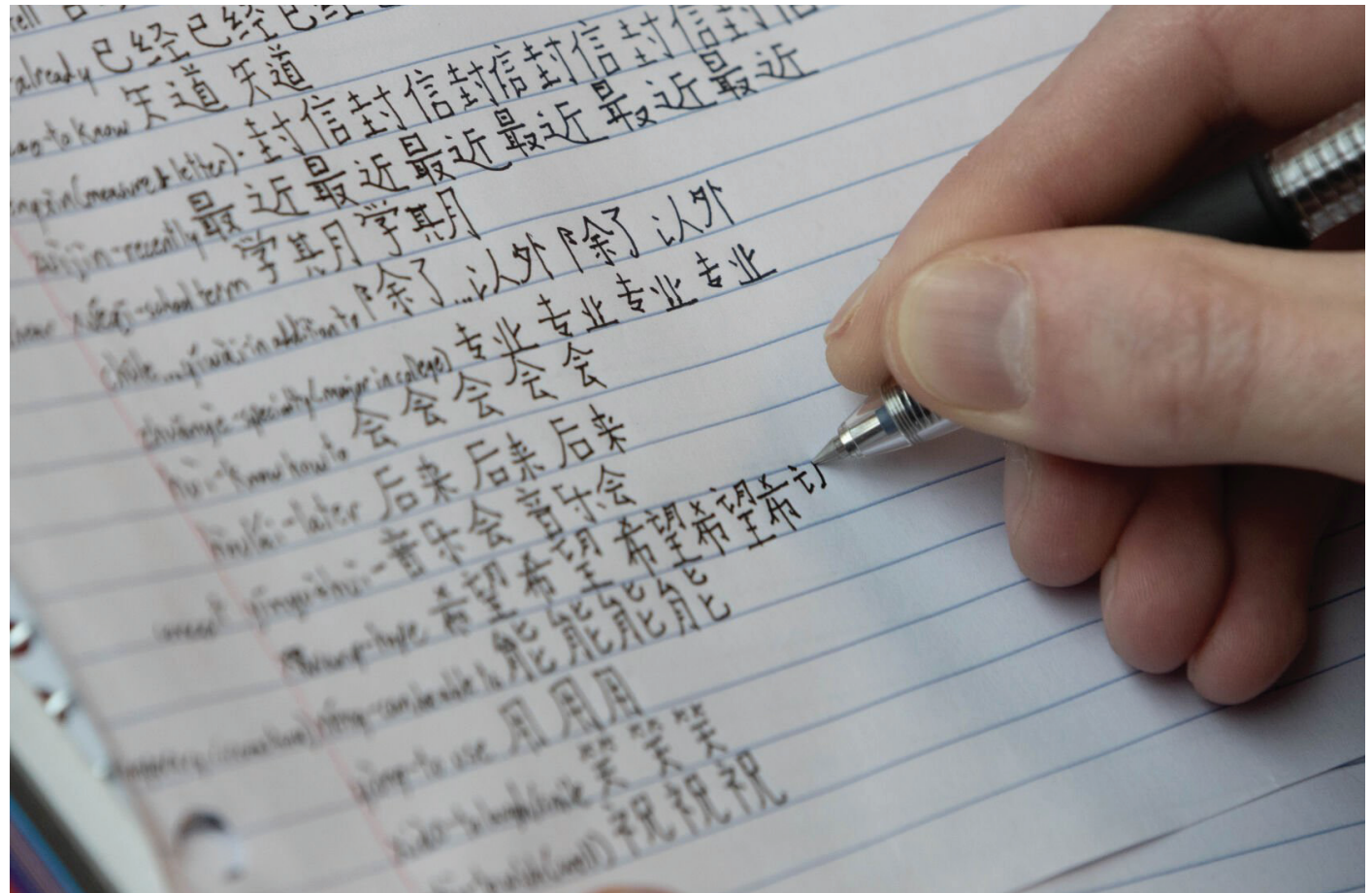
There were also other problems that Zhen raised when it came to the procedure. "I got outside offers twice, and turned them both down. The University promised tenure," Zhen said. But Zhen was never granted that permanency.

When asked about Zhen's claim, DeBoer said, "I can neither confirm nor deny that that happened." However, the process for a tenure professor is more complicated than a simple offer.

The dean of the college will submit a form to the provost, who will then approve the tenure position. Then, there will be a nationwide search for the position, including the candidates at the college, but also any individuals that offer an application. There is then an elimination process that determines the tenured faculty member.

Zhen also brought up another issue at the session. "I taught 18 students in Chinese III for no pay," he said. This was due to him being dropped down to part time but still teaching classes. "I cannot speak to personnel matters," DeBoer said when he was asked about the issues brought up by Zhen.

Zhen also mentioned his out-of-class work. "[I have] helped as co-director of the law program in China," he said. He eventually pulled out of this position because of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, but he also mentioned study abroad programs. These programs include partnerships with the W. A. Franke College of Forestry and the School of



Morgan Larson takes notes during their CHIN 101 class in Eck Hall 334 on Feb. 2. **WESTON FUDGE | MONTANA KAIMIN**

Journalism.

Because of his work, there were strong stances taken at the Curriculum Review Committee meeting. "I am filled with absolute shame with the process," said Scott Arcenas, an associate professor of history and member of the Curriculum Review Committee. "We shouldn't be dragging someone who is going above and beyond."

