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Director's Note

Friends and Colleagues,

Another school year is rushing by and we're rapidly approaching the holiday break. As I reflect on this, I'm struck by the parallels between Christmas and the work we do in education and college access. Thus, I thought it might be fitting to provide a Christmas-themed message for this edition of the GEAR UP newsletter. While the words below are most often associated with Christmas, they can just as easily be associated with education and college access.

Hope: Education provides hope for students all over the world. In our work, we strive to provide hope to students who often have little. As we help our students develop the skills and knowledge necessary for college enrollment and success, we help them see that there's hope for a better future. The parents of our students hope for a better future for their children, but often don't have the knowledge and resources to help them navigate the path to college. Our schools, teachers and programs help our students reach their college hopes and dreams.

Giving: Our teachers, administrators, staffs and other practitioners give selflessly of their time and energy to empower their students and help them reach their full potential. As a former teacher and TRIO Upward Bound Coordinator, I know firsthand all the ways that educators are asked to give beyond their professional knowledge and expertise. Whether it's spending extra time helping students finish assignments, attending extracurricular activities, helping students fundraise, giving students rides home, making evening phone calls to parents, or giving a little more in countless other
ways, it's mostly done freely, unconditionally and without complaint. Thanks to all who do a little more in the spirit of giving so their students can be their best.

**Joy:** The most joyful moments in education occur when we know we've helped a student understand a concept, develop a newfound confidence, appreciate a new perspective, make a better decision, or reach a goal. Most of these moments don't come easily and without trials and tribulations, or bumps in the road. Yet these moments of joy and the experience of helping students achieve is a major motivator for all of us in our choice to do what we do. In the spirit of Christmas, let's remember all the achievements of our students and find joy in the fact that we helped them get there.

**Blessings:** As GEAR UP Director, I'm so thankful for my colleagues, and our partners. They provide me support and inspiration daily and remind me that I'm fortunate to work with so many amazing people. It's truly a blessing to be part of a community of amazingly skilled and passionate educational practitioners.

Thanks for all that you give in helping our students achieve their goals and providing hope to them and their families. May you find joy in their many accomplishments. I very much feel blessed to partner with you in this amazing work. Happy holidays!

Respectfully,

Zach Hawkins
Director, Montana GEAR UP

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**Angela McLean Coming to OCHE**

Lieutenant Governor Angela McLean has recently accepted a position with the Commissioner's Office as the Director of American Indian and Minority Achievement (AIMA) starting in January. As part of an organizational reorganization, GEAR UP and Educational Talent Search will now report to the AIMA Director. We look forward to working with Ms. McLean as we do this important work for our students. Her leadership and experience will be valuable as we continue improving our program and collaborating with partners and stakeholders.

Prior to serving as Lt. Governor, Ms. McLean taught History and Government at Anaconda High School and served as the Chair of the Board of Regents. She has also served on the Board of Public Education. Ms. McLean hails from Twin Bridges and was the first in her family to earn a college degree, graduating from UM Western. She also holds an MA from the University of Montana. She brings a great mix of knowledge and passion for education and minority achievement to OCHE and GEAR UP. We are excited to have her on our team. Welcome Angela!

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**2015 Montana College Application Week**

By all measures, 2015 College Application Week (CAW) was a success.
120 Montana High Schools signed up to participate during the week of November 2-6. Students who applied during that time received structured support at school from counselors, volunteers and other school staff. They also had the opportunity to have the application fee waived or deferred for one of the Montana postsecondary institutions to which they applied. With a few post-secondary schools still to report their numbers, GEAR UP can report that nearly 3000 applications were submitted from students in schools that participated in CAW. That’s nearly 300 additional applications from 2014, and almost 60% above those submitted in 2013. Thanks to the support at your schools, and the creation of a college-going culture by school staff, more students than ever will have completed the first step in getting into college.

All Montana postsecondary institutions participated, including 4-year public schools, 4-year private schools, 2-year schools, and tribal colleges. This was truly a statewide initiative supported by OPI, the Governor’s office, Montana College Access Network (MCAN), and the Student Assistance Foundation. All 50 states now participate in College Application Week, but not necessarily at the same time in each state. The President also declared November College Application Month.

80% of students who responded to the exit survey stated that they qualified for the Free and Reduced lunch program. 54% stated that CAW had a large or significant impact on students in promoting a college-going culture.

**Students Said...**

“I think this is a wonderful opportunity. It makes it far easier for students who might not otherwise have the money, resources, knowledge, time, confidence, or support far more likely to utilize this chance to apply to college.”

“It was nice to have help throughout the application process, it was much needed.”

“I appreciate that this week is available for us. The school I want to go to does not give out application fee waiver codes. So if it wasn’t for this week, I probably would not be applying for the school I really want.”

**Site Coordinators Said...**

“[Only] 10% of our seniors would apply if it wasn’t for CAW.”

“Giving them time to complete the application as well as being available to answer questions was the most important practice. Also, simplifying the application helps get through it quicker...”
7th Year Services: Campus Peer Mentor Program for First Year College Students

Peer mentors have been hired at Montana State University - Bozeman, Montana State University - Billings and the University of Montana. The peer mentors are excited to begin working with GEAR UP freshman and help support students in their first year of college. Each peer mentor will provide a variety of services to students, including: stress management, study tips, note taking, access to campus resources, time management, homesickness and general support. Encourage your 2015 graduates to reach out to their campus peer mentor for guidance, support or general questions.

