The first year of the pilot program for MPACT (Montana Partnering for Affordable College Tuition) was a success. Sixty-five students qualified for MPACT for fall semester 2006, out of which sixty returned for spring semester—a retention rate of almost 90 percent! By May of 2007, 63 students had already been identified as potential award recipients for fall 2007.

The MPACT program allows The University of Montana to award a special financial aid package to academically prepared students from low and middle income families. UM will continue to use institutional funds to support MPACT in 2007-08. The state legislature may eventually consider partnering with the University to fund the program.

To qualify for the MPACT award, students must be eligible for need-based, federal Pell Grants and meet the following criteria:
- Mountain Campus: 3.0 GPA or above, 25 ACT or SAT equivalent
- College of Technology: 2.5 GPA or above, no test scores required

The number of students who qualify is expected to increase in the future, as students from low and middle income families learn about MPACT, set their sights on college, and work harder in high school to prepare for the challenge ahead. High school seniors applying to UM are automatically considered for the MPACT award when they complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAPSA). Questions about MPACT should be directed to the UM Financial Aid Office at 406.243.5373.
Did you know that Montana has one of the highest high school graduation rates in the country, but one of the lowest college attendance rates?

Only about one half of our graduating high school seniors go to college, and, because of population changes, the number of graduating high school seniors is expected to decline over the next decade. This is why, over the last few years, retention has become a top priority at The University of Montana. We must try our best to retain the students who do enroll and help them complete their academic career.

A student’s financial situation makes a huge impact on whether he or she graduates, but other factors can also create obstacles. Disabilities, addictions, health issues, academic struggles, career indecision, difficulty transitioning to college life: all of these factors, if not addressed, can impede a student’s progress and success.

In 2005, President Dennison created the Retention Task Force, co-chaired by Vice President Teresa Branch and Associate Provost Arlene Walker-Andrews. He charged them with identifying and implementing strategies that improve retention. Some of the strategies that have been initiated in the past year are listed on pages two and three. These strategies include:

- Increasing Curry Health Center’s capacity to help students with psychiatric issues
- Accelerating responses to transfer student applications
- Creating living/learning environments to improve student-faculty engagement

Please continue reading below and on the next page for more information about these initiatives!

Expansion of Psychiatric Services

To meet the increasing demand for accessible, affordable psychiatric care for students, Curry Health Center hired Dr. Noel Hoell, a psychiatrist, to work half-time in Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), beginning in fall 2006. Over the course of the academic year, he provided evaluation and treatment for 222 students, arranging hospitalization for students with serious problems and facilitating discharge planning. Staff members at CAPS and Medical Services have benefited greatly from Dr. Hoell’s expertise.

In 2006-2007, CAPS also worked closely with Health Enhancement to devise and co-sponsor a Suicide Prevention Program. Together, they aimed to increase awareness about mental health issues, to educate students about resources that are available, and to encourage everyone on campus to look out for the well-being of friends, students and classmates.

These new services and programs are important additions to the mental health services available through Curry Health Center.

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Because of new deadlines established by the Board of Regents (BOR Policy 301.5.1), students who apply to UM as transfer students will now be notified within ten working days of credits that will transfer. Academic departments will be required to respond to Admissions Office evaluations within five working days or the decisions made by the Admissions Office will be considered final. These deadlines will speed up the application process for potential transfer students, who are trying to make decisions about their future.

The University also hopes to make a good first impression with incoming freshmen in the fall by adding seven new Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs) to the course catalog. Increasing the number of FIGs will ensure that every freshman who wants to participate in the Freshman Year Experience will have the chance to do so. The Freshman Year Experience improves retention by bringing freshmen together in small, supportive communities. Students in the same FIG live near one another and take some of the same classes.

Additional retention initiatives will also be implemented in the coming months. Plans include: enhancing undergraduate advising; addressing retention rates of non-traditional students and students of color; and expanding the Early Warning System pilot program, which aims to identify students who are struggling and to proactively offer help.

New and Improved Services for Students

In fall 2007, students who live in Knowles Hall, and who are enrolled in the course “Introduction to Honors,” could find that they only have to walk down a staircase to get to class. Dean McKusick of Davidson Honors College and Ron Brunell, Director of Residence Life, have announced that several Honors College classes will soon be offered in Knowles Hall, the residence hall where most members of the Honors College live.

The TV room will be renovated over the summer to include all the appropriate technology needed for instruction. As a living/learning environment, the new classroom will augment learning by giving students and faculty the opportunity to engage outside the traditional classroom.

In the future, some classes that are a part of the First Year Experience will also be held in residence halls. This project is concurrently sponsored by the Divisions of Academic and Student Affairs.
In 2007, an "alternative break trip" to San Francisco cost students 50% less than in 2006. Why? Because Jamie Rogers was the Alternative Breaks Coordinator in the Office of Civic Engagement.

Despite being hired mid-way through fall semester 2006, being a full-time student, and only working 10-15 hours per week, Jamie made a huge impact on the program. He showed unprecedented initiative in his role, managing to secure financial support for the Alternative Breaks program from the President’s Office, Davidson Honors College, local businesses, as well as personal friends and acquaintances from Missoula and around the country.

Jamie was named UM Student Employee of the Year for these efforts and his numerous other contributions. He earned the admiration and respect of his coworkers, who describe him as "enthusiastic, punctual, reliable, and trustworthy."

Go Jamie!