Arcenas also criticized cutting the Chinese program in particular. "China is pretty fucking important," he said. China has stepped up to be a global superpower, improving its economy to be the second largest in the world. "It's unstrategic and shortsighted," Arcenas said.

Even though China has increased its global presence, it hasn't helped enrollment in study abroad programs for the University. "We haven't had a student study abroad since 2019 in China," DeBoer said. This is another reason why the minor will no longer be available for the next semester. However, it has left many puzzled as to the source of the low enrollment.

"[COVID-19] is a real reason, but our geopolitical environment has changed substantially in the last 12 months," DeBoer said. Another issue that Zhen mentioned was the difficulty of getting visas for students since COVID-19. The National Library of Medicine stated there was a decline in visas right

after the pandemic, and that the numbers haven't reached the same amount they were before COVID.

Even with low enrollment, the program does have fans. "One of the reasons I was considering UM was because of the Chinese program," said Lance Schumacher, a freshman at the University. "I mean, I wanted to go into accounting, but with Chinese as a minor, it would help me get a job at a big corporation," he said. However, the decision to cut programs is coming down to preparation for the future.

"They are not a statement of value and they are not a reflection on anybody's past performance, they are simply our current reality," DeBoer said. This comes down to statistics about the programs as the future for enrollment seems shaky. "We are heading toward this place where there will be fewer students in the future, so our portfolio of programs is going to have to be tailored to meet that future," DeBoer said. This future will involve student input, but the plans have been set.

"We are clear in our intention as an administration. We are open to ideas and interested in feedback, but it would have to be something compelling that changes the data story that we are seeing," DeBoer said.

Although, since plans to cut the Chinese minor and the other programs are already in motion, it is unlikely for a reversal to happen.

Nevertheless, there is still pushback. At the time of the Curriculum Review Committee meeting, Zhen had yet to tell his students about the cutting of the program. "I am still trying to survive," Zhen said.

These decisions were made at a very chaotic time for the University. With UM President Seth Bodnar stepping down less than two weeks ago, some students are not sure about all the changes. "First Bodnar steps down, now programs are being cut. Everything seems to be going at a million miles an hour," Schumacher said.

This leaves the University in a position of change over the next few weeks as discussions about department cuts will continue in the academic standards and Curriculum Review Committees. However, the administration does have the future in mind for the classes being dropped.

"We don't have a time machine to change the past, we are only able to reflect on the present and reflect on the future that we see," DeBoer said.

DOWNHILL

University of Montana
students and Missoula
residents continue to
foster the culture of

STORY BY
AIDAN
GRAHAM

Telemark skiing is a type of downhill skiing where the skier's heel is free while the toe stays attached to the ski. The Missoula Telemark Challenge is the longest-running telemark race series in the United States.

Skiers at the University of Montana spent the fall months anticipating a winter of a lifetime. With the National Weather Service predicting a veritable “winter wonderland” alongside La Nina conditions, students prepared their equipment and wallets for the upcoming season.

However, as of January, barren, icy slopes have left many students with little but empty hearts and drained wallets after sinking thousands of dollars into equipment and passes at local shops and resorts.

The 1960s and '70s, referred to by some as the “Golden Age of Skiing” in the U.S., saw the construction and advancement of

many locally owned resorts in Missoula and surrounding counties, offering affordable and local access to steep, uncrowded and powder-covered terrain.

Today, in a turbulent economy, skiers and snowboarders face heavily increasing costs of resort skiing, equipment expenses and the

lack of consistent or predictable snow in a constantly changing climate.

While enthusiasts of the sport continue to face this ever-changing landscape and culture, a steadfast circle of UM and Missoula skiers work to foster an accessible landscape despite the trials and tribulations facing the sport.

RED SLOPE

skiing while facing
an unprecedented
economy and
climate

PHOTOS BY
WESTON
FUDGE

Through it all, the sport remains in peril, with many signs pointing toward a bleak future.

HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS

Across the United States, the slopes of family-owned resorts, facing unsustainable financial conditions, are being purchased

by larger ski companies — while others are forced to raise costs, pricing out locals.

Stella Dustman, a sophomore UM student working toward a triple major in environmental science, French and sustainability science and practice, joined the Telemark Club her freshman year and has been acting president since

the fall of 2025. Alongside her nearly 40 Telemark Club members, she's been a major proponent of creating an accessible environment for students to learn teleskiing, a technique that combines alpine and Nordic skiing, on and off campus.

"I love skiing, it's always been a part of my life and I'm grateful to be able to

say that, but it's definitely concerning to think about the fact that it's becoming increasingly difficult to access some of these hills," Dustman said.

The local scene has seen a dramatic shift from the days of cheap day passes, which have doubled in price locally over the past two decades, pushing out lower income

demographics, including many students. Now lower elevation mountains have shut their doors for good.

A TOP-DOWN PROBLEM

This year has been one of the mildest winters on record in western Montana, with December 2025 being the warmest on record, at an average high of 34 degrees Fahrenheit. January was not far behind. It was the second warmest on average, behind January of 1953, which had a recorded temperature as high as 56 degrees Fahrenheit, according to Missoula weather records.

This year is not a one-off season. In recent years, states in the northwest have seen a trend of warmer and drier winters. According to the 2017 Montana Climate Assessment, Montana's winter temperatures have risen by 2.5 to 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit since 1950.