Montana State University - Bozeman, Office of American Indian/Alaska Native Student Success & Department of Engineering's Empower Program: Cheyenne Stevens, graduate student pursing a master's degree in Native American Studies

Montana State University - Billings, American Indian Outreach Office: Kaja Anderson, senior double majoring in History and Native American Studies

University of Montana, American Indian Student Services: Crystal Whiteshield, senior majoring in Business Administration

Feel free to contact a campus peer mentor to speak to your middle school or high school students when you are on campus for a visit. They are very excited to help in any way possible!

SignalVine Text Messaging

January marks the start of the 2016 senior GEAR UP student text messaging campaign. Students who have elected to participate in the messaging service will begin receiving text messages approximately twice a month. Messages will be focused on financial aid, scholarships, FAFSA completion, college next steps, orientation, housing and important deadlines. Please encourage your students to utilize this service and to fill out a SignalVine sign up card.

New this year, we are very excited to offer a text messaging track for parents! Parents will also receive texts about financial aid, scholarships and important next steps. Participants will also have the ability to text GEAR UP with questions!

If you have questions or need student or parent sign up cards, please contact Jamie at 406-444-0350 or jjones@montana.edu.

2016 Statewide Summer Camp RFP Now Available

It's hard to believe, but it's already time to start thinking about summer. We
all know students experience learning losses when they do not engage in summer educational activities. Therefore, Montana GEAR UP would like to invite you to join us in an effort to provide academically enriching summer programming during the summer of 2016 for GEAR UP students across the state.

We will consider proposals that provide GEAR UP students entering grades 7-12 with:

- Learning situations that are both stimulating and age-appropriate opportunities in one or more of the following academic content areas: language arts/writing, social studies, mathematics, or science;
- Opportunities to advance their knowledge of or skills set through one or more of the following learning contexts: technology, environment, the arts, career awareness, or Native American culture; and
- Experiences that develop their understanding of and confidence with all four components of the college-bound process: academic, financial, emotional and social.

Proposals may include:

- Residential summer programs on the campus of a postsecondary institution
- Partnerships with existing, reputable summer programs held on or off campus (e.g., purchasing slots for GEAR UP students)
- New innovative summer enrichment programs

If you are interested in providing academic summer programming for GEAR UP students, please complete the RFP on our website [here](#) and return it to Montana GEAR UP by February 12, 2016.

Montana GEAR UP students participated in 10 statewide summer camps in 2015.

**Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship Application**

It’s scholarship time! The Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship is currently worth up to a total of $23,100 and the application is now available! The scholarship may be used to cover the student’s cost of attendance (tuition, fees, books/materials, room, meal plans, etc...) at any U.S. accredited college or university that awards an associate degree or higher.
Eligible students can apply online [here](https://ui.constantcontact.com/visualeditor/visual_editor_preview.jsp?agent.uid=1122385902302&format=html&print=true). Students who earned the Achievement Grant as a junior, are enrolled in a 2005 GEAR UP school as a senior, are on-track to graduate under the MUS college prep curriculum with a 2.5 GPA, and are Pell Grant eligible are encouraged to apply for the Pathways Scholarship. If you have questions, contact Jamie at 406-444-0350 or jjones@montana.edu. Scholarship applications, 7th semester transcripts, projects, essays, and student aid reports are due March 3, 2016.

### Upcoming Events & Deadlines

#### Professional Development Opportunities

- February 1-2: [OPI Assessment/Data Conference - Missoula](https://ui.constantcontact.com/visualeditor/visual_editor_preview.jsp?agent.uid=1122385902302&format=html&print=true)
- February 21-23: [OPI Indian Education for All Best Practices Conference - Billings](https://ui.constantcontact.com/visualeditor/visual_editor_preview.jsp?agent.uid=1122385902302&format=html&print=true)
- February 21-23: [Montana College Access Network Conference (MCAN) - Fairmont Hot Springs, MT](https://ui.constantcontact.com/visualeditor/visual_editor_preview.jsp?agent.uid=1122385902302&format=html&print=true)
- April 21-24: [Montana Indian Education for All (MIEA) Conference - Great Falls](https://ui.constantcontact.com/visualeditor/visual_editor_preview.jsp?agent.uid=1122385902302&format=html&print=true)

#### GEAR UP School Reminders

- December 31: Services due in GEARS
- January 11: Educator Survey opens
- January 27: [MT GU Winter Liaison Meeting](https://ui.constantcontact.com/visualeditor/visual_editor_preview.jsp?agent.uid=1122385902302&format=html&print=true)
- January 29: Mid-Year IP Progress Report, Quarterly Fiscal Report,
and services in GEARS due
- **January 31-February 3:** [NCCEP/GEAR UP Capacity Building Workshop - New Orleans, LA](#)
- **February 29:** GEARS student performance data and services due for APR
- **February 29:** Educator Survey closes
- **March 3:** Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship applications due
- **March 4:** Local summer program proposals due
- **March 31:** March services due in GEARS
- **March 31:** State Summer Camp registration begins

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**Montana GEAR UP**  
(Gaining Early Awareness & Readiness for Undergraduate Programs)  
*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.*

2500 Broadway  
PO Box 203201  
Helena, MT 59601  
406.444.0056  
mus.edu/gearup