Outreach Tours 2006-07

During the past 18 months, Student Affairs organized outreach tours with the following objectives in mind: 1) to publicize MPACT, 2) to recruit prospective students, and 3) to connect with UM alumni and friends. More than 20 representatives from Student Affairs, University Relations, and the President’s Office, as well as some faculty, participated. The tours included Kalispell, Great Falls, Helena, Livingston, Billings, Butte, Anaconda, Miles City and Glendive.

Faculty members taught more than 150 high school classes, making contact with roughly 2,600 high school students. Other UM representatives made presentations for prospective students and their families, or hosted breakfasts for local high school counselors and principals.

Thanks to the warm welcome received at each location, and the support from local high schools and businesses, the outreach tours were a success. Approximately 470 students, parents and alumni attended the evening receptions. All events were open to the public, as well as local and state media.

UPCOMING CAREER SERVICES EVENTS

Student Employment Job Fair
August 30, 2007

Find part-time work during the school year! This fair is attended by about 50 employers from on- and off-campus.

Accounting and Health Professions Career Fair
October 8, 2007

Find jobs in accounting, finance, physical therapy, pharmacy, nursing, and medical technology.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!
Following are some highlights from the past year in University Dining Services (UDS):

- Two UDS employees—Tom Siegel, Chief Executive Chef of UDS, and Tom Campbell, Executive Chef at the College of Technology—were nominated for the 2007 Chef of the Year award, sponsored by the American Culinary Federation. The award recognizes an outstanding culinarian who works and cooks in a full-service dining facility, and 1) has demonstrated the highest standard of culinary skills, 2) has advanced the cuisine of America, and 3) has given back to the community. Tom Campbell was named Chef of the Year.

- Byron Drake, Culinary Services Manager, chaired and hosted the National Association of College and University Food Services 2007 Continental Regional Conference at UM from March 25–28. The four-day food conference drew 140 food service professionals and industry partners.

- Amanda Bull was named the 2007 Dining Services Outstanding Student Employee of the Year. Amanda, a junior studying Human Biology, works as an Administrative Assistant at the Cascade Country Store. Go Amanda!

Chief Executive Chef Tom Siegel took 10 days of annual leave to travel to Mexico and attend the Sazon School of Cooking at San Miguel de Allende. We bring you an excerpt from his “journal”...

My most recent culinary quest to Mexico took me to the Massif plateau, one of the oldest enclaves of Spanish colonialism. Upon my arrival, I imagined being a 16th century Spanish cook in a new land, surrounded by exotic foods I had never seen before. How would I have reproduced my favorite Spanish dishes without key ingredients? What exciting new flavors would I have blended into my comida?

Thinking about these questions, I set out to find the “smoking gun”—proof that pure Spanish cuisine had once been fused with the durable cuisine of “lo Mexicana.” My eyes grew big as Aztec comals when I saw my first recipe: Fideos Secos. Ah ha!

The word “Fidueua” originates from the Valencian port of Gandia, from which many sailors left Spain in pursuit of the New World; and the dish—a thin capellini cooked in the style of paella—was the sailors’ favorite dish! The recipe revealed the telltale signs of a recipe gone fusion: chiles, avocados, and tomatilla salsa, ingredients indigenous to Mexico. Indeed, I had found the smoking gun! It was a grand discovery!

Amanda Bull, 2007 Outstanding UDS Student Employee of the Year, with Mark LoParco, Director of UDS
n 2006, Dan Burke, Assistant Director of Disability Services for Students (DSS), became the first Montanan to be elected to the Board of Directors for the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). Started in 1940, NFB is the largest organization of the blind in the world. Dan also serves as the President of the Montana Association for the Blind and on many other boards and councils that address disability concerns.

In his role as Assistant Director of DSS, Dan supervises the print-to-"e-text" conversion service, conducts assessments of DSS programs, and conducts training on civil rights and services for students with disabilities. He also acts as Coordinator at the College of Technology campuses, guiding students with disabilities through the accommodation process and making sure that students are eligible for civil rights coverage.

Dan, who is blind, lives out the NFB philosophy of self-determination in everything he does. He uses a long, white cane and is a fierce advocate and reader of Braille.

What does Dan do when he’s not helping students or advocating for the country’s blind? He studies Irish!

This is a challenging endeavor, because unlike some languages, Irish cannot be read by a screen reader or any other assistive technology. The only way Dan can read Irish is by converting it to Braille. Dan reads Braille on a refreshable display on his PacMate, a PDA for blind users that was purchased with a grant from the Western Montana Gallagher Foundation. Dan can also print the Braille on paper with the use of computer software. He says he could not learn Irish words without Braille, because no other medium gives him the same access to and control over the language.

Dan’s involvement in organizations like the NFB ensures that students with disabilities at UM receive high-quality coaching and top-notch services. His outgoing nature combined with his passion for learning make him a natural leader. He is sure to be a success on the Board of Directors for the NFB. Go Dan!

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Residence Life put a new spin on staff orientation last year by inviting a former staff member to come back and participate in staff orientation. Kicking off the first year of the Alumnus-in-Residence program, Carina Niedermier Beck returned to participate in the two-day orientation at Salmon Lake. Carina is now the Director of Career Services at Montana State University. She made a presentation on leadership, speaking about how her experiences in Residence Life helped her to prepare for a professional career. Students had ample opportunity to speak informally with Carina and appreciated the insight the former staff member was able to share.

This year’s Alumnus-in-Residence will be George Paul. He currently works as the Director of the Port of Butte.

You can make a donation to Student Affairs through the UM Foundation by visiting www.umt.edu/sa and clicking on the secure link “Giving to Student Affairs”.

Thank you for your support!