As of Jan. 27, according to a report from NBC Montana, western Montana's snowpack remains below normal levels, with over half of the state's major water basins sitting under 90%. This is because above average temperatures are primarily affecting lower elevation basins.

Lookout Pass, a small, locally-owned resort on Interstate 90 at the Montana-Idaho border, has become well-known among skiers on campus for its financial accessibility. While a student season pass at Montana Snowbowl can cost UM students upward of \$730, the Lookout Pass student discount sits significantly lower at \$167.

While Lookout has applauded itself for its seasonal snowfall, averaging at an annual 400 inches, the 105-mile drive from Missoula makes it less accessible. For most students, especially during a mild winter, barren mountain faces and icy slopes make some sections of the mountain off-limits.

"I typically buy a Snowbowl pass most years, but I didn't this year since the price increased so much," said Ellie Dula, a sophomore forestry student. Dula said she is an avid skier who, during a typical season, attempts to ski multiple times a week. "This means I have to go to Lookout, where the season pass is much more affordable, but the drive is often too expensive due to having to buy gas."

The day passes in Montana once averaged roughly \$35 to \$40, but now skiers have to pay over \$70 at most local resorts.

In a poll produced by the Montana Kaimin on Jan. 17, over 80 students out of 100 claimed that the rising cost of the sport interfered with their ability to ski.

On average, according to ticket cost records, Missoula area resorts have seen an over 10% increase in ticket costs in the last year alone, a heavy increase compared to the current 2.9% U.S. inflation rate. According to a 2025 article from The Sunday Times, this has been a common rate increase at both local and major resorts.

At the same time, local and major resorts are forced to balance the costs of rising goods and services while attempting the costly endeavor of supplying recreation in deeply rural areas. According to economic data from 2025, the annual costs of



Zoe Barrett, a sophomore majoring in social work at UM, competes at the Missoula Telemark Challenge at Snowbowl ski hill on Jan. 29.

running a mid-sized ski resort can range from \$15 million to \$50 million, including infrastructure, energy, labor and insurance costs.

Additionally, as warmer winters continue, lower elevation resorts, such as Montana Snowbowl, have turned to snowmaking to ensure greater snowpack. However, snowmaking remains one of the most costly endeavors in resort maintenance. According to a 2024 eFinancial Model, the snowmaking equipment can cost anywhere from \$50,000 to \$3 million per season.

The Sunday Times reported one of the largest problems facing the cost of the sport is the consolidation of the industry by large-scale ski corporations. This is a point Elijah Kempf, president of the UM Freeride Club, a campus group promoting access and education on alpine and backcountry skiing, agreed with.

"The problem isn't really the local resorts, I mean, running a resort is expensive," Kempf said. "The problem facing the culture is really conglomerates like Vail and Alterra continuing to buy up our mountains. They're the ones pricing people out."

Through industry consolidation, where monopolies are built through buying out competitors, companies can choose to charge any price without the threat of competition. Currently, according to the Storm Skiing Journal, multinational ski corporations such as Vail and Alterra own over 50 resorts combined in North America, accounting for 14% of ski resorts in the U.S.

A single day pass at any major franchise resort can cost anywhere from \$150 to \$300. According to The Sunday Times, these rates are primarily to encourage the purchase of the Ikon or Epic pass, season passes allowing unlimited access to Vail- or Alterra-owned resorts that cost upward of \$1,500.

"Raise prices high enough [and] you have no choice but to buy a pass," Kempf said.

Moreover, whether or not some local resorts attempt to appeal to the increasing demand from skiers in the area is up for debate.

"I think that it's generally a result of rising [Gross Domestic Product] in the Missoula area," Dula said. "Especially with regard to Snowbowl and [its] ever-rising prices despite showing little to no improvement in terms of mountain services and upkeep. [It] seems to be continuously

capitalizing on [its] proximity to Missoula without showing any significant positive change."

Montana Snowbowl did not respond to request for comment.

According to the National Ski Area Association, roughly 60 million skiers attended resorts in 2025, five million less than the previous year. While the association has seen a gradual decline in skiers across the country, mountain access isn't the only thing pushing people away from the sport.

A POLE AND A LEG

Between the months of September and December, local sporting goods stores find themselves packed with students and locals ready to sink thousands of dollars into early season deals on passes and equipment. From skis, boots and poles to jackets and gloves, the cost of ski equipment can range anywhere from \$500 to \$2,000. As a skier's skill level increases, so does the cost of their gear.

Increasing demand for more complex gear in the United States, alongside 10 to 20% tariffs on European equipment manufacturers, has caused a rise in the cost of equipment, pushing many toward secondhand gear as an alternative.

“Things really are just more expensive, just like everything else right now,” said Zach Ford, owner of the Missoula Sports Exchange. “What we’re seeing is more of a social shift, where lower economic demographics are saying, ‘There’s gotta be a way around needing to have money to be able to do this.’”

At the end of Missoula’s Hip Strip, Ford, along with his wife, runs the multi-story sporting goods store offering equipment of all varieties, including winter sports gear. The Fords have been running the store for over 10 years, offering affordable access to a number of outdoor activities through discounted secondhand gear.

“I bought the store 10 years ago from the previous owner, because I wanted to see a shop that provided a little bit more affordability on the used gear spectrum and to give more back to the community on that end,” Ford said.

