GEAR UP States Collaborate on Longitudinal Evaluation

Montana GEAR UP is joining 11 other states with GEAR UP grants to collaborate on a longitudinal evaluation of the effectiveness of GEAR UP, the nation’s second largest college access and readiness program. The newly formed GEAR UP College and Career Readiness Evaluation Consortium (Consortium) will work in partnership with ACT, Inc. and the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP), the lead training and technical assistance organization for GEAR UP grantees.

Recognizing the need for high quality research and evaluation to inform program administration, implementation and value-added impact, the Consortium will work together to adopt common standards, indicators, data elements, diagnostics, and data collection and reporting methods. The data alignment will help strengthen the formative and summative evaluation and practice of GEAR UP. The conversations behind the development of the Consortium started more than a year ago in response to requests from Congress and the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) for data on the effectiveness of GEAR UP programs. Although all states conduct evaluations of GEAR UP and report on common data elements in the Annual Performance Report, states were hard pressed to find consistent and comparable evidence about the efficacy of GEAR UP as a college access and success program nationally.

The Consortium will result in a rigorous evaluation of GEAR UP at a national level using common indicators. Each Consortium state will administer ACT’s EXPLORE, PLAN and the ACT assessments to all GEAR UP students in the state, in 8th grade, 10th grade, and 11th grade respectively. They will then share the results of the assessments, as well as the cohorts’ high school graduation rate of their GEAR UP students. The Consortium will also analyze the cohorts’ postsecondary enrollment data, as verified through the National Student Clearinghouse. Additionally, common survey questions will be administered in grant years two, four, and six, measuring GEAR UP students’ and families’ knowledge of postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing.

Most participating states wrote the Consortium into their 2011 grant applications. To date, twelve states have committed to join the Consortium: Arizona, Idaho, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, Oklahoma, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Two or three more states may join the Consortium later this spring.

(continued on page 2)

Student Loans and Repayment Schedules

BY CORY CHENOWETH, FINANCIAL AID MANAGER

Almost half of all Montana college students will take out some sort of student loan during their time in college, and the average total student loan debt for these students is about $23,000. This information probably isn’t new for most of our students who plan on going to college. It is important, however, for students to understand what their monthly payments will look like after they graduate and what type of income is recommended in order to comfortably make these payments.

To the right is a loan repayment chart that was put together using the loan repayment calculator from www.getmoneysmarts.org. Please share this information with parents and students when discussing the importance of applying for scholarships, grants, fee waivers, and loans. Also, students should reference this chart when determining what college they plan to attend as well as what major would be best for them. If you have any questions please contact Cory Chenoweth at cchenoweth@montana.edu or 406-444-0350.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Loan Amount</th>
<th>Number of Payments</th>
<th>Monthly Payment</th>
<th>Recommended Salary*</th>
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*Recommended annual salary based on 8% of income available for loan repayment.
GEAR UP Spotlight: Graduation Matters at Hardin High School

BY CORALIE TESCH, GEAR UP LIAISON

The Graduation Matters Leadership Team at Hardin High School has been working hard to gather data from students, present this information to stakeholders, and form partnerships with groups throughout our extended community. The group will present information to the school board this month and will have a community-wide stakeholder presentation in early March. Some of the established partnerships are with Little Bighorn College, the Crow Nation Education Department, the Adult Ed and GED programs, and we are currently looking to add many other local agencies, such as the county commissioners office, hospital association, Department of Family Services, the Kiwanis, the Hardin Chamber of Commerce, and the Crow Tribe.

The Graduation Matters Team at Hardin also applied for a recent $10,000 grant offered by the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation and distributed by the Office of Public Instruction (OPI). The goal of this grant is to provide an additional staff member for our after-school program, specifically working with students on credit recovery. Currently Hardin has a strong after-school program open to all students, which is funded by Montana GEAR UP. The overarching goal of the grant is to bring together community stakeholders and look at data and formulate a plan for reducing the dropout rate.

