



The University of Montana Western Campus Report

DATE: August 2025

TO: Board of Regents

FROM: Michael Reid, Chancellor

RE: Campus Report for the September Board of Regents' Meeting

- **UMW Biology Professor Awarded NSF Grant to Study Chronic Wasting Disease**

Dr. Kyle Richardson, Assistant Professor of Biology at the University of Montana Western, has been awarded a \$350,721 National Science Foundation grant to study environmental transmission of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in Montana's deer, elk, and moose. The three-year project will investigate how prions—misfolded proteins causing this fatal neurological disease—may persist and spread through soil, vegetation, and water contaminated by infected carcasses.

Research will focus on contamination sources, links to disease prevalence, and environmental factors that break down prions. Students will play a key role, participating in fieldwork, lab analysis, and data collection, with up to three hired annually as paid research technicians. The project will also involve collaboration with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, private landowners, and scientists statewide and abroad, contributing both to wildlife conservation and UMW's hands-on learning mission.

- **New Wellness Center Opens on UMW Campus**

The University of Montana Western officially opened its new Wellness Center on August 18, marking an exciting addition to campus resources focused on student health and well-being. Located next to the Bulldog Athletic Recreation Center (BARC), this 5,550-square-foot facility features state-of-the-art fitness equipment, flexible workout spaces, and quiet zones designed to support both physical and mental wellness. The center offers students, faculty, and staff a welcoming environment to prioritize healthy lifestyles and foster a stronger sense of community.

Its modern design and comprehensive amenities reflect UMW's commitment to enhancing the overall college experience by promoting balance and well-being. As the academic year progresses, students and staff are encouraged to take full advantage of this new facility to support their health and success.

- **Montana Western Announces 2025–26 Bank of Commerce Performing Arts Series**

The University of Montana Western's Fine Arts Department has announced the 2025–26 Bank of Commerce Performing Arts Series, offering a vibrant mix of Mainstage and Youth Season productions.

The Mainstage lineup includes UMW Drama Club's Sunday Night Improv, *The Laramie Project* and its sequel, *The Country Wife: A Modernized Staged Reading*, and *The Play That Goes Wrong*.

The Youth Season features *Red Riding Hood*, *Jabberdoggy: And Other Made-Up Words*, *Richard III*, *The Secret Garden*, and *Willy Wonka*.

The series showcases local talent, fosters creativity, and connects the Dillon community through live performance, continuing UMW's mission of inspiring storytelling and accessible theater.

- **UMW Kicks Off New Academic Year with Orientation Weekend**

The University of Montana Western welcomed new first-year and transfer students to campus during New Student Orientation, held August 14–17.

Over four days, students connected with peers, faculty, and staff through interactive sessions, team-building activities, and outdoor adventures, helping them prepare for academic success and campus life.

Highlights included Move-In Day, Convocation, the Legacy Plaza Ceremony, and the Welcome Lunch. Students also enjoyed hiking to the “M,” axe throwing, floating the Beaverhead River, and the Bulldog Feast. Orientation introduced students to UMW’s Experience One model and fostered a strong sense of community.

- **Montana Western Men’s Rodeo Team Finishes Third Nationally at CNFR**

The Montana Western men’s rodeo team placed third in the nation at the College National Finals Rodeo, with Gavin Knutson earning the reserve champion bull rider title after posting a 221.5 average.

Kyler Erickson and Cole Trexler won the team roping short round and finished third nationally, while Jake Deveraux placed 14th in tie-down roping. Trevor Kay had a strong start in bareback riding but was sidelined by injury.

On the women’s side, Laura Haight placed 14th in barrel racing, Tavy Leno finished 45th in goat tying, and Charlee Resch and Tynell McInenly competed in breakaway roping. The women’s team placed 21st overall.

- **Montana Western Announces 33rd Annual Bulldog Bash**

The University of Montana Western Foundation and Athletics will host the 33rd Annual Bulldog Bash on October 11, 2025, in the Keltz Arena.

The day will begin with a community tailgate and the Montana Western vs. Carroll College football game, followed by an evening celebration featuring dinner, a student-athlete speaker, and a video spotlighting football player Jack Kirkley and volleyball player Jordan Olson.

Guests can participate in silent and live auctions, with proceeds benefiting scholarships and program enhancements for student-athletes. The Bulldog Bash offers alumni, boosters, families, and community members an opportunity to connect and show their support for UMW Athletics.

- **Bulldog Volleyball Earn Frontier Conference Character Honors**

Montana Western head volleyball coach Katie Lovett was named Frontier Conference Coach of Character, and the Bulldog women's volleyball team earned the Women's Team of Character award.

Lovett led the Bulldogs to their most successful season in program history while fostering a character-first culture through leadership initiatives, peer-led presentations, and community engagement.

Her team is deeply involved in mentoring youth athletes and supporting local causes. The Bulldogs were recognized for their servant leadership and participation in awareness events like "Walk a Mile in Her Shoes" and the Color Fun Run. Their season included a historic home playoff win and notable displays of sportsmanship.

- **Alumni Spotlight: Building a Life Rooted in Hard Work and Community**

Michael Bennett, a 2018 Montana Western graduate, came to UMW for football and the unique block system but found much more: lifelong friendships, purpose, and a home. Struggling in high school, football and supportive professors helped him grow.

Today, he owns Maverick Metalworks LLC in Dillon, creating custom metalwork with pride in community service. His business and communication skills, honed at UMW, especially through digital media classes, have been crucial. Living in Dillon with his family, Michael remains connected to the university.

His advice to students: embrace every moment—you'll miss it. Montana Western gave him more than a degree; it gave him a foundation for life.

- **Fifth Annual Beaverhead Treasure Hunt Wraps Up Celebrating Art and Community**

The Fifth Annual Beaverhead Treasure Hunt concluded this summer, celebrating a beloved Montana tradition. Hosted by the Beaverhead Chamber of Commerce and the University of Montana Western's Glass Program, approximately 200

unique Montana Stepping Stones—hand-crafted glass art by UMW student artists—were hidden across Beaverhead County.

Participants discovered these colorful treasures at local businesses and historic sites, then entered a drawing for \$100 in Chamber Bucks. The event highlighted creativity, community, and adventure, drawing both visitors and locals to explore and enjoy the county's artistic spirit and scenic landmarks throughout the season.