Ford said 55% of all store profits are donated to local organizations, with hopes that the money is recycled back into the community and the sport as a whole.

Across town, the University of Montana Outdoor Program offers students the opportunity to understand their equipment through classes and maintenance. However, due to a noted lack of visibility and mild winter season, some workers feel as though these opportunities go to waste.

Front desk worker, UM student and ski instructor Layne Rolston-Clemmer said he’s seen few visitors to the center.

“Over the time I’ve worked here, there’s been probably five or six people that have come in over the past month-ish to have their skis tuned. Usually it picks up when there’s actual snow on the ground,” Rolston-Clemmer said. Rolston-Clemmer has worked and instructed at the center

for over a year. “I’d say even if there was a lot of snow, it’d probably be three people a week, maybe five. Not a lot of people know that we actually do this.”

The center offers students the ability to tune skis and gear for \$5 per half hour without assistance, and \$15 with assistance. Students may also rent out winter gear such as snowshoes and cross-country skis, along with a variety of other types of outdoor gear.

“You know, as cooking gets more expensive, it puts more emphasis on some people to take care of their equipment, to make sure that they’re keeping in good shape they don’t have to buy more. It’s the same with skis,” Rolston-Clemmer said.

While local shops and services work to keep equipment accessible, other Missoula residents work to keep something just as important alive: the culture.

HONORING A LEGACY

As the outlook of ski culture in Montana continues to shift, many locals continue to work together to keep the sentiment of the “Golden Age” alive, both in and out of the University.

Marshall Mountain, a defining Missoula staple, ended its final season in spring of 2003. From then on, it sat as publicly accessible land for hiking, biking and backcountry skiing. Jackson Lee, parks manager at Marshall Mountain, has been a major proponent for the land’s development over the past two years.

“I think when we look at the Marshall Mountain model, what you had or you have here is this arc from what was a small resort to a shuttered property to a revived public mountain park,” Lee said. “So I think for us, it’s become this really great blueprint for honoring that outdoor legacy, and embracing the fact that so many people, so



Cross-country skis available for rent at the UM Outdoor Program located next to the Fitness and Recreation Center on Jan. 22. A cross-country ski package, which includes skis, boots and poles, costs \$22 a day for members and \$24 a day for non-members.

many Missoula County residents still really enjoy the all-season recreation experience up here.”

In 2023, the land, facing private development, was purchased in a unanimous vote by the Missoula City Council and turned into a public park. The land is now accessible for all-season benefits, with continued master plans to increase recreation while honoring the legacy the resort once fostered.

While this current winter has prevented much of the typical skiing, according to Lee, it hasn’t stopped people from recreating.

“I think when it comes to Marshall, we’ve really been leaning into the all-season benefits of this public park. Generations of Missoulians learned to ski at Marshall Mountain,” Lee said. “So I think what we have with Marshall Mountain Park now is an opportunity, not only to see that those learning experiences still occur here on the winter side, but also expand that to the non-winter side.”

Alongside the city, many UM students keep Marshall alive, with multiple student groups, including the telemark and freeride clubs.

“We see a lot of involvement from the student population up here at Marshall,” Lee said. “There’s also a push this year to formalize a rail garden, a freestyle park here at the base area, and quite a bit of the organizing effort around that has come from college-age people.”

Kempf, a UM forestry major with a minor in fire science, is one of the many proponents for ski recreation and accessibility at Marshall and across campus. Kempf, who founded the Freeride Club last year, claims he did it to organize a greater ski community on campus.

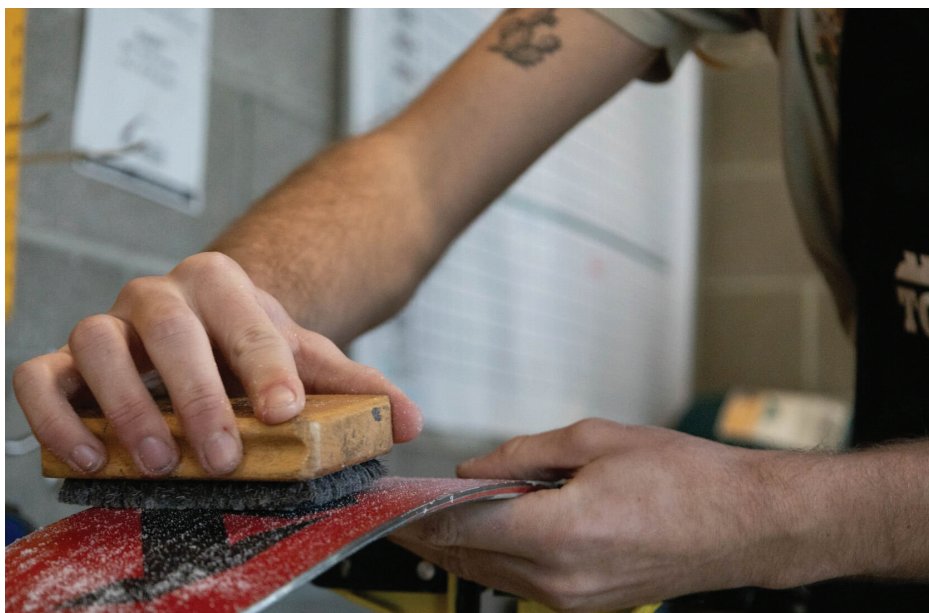
“I think if people want change they need to collectively make it. I mean, with an area like Snowbowl that charges you an arm and a leg just for the convenience, you can choose not to support [it],” Kempf said. “A place like Lookout might be farther away, but that’s why you rely on your community, and that’s why groups like freeride are here to, you know, bring those people together, and give them those opportunities.”