There are nine teachers, eight students, and the GEAR UP Liaison on the Graduation Matters data team. Junior/Senior guidance counselor Laura Sundheim leads this team. Ms. Sundheim conducted a needs assessment, which was written by the students to better understand who was dropping out and potential reasons. The team also used the My Voice Student Aspiration Survey to collect data on student perceptions of our school. The My Voice Survey is being conducted at this time, and data will be analyzed within the next month. The needs assessment was given to the students who dropped out of school during this current year, and responses provided the following valuable information:

- 83.3 percent of students surveyed regretted dropping out of school.
- Only 27.8 percent who dropped out participated in high school sports or clubs.
- 61.1 percent of students reported having problems making it to school in the morning.
- 66.6 percent said that they got too far behind academically to catch up.
- 44.4 percent planned on taking the General Educational Development (GED) test.
- Only 5.6 percent mentioned that bullying played a role.

When asked what would have kept them in school the following responses were the highest recorded:
1. Friends
2. Being able to work at my own pace
3. Role Models
4. Counseling

Of the students who did dropout 42 percent scored Novice on their last Criterion Reference Test (CRT) reading test and 19 percent had scored Nearing Proficient. In math students who dropped out scored 53 percent Novice and 21 percent Nearing Proficient.

As for age and gender, most dropouts were 16 and younger (44%) and most were in grade 9 (35%). 51 percent were female and 79 percent were Native American students.

Hardin High School is proud to be a member of the Graduation Matters movement in Montana. It further promotes our GEAR UP goals of increasing graduation rates, keeping students in school and promoting future educational goals after high school. The community partnership and data collecting and sharing are the most vital aspects of this program.

GEAR UP States Collaborate on Longitudinal Evaluation (continued)

The success of the Consortium is premised on key relationships with ACT, NCCEP, and DOE. ACT has offered to serve as the lead research and evaluation partner for the Consortium and has generously committed substantial in-kind research support to make this multi-state, longitudinal evaluation possible. NCCEP will serve as the managing partner and oversee the hiring of necessary staff and consultants to the project, seek additional foundation support, and coordinate the logistics of a multi-state partnership. DOE has been supportive of the Consortium and the states’ desire to pool limited resources to launch the initial phase of the project.

“We are thrilled to partner with consortium states in this effort,” said Ranjit Sidhu, the Senior Vice President for Strategic Initiatives at ACT. “Gaining deeper insight into the practices and interventions that improve college and career readiness, especially among low-income students, remains a vital need among educators and policymakers. This unique opportunity to examine practices and strategies in a wide array of educational settings has the potential of benefiting the entire education community.”

“We are very pleased to support the initiative demonstrated by this new coalition,” said Nathan Monell, NCCEP Executive Director. “The Consortium is just the latest demonstration of a unique characteristic of the GEAR UP community – a commitment to continuous improvement to ensure that federal education funds have the biggest local impact possible for our low-income, minority, and first-generation students. Together we are building a culture of evidenced-based assessment and decision-making.”

The work of the Consortium will be funded in its 2011-2012 planning phase by evaluation funds set aside by the member states. NCCEP has agreed to pursue foundation and corporate support to enhance the study and allow a more comprehensive look into the efficacy of defined GEAR UP program treatments and dosages.
Life After High School: Interviews with GEAR UP Graduates

Montana GEAR UP has been conducting a series of interviews in order to learn about the experiences of 2011 GEAR UP high school graduates. The third interview in this series was conducted with Dutton/Brady graduate Christa Carter. Christa is attending Montana Tech and is majoring in nursing.

- **How did you decide which college to attend?** Since there would be no point in going somewhere that does not offer what you are interested in, I first chose the colleges that offered my major. Then I had to do a process of elimination. I did this by writing down a list of pros and cons for the colleges I was thinking about attending. Also, I was thinking about how I felt when my school took me on campus visits schools around Montana. Luckily, since my school was part of GEAR UP I had the opportunity to visit almost all the colleges in Montana which helped me a LOT when I was deciding what college was the best fit for me.

