Welcome from the Director

BY SANDY MERDINGER, PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Celebrations and Challenges...we are always faced with challenges and have reasons to celebrate. At this point in the life of Montana GEAR UP, this rings truer than ever. Currently we are in a state of transition, not knowing for sure where that transition will take us. Our 2005 state GEAR UP grant is winding down and we recently received a limited one-year extension; however, we are uncertain as to what GEAR UP services will be provided. These decisions hinge on whether we receive a new seven-year state grant. The good news is we will have an answer by the end of September!

Now that I’ve covered our immediate major challenge, I want to focus on celebrations from the last few months:

- The first cohort of students in the 2005 grant graduated from high school this spring and now many of them are off to college!
- The class of 2011 earned significant awards – 364 students were awarded Montana GEAR UP Achievement Grants totaling $546,000 and 48 were awarded Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarships totaling $1,065,600!
- 17 middle and high school GEAR UP local summer programs were held including the first ever out-of-state science inquiry program!
- 5 GEAR UP state summer camps took place impacting 257 middle and high school students!
- For the first time ever, Montana GEAR UP had 2 students selected to participate in the Youth Leadership Summit at the National GEAR UP conference!
- Montana GEAR UP submitted a highly competitive application for a new seven-year grant to ramp up academic achievement and college readiness for Montana students!
- In writing this grant we became more aware than ever that we have so many wonderful partners and supporters who believe that college is possible for all Montana students!
- We are transitioning the annual GEAR UP conference into the first Montana College Access Network conference and encourage everyone one to attend!

Regardless of where this transition leads us, Montana GEAR UP is proud to be a part of this incredible work and we wish everyone the best for the upcoming school year!

Two Montana Students Selected to Attend Youth Leadership Summit

BY ROSE BEAR DON’T WALK, ST. IGNATIUS HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR

Hey there all you newsletter fans! My name is Rose Bear Don’t Walk, and I’ve had the wonderful opportunity to experience a little thing called the Youth Leadership Summit (YLS). According to the NCCEP website “youth leaders, known as GEAR UP Scholars, work together to compile a Summit report focused on what educators should consider as they design strategies and programs for increasing student achievement. The culmination of the Summit is the presentation of the report to the conference attendees at the NCCEP/GEAR UP National Conference”.

The YLS is, in my opinion, one of the greatest leadership experiences for students. Being selected to attend this leadership summit was an honor I’m still proud to receive. When attending this summit, I was able to meet leaders and mentors from around the country. We were selected by expressing the educational issues that we faced in our communities. The main goal of YLS is to give students a voice. With that voice, we can create awareness for our needs and the solutions that can be achieved with GEAR UP. So, with the help of my fellow YLS scholars our moving, hard-hitting, presentations were born. This didn’t happen overnight. We spent hours and hours perfecting and fixing our presentations. Alongside the presentations, we were also asked to present a five-page paper that went into the issues and needs in greater detail answering the prompt “what are the toughest educational challenges you and your peers face, and what solutions would you recommend to overcome these challenges?” Spending hours and hours with such wonderful people, working towards a goal that was greater than us gave me nothing to complain about. By the end of our four days with each other, I had developed a special bond with many of the scholars and mentors that I will not forget soon.
Survey Says...

In the 2010-2011 school year, Montana GEAR UP high school students were asked whether they were on track to meet course requirements of a) the Montana University System college preparatory curriculum and b) the Montana University System rigorous core curriculum. The survey results are presented in the chart to the right. For the college preparatory curriculum, about an equal number of students indicated that they were on track (46 percent) versus those who didn’t know whether they were on track (44 percent). In terms of the rigorous core curriculum, about half of the students surveyed (53 percent) did not know if they were on track to meet the course requirements versus the 33 percent of students who did.

GEAR UP Spotlight: Lame Deer Coastal Ecosystem Summer Program

BY BYRON WOODS, LAME DEER HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE TEACHER

If you ask any of the nine students who participated in this year’s GEAR UP summer science enrichment program what a temperate rainforest is, they can tell you. They would probably respond with a statement like “it means cold and wet”. Lame Deer High School’s summer program, funded by Montana GEAR UP, took nine students to study the ecosystem and climate change along the most uninhabited stretch of coastline near the most northwest point of Washington State in the Olympic National Park. The trip required students to backpack with gear for a four-day, three-night expedition.