With the support of his club members, Kempf continues to create an affordable, accessible environment on campus for winter sports through ski convoys, safety courses, rail gardens and events such as the upcoming February rail jam on campus, which Kempf said will happen with or without snow on the ground.

Alongside freeride, Dustman and the UM Telemark Club have continued to foster the culture and art of telemark skiing. In collaboration with the Missoula Telemark Challenge and in addition to participating in races, the club offers its members free access to necessary equipment and entry to races, removing the financial barrier to many wishing to access the sport.

“It can be difficult as a college student, but get creative. Reach out to folks. At the foundation of all of this is the group of people in the community that we ski with and we enjoy being outside with, so, I think that’s the biggest takeaway,” Dustman said. “Those people will help you get to where you want to be.”

While an uncertain future remains in the foreground, UM and Missoula skiers have not only shown the importance of community reliance, but the hope that is shared through it. As long as snow continues to fall, one way or another local skiers hope to continue to shred and thrive.



Ethan Chatwood brushes wax shavings off of a pair of skis at UM’s Outdoor Program on Jan. 22.

Come along for a tour of the Butterfly House

BEE REISWIG | ARTS REPORTER

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You've been looking forward to the butterflies all month, to watch them eat flowers and diced bananas and experience the beauty of a creature that often exists for just a brief amount of time.

The University of Montana Retirees' Association tries to do an event every month, except for July and August. For January, you've decided to join the association on its visit to the Missoula Butterfly House and Insectarium. Despite that, you're running a little late.

"Keeping active as seniors is super important," says Daniel Doyle, a former criminology professor and current UMRRA committee member. "For psychological health, but also for physical health. And to the extent that we can do that through the UM Retirees' Association, I think that's a good thing."

Normally, this building is bursting with children running around and people of all ages excitedly pointing at exhibits. Now, it's a little bit more peaceful. You can take a deep breath and relax into this smaller tour. The location has brought in people like Patricia DaSilva, who's attending her first event in 10 years after retiring from the University as an administrative manager.

After joining one of the two groups, you follow Rob Taylor, the lead horticulturist, through the door into the heart of the insectarium.

Moving past insect exhibits and blown-up photographs with pops of orange and red among the mostly-green decor, you find the rest of your group filing into a space the size of a large elevator. Taylor holds one set of glass doors open for you. A second set stand closed just ahead of you.

Once everyone has shuffled into the room and closed the doors behind them, the second set is opened. A blast of warm humidity washes over you. It's not quiet, like the rest of the building has been. The heaters whirl loudly, keeping the huge room the right temperature for the tropical butterflies that reside there. Taylor puts on a microphone and grabs a rounded net cage that zips up on the side.

He walks down toward the middle of the room and the group follows, taking in the vibrant greens that cover the room. Plants of all sizes, some with bright flowers, fill the space. Little birds, button quail brought in to eat the spiders whose webs had started trapping butterflies, scurry at the edges of the cement path.

Taylor does a miniature butterfly release for the crowd. He explains that moths transform in a self-spun silk cocoon, while butterflies emerge from a chrysalis — an internal process that leads to the caterpillar shedding its skin.

As Taylor pulls out one of the butterflies



A butterfly lands on a visitor's arm at the Missoula Butterfly House and Insectarium on Jan. 29. TORI KUEHL | MONTANA KAIMIN

from their cage, he tells you that moths have been around for 300 million years. They predate the dinosaurs. He doesn't have any moths to release today, but that doesn't stop him from gushing about the nighttime creatures.

"I wish I had moths, love butterflies, but I love moths more," Taylor says. "I feel like moths get the short end of the stick with people."

As the demonstration continues, he uses a cheap foam sponge brush to gently hold the butterflies and set them on the leaves of a nearby tree. Touching butterfly wings is strictly off limits. Lepidoptera, the scientific order for moths and butterflies, means scaled wings. They are the only insects on the planet that have such a thing, and you have to be careful not to let the oils on your hand strip their unique characteristics away.

After a little bit of free time, you wander over with the rest of the group to look at a display of various cocoons, chrysalises and Lepidoptera of the past. They ask Taylor about where the butterflies came from and what that brown one over there is called — it's an owl butterfly.

There's so much variety in coloration. A

bright blue wing here, a zebra-striped set of wings there. You think about the fact that some species only live for two days. About 300 chrysalises and cocoons come in for the Missoula Butterfly House and Insectarium every Friday. They're shipped in from all over the world, and up to about 20% fail to emerge correctly, or at all.

The cool air feels refreshing after the humidity of the butterfly house. You look toward Glenn Marangelo, the development director of the Missoula Butterfly House and Insectarium. He co-founded it with his wife, Jen Marangelo, when the insectarium didn't even have a place to stay. Aquariums filled their house, and they set up a table at any event they could.

They moved into a place downtown before their current setup at the Missoula Fairgrounds. They were able to design this building to be exactly the way they wanted it. It flows well from exhibit to exhibit, and there are interactive elements spread throughout. You can find out how much you'd be able to carry as an ant, or look through a microscope.