- **Did you receive any financial aid?** Paying for college is hard; not everyone can do it on their own due to their family financial conditions. That is why I filled out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). If it was not for my scholarships and financial aid, I would graduate from college with student loans up to my eyeballs.

- **What influence did GEAR UP have on your college and career aspirations?** I honestly believe that GEAR UP helped me make my decision on what college I wanted to attend. GEAR UP offered so much information about college, the cost, what to expect, and how I could get help. But when it comes to the career aspect, I have always known what I wanted to do. Even though I already knew, GEAR UP reassured that my major choice would be the best fit for me by having me take interest surveys and job shadowing people in the career I chose.

- **How would you describe your first semester of college?** My first semester was probably the best first semester I could have asked for. My advisor helped me choose classes that I enjoyed, but also did not overload me with classes. This was very helpful because when you transition to a new surrounding it can be overwhelming, and if you have a lot of classes that are stressful they can add to the overwhelming feeling. Also I had all afternoon classes so I never had to get up early. Unfortunately, it will not always be easy as I am finding that out this semester.

- **What advice can you give about living away from home with a roommate?** Roommates can either make it a positive experience or can make it very uncomfortable. My friend and I requested to room together since we knew we already got along, so I do not know how it feels to live with a total stranger. What I do know is that it is a fun experience, and if it was not for living in the dorms, I would not have met more than half the students I know. One piece of advice, mainly for girls, you do NOT need to bring your whole room. The dorm rooms are tiny as it is, and a lot of stuff will just make it feel cluttered. Just bring the necessities!

- **So far, do you feel prepared academically for college courses?** Yes and no. Yes, because I had taken courses in high school that gave me a basic background for some of my classes that I am taking now. No, because I wish I would have known then how important it was to pay attention and retain the information I was being taught.

(continued on page 4)

2012 Montana GEAR UP Statewide Summer Camps

**BY JESSIE SALISBURY, STATEWIDE SUMMER CAMP COORDINATOR**

This summer Montana GEAR UP will be funding five academic enrichment summer camps. Camps are FREE to any student who will be attending a GEAR UP school from the 2011 grant as a 7th or 8th grader. These camps are an excellent opportunity for students to experience life on a college campus and a chance for some to experience life outside of their community for the first time. The table below lists the dates, campus host, camp theme, possible regional pick-up sites, and the maximum number of students each camp can accommodate. Applications for summer camp will be mailed to GEAR UP school liaisons in mid-March. If you have any questions regarding statewide summer camps, please contact Jessie Salisbury, Summer Camp Coordinator, at 406-444-0056 or jsalisbury@montana.edu.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>College &amp; Location</th>
<th>Camp Name</th>
<th>Camp Focus &amp; Theme</th>
<th>Possible Regional Pick-Up Sites</th>
<th>Max # of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 10-13</td>
<td>MSU – Northern Havre</td>
<td>GEAR UP + SuperCamp</td>
<td>Quantum Learning Network Program: Study skills and life skills!</td>
<td>Missoula/Libby/Browning Hardin/Billings Wolf Point/Harlem</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 17-22</td>
<td>UM Missoula</td>
<td>Digging for the Past &amp; Thinking for the Future</td>
<td>Creative writing, discussions with inspiring published authors, and archaeological digs</td>
<td>Libby/Pablo Harlem/Havre/Browning Hardin/Billings</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 24-30</td>
<td>DCC Glendive</td>
<td>GEARing UP for College</td>
<td>What is college really like? Experience a college semester in a week!</td>
<td>Missoula/Billings Kalispell/Shelby/Hi-Line</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 15-21</td>
<td>Montana Western Dillon</td>
<td>CSI: Birch Creek</td>
<td>Crime scene investigation including forensic science, research, history, and drama</td>
<td>Libby/Missoula Havre/Browning Hardin/Billings</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 15-21</td>
<td>Carroll College Helena</td>
<td>Preserving the Planet</td>
<td>Environmental studies incorporating writing, arts, and humanities</td>
<td>Libby/Missoula Havre/Browning Hardin/Billings</td>
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</table>
Montana GEAR UP Reminders & Upcoming Events

March 2: Local Summer Program Proposals for 2011 grant schools due to Montana GEAR UP. Please contact your school grant manager with questions.