Our first stop was along the Continental Divide near Butte where we discussed tectonic plates and water drainage. We then traveled to Spokane, Washington, making stops along the way to discuss roadside geology and geographical features. Arriving in Spokane, students were able to explore the Spokane River and walk the bank up to Gonzaga University. The next morning we traveled across the Columbia Basin also known as the Channeled Scablands, an area of basalt formed from lava scoured by floods during the Glacial Lake Missoula Floods nearly ten thousand years ago. Then we headed over the Cascade Mountains and into the lush green metropolis of Seattle. Our first stop in Seattle was REI. Through the Gear Bank, students were able to use backpacks, sleeping bags, pads, tents, stoves, and rain ponchos free of charge. As we crossed the Puget Sound, the students roamed the ferry taking in the views of a disappearing Seattle and the ominous Olympic Mountain Range in front of them. Students then set up camp and tested the salinity of the water. All tests came back positive for high salt concentrations. Luckily for them we had water filters, and we set off to find a source of water and learn the principles of water filtration. That evening they cooked their own meals and watched the sun set over the Pacific Ocean.

The next day’s theme was tides, and we were able to observe firsthand the erosive power of the ocean waves and identify the different plants and animals associated with the tidal ecosystem. As we headed south, we had to the east the temperate rainforest of the Olympic peninsula and to the west the Pacific Ocean. Along the way we were able to observe seals in the kelp beds offshore diving and returning to the surface to eat their catch. Students’ journals were filled with observations and reflections. Students were able to canoe around the protected harbor of Neah Bay. As eagles circled overhead, the captain and guides told stories about ecosystems, traveling, fishing, and hunting in the canoes across Washington and into Canada, a tradition that is carried on to this day. Students explored the Makah Tribe and the culture, history, and artifacts at the local museum learning the importance of knowing your own history.

After eight days of science fieldwork and notebook writing assignments, two ferry rides, a canoe trip, 23 miles of backpacking, and a long bus ride, we now have a new respect for the people and animals that live in this ecosystem. Despite the cold and wet weather, the students were actively engaged through the multiple hands-on field experiences, and they are already making plans for next summer’s science program.
GEAR UP Statewide Summer Camps
BY JESSIE SALISBURY, PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Summer has come to an end, and as students file back into the classroom to share their summer vacation stories, the 257 students who attended one of the five Montana GEAR UP statewide summer camps will have lots to talk about.

The first two camps of the summer were hosted by MSU-Northern in Havre. These 3½-day GEAR UP + SuperCamps were attended by 70 middle school students (June 5-8) and 55 high school students (June 9-12). Facilitated by a talented team from Quantum Learning Network, these camps focused on enhancing academic and personal life skills. The approach to learning is creative, interactive, and proven to strengthen leadership, reading, listening, and study skills.

Dawson Community College hosted 53 middle school students from 13 GEAR UP schools at the week-long DCC + ME = Discovery camp, which was held in Glendive from June 19-25. Students participated in the full college experience compressed into a week.

From the admissions process through finals, campers were exposed to everything students experience at college.

Fifty middle school students attended the Carroll College: Preserving the Planet Environmental Studies Camp in Helena from July 17-23. This year’s camp focused on the preservation of our world and its cultures. Highlights of the week included: an engineering activity that demonstrated water filtering in the developing world and a pine bark beetle activity on Mount Helena.

UM-Western in Dillon hosted their third CSI: Birch Creek camp (July 17-23), which had a forensic science theme. Twenty-nine middle school students spent the week conducting a forensic investigation of a fictitious cold-case file involving a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) enlistee. To solve the case, students were introduced to historic camp documents, CCC history, crime scene investigative procedures, field observation, DNA testing, and collecting/identifying botanical evidence. Students also wrote an investigative report and presented their research findings in a symposium.