There's such a variety of insects out here. You watch leafcutter ants march back and forth from colony to leaves, learning that they

do not in fact eat the scraps of leaves they so dutifully carry. Instead, it feeds their fungus farm, which they do consume. You crouch down and watch bumblebees crawl over one another on their self-built pile of wax.

Marangelo explains that Western black widow spiders, which are found here in Montana, get a bad rep. Sure, it would be pretty painful to get bitten by one, but it's most likely not going to kill you "unless you're already knocking on the door," according to Marangelo. But they'll usually only get you if you apply a ton of pressure on them, like accidentally rolling over on one in a sleeping bag.

As the other group emerges from the butterfly house, Marangelo takes it as his cue to wrap up the tour. Everyone moseys to grab their coats from the other room and chats about their experience along the way. The retirement association loosely plans for its next event.

"The adults that come in and really get to spend time get to see how amazing it is," Marangelo says. "It kind of brings out the kid in all of us."

And as you wander out, you smile and look forward to coming back.

'Heated Rivalry' avoids queer tropes

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HBO's "Heated Rivalry" had fans on the edge of their seats, watching its main characters gaze unwaveringly at each other from across a club while "All the Things She Said" by t.A.T.u played in the background.

"Heated Rivalry," a TV adaptation of Rachel Reid's book series, quickly dominated social media after its release. The series centers on multiple queer couples within the high-intensity world of professional hockey, but the series focuses on two rival hockey players who begin a sexual relationship that eventually evolves into a full-blown romance as the years progress.

After its release, "Heated Rivalry" gained millions of views, racking up nearly nine million views an episode. However, even with all the popularity of the show, it still could not avoid controversy.

Criticism has been aimed at viewers of the show, saying that they are fetishizing gay men by overly focusing on the sex scenes in the show and ignoring the queer representation that it brings. According to The New York Times, about 66% of "Heated Rivalry" viewers are female.

Famous love-based franchises that have been popular with female audiences, such as "Twilight" and "Fifty Shades of Grey," often depict relationships with very clear power imbalances. The relationship shown in "Heated Rivalry" is one that female audiences don't often see, a relationship built on desire, consent and power equality. However, queer viewers seemed to have a different perspective.

The show has received a lot of praise for its positive LGBTQ+ representation.



CONTRIBUTED | IMDB

Michael Legg, the artistic director at the Montana Repertory Theatre and a fan of the show had this to say about the topic. "It's romantic, which you don't

get to see a lot of in terms of media representation of gay men. So much of gay representation is about our trauma." Some of the most popular pieces of

media that depict queer people are "Brokeback Mountain," "Pose" and "Moonlight." These productions have provided the world with an inside look into the struggles that life can pose to a queer person, such as discrimination, homophobic violence and the difficult choice of deciding when and where to come out — if at all. Film and TV has long been plagued by the trope "bury your gays," when queer characters only have relationships that end tragically, often with one partner dying.

While queer representation that focuses on these harder subjects has brought great awareness to these causes by depicting the reality of what it is to live as a queer person, it isn't the whole picture.

The subject matter is informative to the public, but it is also very heavy and tragic, making viewing such shows difficult for some. Freedom from these stereotypes is in part what made "Heated Rivalry" such a popular show with viewers. It gave them a chance to see a queer love story that had suspense, love, sex and was free of the gut-wrenching tragedy that most queer love stories are steeped in.

The impact of the show has stretched past entertainment and into the professional hockey world itself. Former hockey player Jesse Kortuem recently came out as gay.

"I know many closeted and gay men in the hockey world are being hit hard by 'Heated Rivalry's' success," Kortuem said when asked about the show in an interview with Out Magazine. "I loved the game, but I lived with a persistent fear. I wondered how I could be gay and still play such a tough and masculine sport."

New climbing routes in the rec center have students stumped and pumped

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The University of Montana Fitness and Recreation Center added five new routes to its climbing gym, stumping students on how to summit the climbs while building physical and mental strength and relationships.

In the first weeks since students returned to the wall, climbers noticed some routes are more difficult than last semester. The new routes allow students to learn new climbing techniques, build different types of strength and build long-lasting connections with other climbers.

Trey Schreder, a student at UM, climbed a few routes before holding the rope for his friend. This process is known as “belaying,” an integral part of climbing most climbers take seriously to ensure safety. It also allows a climber to take a rest. Feeding the rope through the pulley system, Schreder reflected on the new routes.

“They’re fun, but some of them are pretty technical,” Schreder said.

Climbing can be split into three categories: top rope, lead climbing and bouldering. Each of the new routes vary in difficulty for both top rope and bouldering.

For top rope, grading follows the Yosemite Decimal System. The system ranks climbing route difficulty based on how much strength and stamina the wall requires, typically ranging from 5.0 to 5.15.

Routes in bouldering are graded on a range of V0 to V17 in the climbing sphere. The “V” stands for vermin, named after the nickname for John Sherman, a renowned American climber.

Schreder has been climbing for two-and-a-half-years. During that time he met his climbing partner, Nina Erving.



Nina Erving looks down at her partner as she climbs the new routes at the Fitness and Recreation Center climbing wall on Jan. 29. **WILL LADYMAN | MONTANA KAIMIN**

The two climb indoors but have also gotten into climbing outside.

Erving, an employee at the climbing gym and student at UM, scaled the wall as Schreder managed the rope to ensure she wouldn’t fall from the 50-foot wall.