March 5: Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship deadline for Montana GEAR UP seniors who received the Achievement Grant as a junior. Contact Cory Chenoweth at chenoweth@montana.edu or 406-444-0350 or with questions.

March 8: Montana University System, Student Financial Services, Scholarship Coordinator conference call, 12:00pm. To participate in the conference calls dial 1-866-200-5786 and enter the conference I.D. number 4432778 when prompted.

March 15: Governor's Best and Brightest Scholarship Program and the MUS Honor Scholarship deadlines. For further information regarding these scholarships visit: scholarship.mt.gov.

March 27: MCAN Education Call, 3:30 pm (MST). Topic: Career Development Facilitator (CDF) Training By Mary Ellen Earnhardt. For more information or to become an MCAN member visit knowhow2gomontana.ning.com.

April 12-15: Montana Indian Education Association (MIEA) Conference, Bozeman. For more information or to register for the conference visit mtiea.org.

April 15: Annual Performance Report (APR) due to the U.S. Department of Education.

April 19-20: Montana School Counselor Association (MSCA) Spring Conference, Bozeman. For more information or to register for the conference visit mtschoolcounselor.org.

April 24: Statewide ACT test date for pilot schools.

April 30-May 1: Montana GEAR UP Implementation Plan Workshop, Helena. GEAR UP teams are required to attend. Please call the Wingate to reserve your room at the state rate at 1-866-300-7100 and ask for the “Montana GEAR UP Block”. The meetings will take place at Carroll College.

Life After High School: Interviews with GEAR UP Graduates (continued)

High school is a time to have fun, but it is also a time when you have to think of your future.

- What has been the biggest challenge academically transitioning from high school to college? The biggest challenge transitioning from high school to college would be improving my study habits. During high school, I never really studied that much because a lot of the material was easy and the teachers in high school moved a lot slower than college professors do. When you realize that you or someone else is paying a lot of money for your education you tend to take it a lot more seriously.

- What has been the biggest challenge socially transitioning from high school to college? I have always been a very outgoing person and do not find it awkward meeting new people. Also, since I was in sports during high school, I already knew a lot of people that I was going to school with. My advice is to try to branch out and meet new people.

- What do you wish you had known before you started college? I would have to say knowing how to balance my homework, work, and friends. You find yourself in this bind when your friends want to go out, but you have homework to do and work the next morning. It’s tough to say “no” to your friends, but you have to always keep in mind that school is more important.

- What best prepared you for college? I grew up in a class C school. The teachers make you start thinking about college at a young age. If it would have been up to me, I wouldn’t have started thinking about college until my senior year. Junior high is when I started the GEAR UP program, which encouraged my teachers to get the students prepared for college. I am very fortunate that I had so many teachers caring about my future and wanted me to find the college that was right for me. So I would have to thank all my teachers and GEAR UP for helping me on my journey.

- What advice would you give current high school students? Don’t take high school for granted. You will appreciate the classes you take and the toughness from your teachers when you get to college. You do not have anyone telling you that you have to go to class or anyone checking to see if you are doing your homework. You have to have a lot of self-discipline to succeed in college. Also, do NOT go to a college just because your close friends are going there! If your friends are your true friends, they will continue to be your friends no matter where you are! My final piece of advice is apply for as many scholarships as you can! Free college is the best college there is, even if it means you have to write a lot of essays or spend countless hours at the computer. In the end it will all be worth it!

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Our mission: Montana GEAR UP believes that postsecondary education is possible for all Montana students, regardless of economic background. Montana GEAR UP supports schools, students, and their families to increase students’ college and career readiness through academic preparedness, postsecondary planning, and financial aid knowledge so that they may succeed in their education beyond high school.