Montana GEAR UP statewide summer camps offer a variety of engaging opportunities on college campuses to students. These summer camps are designed to generate excitement about the option of attending college, and they work. Consistently over the years, more than 90 percent of students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that attending these summer camps increased their motivation to go to college.

Plan to Attend the 1st Annual MCAN Conference, September 19-20

Montana educators and education partners looking to find new and innovative ways to direct students along the path to higher education are invited to attend the Montana College Access Network (MCAN) conference at the Billings Hotel and Convention Center September 19-20.

With the theme “Building a College Going Montana,” the conference is focused on bringing educators together to share ideas and best practices, and hear from dynamic and inspiring keynote speakers, while the group works toward its common goal.

Keynote speakers include Ranjit Sidhu, Senior Vice President of Strategic Initiatives for the Education Division of ACT, Inc.; Montana resident Kevin Connolly, creator of The Rolling Exhibition; Paul Anderson, 2011 Montana Teacher of the Year; and Pam Krueger and Jack Gallagher, co-hosts of the award-winning public television series, Money Track.

As an added bonus to conference attendees, MCAN coordinated the conference to coincide with the Montana Financial Education Coalition (MFEC) conference, “Building a Money $avvy Montana.” As part of the MFEC conference, educators can participate in breakout sessions that provide practical information on a variety of financial education issues and programs, attend a resource fair and more.

Montana GEAR UP will sponsor at least two staff from each 2005 grant GEAR UP school to attend the conference. Please contact your school grant manager if you plan to attend. For more information or to register for the MCAN and MFEC conferences, please visit the website at: www.knowhow2gomontana.org/conference. We look forward to seeing you in Billings!
Montana GEAR UP Reminders & Upcoming Events


September 19-20: Montana College Access Network Conference, Billings. To register visit knowhow2gomontana.ning.com. Montana GEAR UP will sponsor at least two staff from each 2005 grant GEAR UP school to attend. Please contact your school grant manager if you plan to attend.


September 30: Deadline for entering local summer program activity information in GEARS for 2010-11 school year. Contact Andi Rankin at arankin@montana.edu (406-444-0674) or Jessie Salisbury at jsalisbury@montana.edu (406-444-0056) with questions. Montana GEAR UP staff will enter all statewide summer camp information.


November 4: Achievement Grant deadline for 2005 GEAR UP grant juniors to submit applications to liaison. Contact Cory Chenoweth at 406-444-0350 or cchenoweth@montana.edu with questions. Applications will be available October 1.

November 14: Achievement Grant deadline for 2005 GEAR UP grant schools to submit applications to Montana GEAR UP.

GEAR UP Spotlight: Harlem High School Parental Engagement

BY JAMES HODGSON, GEAR UP LIAISON

Harlem High School, like many schools, has traditionally had problems with parental involvement. For many years, parents only came into the school for parent-teacher conferences, or to visit the principal because their child was in some sort of trouble.

Over the past several years, we have been brainstorming ideas to bring parents into the building. The idea began with parent-teacher conferences and expanded from there. We began by making the conferences a celebration rather than something that was dreaded. With the help of GEAR UP, we began by offering incentives such as food. This was an instant hit, and our participation at conferences increased right away. Our last PTC was attended by 88% of our parents! We decided to push this idea even further, and we started our family fun nights. A committee was formed and meets each month to plan our theme and menu at least one month in advance. Fun nights kick off right away at the beginning of the year, and each month we focus on something different. During the night, we offer a full meal ranging from having a Taco Cart, to having a full turkey and dressing dinner. We also offer prizes during the night and those differ throughout the year as well.

We look for themes that will attract the most parents, students, and teachers. At first, teacher buy in was not that great. It was viewed as another time-consuming evening event. Over the past few years, more and more teachers are not only participating, but also helping plan and implement the fun nights.

Examples of our fun nights include: family literacy night, Native pipe making showcase, career night, math bingo, and financial aid night to name a few. Our record turnout was almost 300 people for our November fun night. Harlem is always looking for new ways to bring parents into the building for positive events other than sports and we will continue to keep the new ideas rolling in.

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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.