Fluidly moving from hold-to-hold, Erving looked strong and confident. As she scaled the wall, holds became farther apart from each other, slowing her movements. Keeping her feet under her, she reached for a faraway hold and slipped. Schreder kept his grip strong, only allowing her to fall one foot.

“He’s one of the only people I’ll let belay me,” Erving said.

Erving is one of the climbing instructors at the recreation center, teaching introduction to indoor climbing, and takes the safety procedures of the practice seriously.

One wrong move or distraction, and people could get severely hurt or killed.

“I’m kind of a paranoid climber. There’s a lot of sketchiness that goes into it. I like everyone to know the basics and be safe with it,” Erving said. “We’ve had close to no incidents, and we want to keep it that way.”

The climbing gym offers a welcoming atmosphere, where experienced climbers often give new climbers advice. Whether that’s through lessons or just hanging around the wall, the climbing gym is a space for community.

“A lot of people come in having never worn a harness or have never seen climbing shoes, and by the end they can lead climb, which is super cool to see,” Erving said.

Parish Craighill walked into the bouldering gym wearing the new

climbing shoes he had just gotten at REI. Forest green with orange laces, the new pair helped Craighill stick to a new route he had been working on as his friends watched and motivated him.

Reaching for the last hold, he slipped and laughed. Different types of strength are used for different climbs, depending on the hold.

“This red V3 is way more difficult. It’s diabolical,” Craighill said. “While this blue one across from it, I could do hundreds of times before pumping out.”

“Pumping out” refers to when a climber’s muscles are so fatigued that they lose their ability to climb. Each hold trains a different muscle group.

A jug is a hold that tips off the wall and grants easy grip, while a crimp is a hold that is just big enough to grab with your fingertips.

The red route, mainly set with jugs that are far apart, trains arm strength and reach.

The blue route, mainly built with crimps, trains grip and finger strength, which Craighill naturally has.

A fellow rock climber and student at UM, Joe Biernat, stepped up to the route to demonstrate how to finish the climb. Keeping his hips to the wall, Biernat kept his center of gravity from pulling him off the wall.

The long reaches make it hard to keep the body close to the wall. Slowly and diligently, he made his way to the second-to-last hold.

“The second-to-last hold you’ve got to grab with your left hand to make the finish because it goes right,” Biernat said while finishing the move and jumping down to the mat. His friend Max Niemann, an avid climber, came up to Biernat and fist bumped him.

The group spent a full hour going back and forth on different climbs, enjoying each other’s company. The group said they come at least five times a week.

Griz softball set to kick off 2026 season

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The University of Montana's softball team opens its 2026 season in San Diego this week. It emerges with new faces set on putting last season behind it.

The 2025 version of Griz softball went 8-42 overall and 1-15 in Big Sky Conference play. This season, Montana's schedule is scattered with strong opponents, including University of Utah of the Big 12 Conference, as well as the University of Oklahoma, the third-ranked team in the nation in the USA Softball Collegiate Top 25.

Catcher Madison Tarrant, one of just three upperclassmen on the softball team, said she thinks the tough competition is good for the Griz because it prepares the team for the conference schedule.

"When we get to conference, we're more confident," Tarrant said. "So I really like that, and I think it's really going to benefit us for the rest of the season."

Tarrant, a junior from Phoenix, said even though there are a lot of new faces on the team, everyone is getting better.

"We've been working our butts off," Tarrant said. "I feel like this team has a lot of heart, and we're all really young. I think for this season, it's just going to be a lot of newness, but a lot of goodness if that makes sense. I'm excited to see what we do."

She added that the lack of cold weather this winter has really helped the team get quality practices in.

"Last year it was like negative 20 degrees when we got back, and we practiced outside one time," Tarrant said. "[This year] we've been outside pretty consistently, so I think that's going to make a huge impact on our gameplay, just being able to play outside and practice outside, so when we do get to those game settings, it's gonna feel a little bit more normal."

As one of the oldest members of the team, Tarrant said she sees herself as a leader for the new players.

"They're like my children," she said. "They have so much passion to play, and a lot of them just come to learn, and they want to learn from coaches, they want to learn from teammates. I honestly love everything about them, and I think they bring a really nice new personality to our team."

A big addition to the team this season was junior pitcher Kaiana Kong, who transferred to UM after helping take Western Washington University to back-to-back NCAA Division II World Series appearances. In those two seasons, Kong had a 31-3 record as well as a 1.42 earned run average, or ERA.

Kong said she is hoping to provide stability to the UM pitching staff that had the seventh-worst ERA in the nation at 7.88.

"I just want to be someone who can be in the game and just give the team a chance to win," Kong said. "Just someone that [the team] can rely on and depend on in those situations."

Kong said she is looking forward to getting on the road and seeing what the team can do, especially against Oklahoma on Feb. 13.

"We've had a lot of time to practice and to develop, and we're antsy to get out and play someone other than ourselves," Kong said. "We're excited for Oklahoma. We want something that's going to challenge us."

Even though she is a newcomer, Kong said her experience at UM has been great so far.

"It's been super cool, and everyone's been so welcoming," she said. "It's been really nice to have catchers who learn more about us pitchers, and for all of the rest of my teammates to just back me up has been really nice."

Being there for the pitchers is one of Tarrant's goals.

"I really love to catch and I love my pitchers, I think we establish a really good relationship," Tarrant said, adding that

she has help from assistant coach Megan Casper.

"[Casper] is like a pitching wizard," Tarrant said. "She cares about pitching, but she also cares about their personality. We go really well together. We always joke and say we share a brain cell, so I just feel like having that kind of connection with a pitching coach helps the connection with the pitchers be even better."

Along with supporting the pitching staff, Tarrant said she wants to help the whole team when needed.

"[I want to] continue to lead my team in the right direction and be that shoulder to cry on, that person to fall back on if things go bad or even if things are good," Tarrant said.

Tarrant said she is ready to get on the road sooner rather than later, even though it is tough to leave.

"It's definitely sad [leaving], we love the Griz community, we're so supported here, but personally, I love going to warm places," she said. "I love to see my family, to be in the nice weather, but I do also feel like we sometimes miss that Griz community, so it's like a double-edged sword."

SPORTS BRIEFS

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LADY GRIZ FALL SHORT

The University of Montana's Lady Griz basketball team lost to the Sacramento State Hornets on Saturday with a score of 64-57.

Mack Konig came back into the lineup for the Lady Griz after being out with an injury. This was the first time Konig took the court since Jan. 3.

The Griz entered the second half of the game tied with the Hornets 29-29. But the Lady Griz saw the deficit grow in the third quarter.

"That's probably the difference in the game," head coach Nate Harris said to UM Athletics. "We needed a couple more stops as we battled some offensive ups and downs."

The Hornets lead the Griz in both three pointers, 44.4% to UM's 26.8%, and free throw percentage, 71.4% to the Grizzlies' 50%.

The loss broke the Lady Griz's four-game win streak, their longest in two years.

SWEEPING IT UP

On Sunday, the Griz men's tennis team swept the visiting Division III Whitworth Pirates in a non-conference duel.

The victory comes after the team lost its home opener against Utah State.

Tom Bittner and Baltazar Wiger-Nordas defeated Ryan Ashley and Henry Preacher in the doubles round 6-1.

Then the Griz's duo Duncan McCall and Johnny Wilkinson beat Matt Froslan and Matthew Morrison, 6-1, to clinch the opening team point.

Bittner then went on to beat Morrison in two rounds, 6-2 and 6-1, to improve the record to 2-0.

UM freshman Matthew Upton took down Connor Judson 6-0 and 6-1.

"That was just what the guys needed. We were composed and had great execution. The guys were professional and did a great job from top to bottom. I think they all played really well and got to work on a few things, which was helpful," Jason Brown, UM's tennis coach, said to UM Athletics.



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Boondockers' is back

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Axe chopping, tree climbing and cow pie throwing — three essential activities for the annual Boondockers' competition between forestry and law students, to decide who will take home Bertha, the stuffed moose head.

The event, which took place on Jan. 28, is a tradition leading up to the University of Montana's Foresters' Ball. Earlier in the month, law students captured the forestry building's moose head, Bertha. The forestry school then retaliated by building a log truck inside the Law School. Boondockers' Day settles this built-up tension. Law students and forestry students face off on the Oval to either keep Bertha in the law building or return the moose back home.

"Boondockers' is kind of the first publicized time that the foresters and lawyers come together," said Miranda Allen, a senior forestry student and publicity officer for the Foresters' Ball.

The day opened with a demonstration from the UM Woodsman Team to gain attention from students passing by. The events included Jack and Jill sawing, stocksaw and springboard chop. Chloe Brown, a member of the woodsman team and a forestry student, gained interest in joining the team from the Boondockers' event.

"It was the coolest thing I've ever seen," Brown said. "So I finally got up the guts to join and found out that it's not as scary as it looks and it's super fun. I love it so much."

After the woodsman team finished its events, the games began. The lawyers took the lead after winning a word search, but forestry came right back after winning a trivia competition. The woodsman team then put on a show in a swing dancing contest. The foresters ultimately took home the win, giving them a 2-1 lead. It all came down to the cow pie throwing contest.

The cow pie throwing contest is a tradition where the deans of the forestry and law schools compete to throw a piece of cow manure at a target. The contest had a surprise appearance from Monte.

"Monte's always excited to throw cow pies, or do anything, really," said Karen Schlatter, a representative for UM's marketing and communications.

Schlatter has been an adviser for the



UM Woodsman team member Alex Kaper competes in the springboard competition on the Oval. Kaper's goal is to chop slits into the wood and then place the wooden planks in the stump to stand on. He then has to step onto the plank and cut off the top part of the tree stump.



UM forestry students celebrate as they win the Boondockers' event on the Oval on Jan. 28

forestry club for the past four years. She appreciates the uniqueness of Boondockers' Day.

"I mean, how would you explain this event to someone who wasn't from Montana? It's just so random," Schlatter said.

Ultimately, the foresters won. Law school student Thor Skjelver and forestry student Alden Whitney signed a contract stating "The Lawyers ("Grantors") who reside in

Missoula County, do hereby convey, release and forever quit claim unto the Foresters ("Grantees"), who reside in Missoula County, personal property known by the name of Bertha the Moose."

RIGHT: Thor Skjelver, a UM law student, gives a contract to Alden Whitney, chief push for the Foresters' Ball. The contract was signed by both people to return Bertha to the Forestry Building.



UM Woodsman team member McKinley Verhulst swings down to chop a stump in the underhand competition on Boondockers' Day.

