Apply Early
Students cannot go to college if they do not apply. This may seem like an obvious statement; however there are a number of students who “plan” on attending college, but they never get around to filling out the application. If a student is planning to attend college in Montana, the college admission applications are generally straightforward, easy to fill out, and can be completed in an hour or so. If a student is planning on going out of state, the application may be a little more extensive, requiring an essay and a personal statement.

The earlier a student can complete the college admission application, the sooner they will find out their admission decision. Most schools are on a rolling admission schedule, meaning that once students send in their completed application, notification of their acceptance should occur within about two weeks. Another reason students should apply early is to maximize their eligibility for scholarships and other types of financial aid. Students who wait until March or April to apply, may be losing out on thousands of dollars in financial aid.

Additionally, once students are admitted to a college or university, the school will continue to communicate with them in order to help complete all of the other necessary steps that are required after admission.

Apply Often
Counselors recommend that students apply to between two and five schools. Filling out multiple applications requires a little more work, but it is always important for the students to give themselves options. Counselors also recommend applying to at least one school that is nearby as well as one that may be a little further away from home. Most schools require a $30-$50 application fee, which may seem a bit overwhelming for some families. Many schools, however, will offer application fee

(continued on page 4)
GEAR UP Spotlight: Hardin High School

BY JONATHAN STANDS, GEAR UP LIAISON

The Hardin Chapter of Family Career Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) hosted the District IV leadership meeting at the Big Horn County Historical Museum on September 22, 2010. High schools attending included: Billings Skyview, Shepard, Forsyth, Rosebud, Roundup, Colstrip, Huntley Project, and Hardin.

Activities for the day included a business meeting, self-guided tours of the museum facilities, and a variety of old-fashioned school yard games. Each chapter was asked to bring one of these games to play, which included Red Rover-Red Rover, London Bridge, a race with oranges and spoons, and a bean bag toss. The students were also able to use hand-crank ice cream makers to make their own ice cream for dessert.

The highlight of the day for the visiting students and Chapter advisors was the entertainment provided by the Hardin High School Indian Club dancers. The HHS Indian Club students, outfitted in their splendid regalia, demonstrated a variety of dances performed at native ceremonies and pow-wows. The visiting students joined in the dancing with the group. It was a great way to introduce many students to the Native American culture prevalent in the Hardin area. The day concluded with a talk by Birdena Real Bird, FCCLA sponsor Mary Torske, and Hardin High School GEAR UP Liaison Jonathan Stands.

Credit Recovery Program gets GEAR UP Students Back on Track

BY ROB BREEDING, GLACIER HIGH SCHOOL GEAR UP LIAISON

While we may wish it otherwise, not every GEAR UP student is on the fast track to college. For some students, the battle is just to ensure they graduate. To make sure more of our students achieve that goal, Glacier High School (GHS) GEAR UP added a new Credit Recovery Program last summer.

The competency-based program was a big success. Thirty-five students earned a semester’s credit in 73 different courses during the six-week program. Four students tied for top honors, each earning credit for four semester courses and putting their academic careers back on track.

“Those kids who recovered credit can see the light at the end of the tunnel,” said Micah Hill, GHS assistant principal. “Most of the kids who went through are still in school this year.”

The Kalispell school district has long offered summer school programs through its Bridge program at Linderman School, but the credit recovery program was new. And unlike those other summer programs, credit recovery was offered on the GHS campus and taught by GHS teachers.

One of the teachers who taught during the summer said that distinction was critical to the program’s success.

“We thought it was fantastic that the kids could recover their credit right here in this building with Glacier teachers,” said Anthony Lapke, a math teacher at GHS. “The students felt a sense of ownership about Glacier High that they might not have had before.”

For some of these students success at high school was a new experience.

“Their associations with this building were probably with feeling unwanted, unwelcome,” Lapke said. “Many probably felt unworthy. The only connections they had with adults at Glacier were bad.”

But success during the summer has allowed many of the students to return to school with a new attitude.

“Those kids came back this fall with a swagger,” Lapke said. Adopting the competency-based model was also critical.

Students who had been close to passing, but ultimately failed courses were able to demonstrate their knowledge of a topic and work on filling in the gaps, rather than starting over.

“The kids were able to show their depth of understanding from the beginning, which gave them hope and reason that they weren’t starting from scratch,” Lapke said.

Students who succeeded in the program agreed.

“It wasn’t as complicated as regular school,” said one sophomore girl who earned B’s in two semesters of Biology. “They explained it and let you do it on your own. If you needed help you just asked.”

A sophomore boy who earned credit for three classes said the program has allowed him to see his teachers in a new light. He realizes now that they aren’t always the adversaries he once imagined.

“It was fantastic. A great way to get your credits back,” he said. “I have a better relationship with the teachers here. I realize they are here to help us out.”

Glacier is moving ahead with a credit recovery program during the school year. The administration also hopes to offer credit recovery again next summer.

With any academic program, the critical element is the teachers.

“Our summer teachers honestly believed that every one of those kids could pass whatever course they were taking,” Hill said. “The teachers were willing to do whatever it took to help get them there.”

Whatever it took, that is except for giving the kids a free pass.

“It wasn’t a function of dumbing down the curriculum,” Hill said. “Instead, the summer program allowed teachers freedom to determine where student’s knowledge of a subject was lacking, and how to measure that knowledge in a different way. They boiled it down to what the students needed to know and how to demonstrate that,” Hill said.

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In February 2010, Montana GEAR UP awarded 364 high school juniors the $1500 Achievement Grant to be used toward funding their postsecondary goals. In order to qualify for the grant, students were required to have maintained a 2.0 GPA, be on track to complete the Montana College Prep Curriculum, and submit a completed application on time to their school GEAR UP liaison. All students who met these criteria were awarded the grant. What follows is a closer look at who the 364 2009-2010 Achievement Grant recipients are as compared to their classmates, numbering 396 students, who either did not receive or apply for the Achievement Grant. As seniors this year, the Achievement Grant recipients are now eligible to apply for the Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship. This scholarship is valued at up to $21,400 and is awarded based upon a variety of factors including financial need (must be eligible for a Pell Grant); academic preparation and performance; participation in extracurricular activities and community service; and quality of the written application.

Sources: 2009-2010 Student Survey & Student Performance Data
Montana GEAR UP Reminders & Upcoming Events

November 5: Achievement Grant application deadline for students to submit to liaison. Contact Cory Chenoweth, Financial Aid Manager, at 406-444-0350 or cchenoweth@montana.edu with questions

November 12: Achievement Grant application deadline for liaisons to submit to Montana GEAR UP

November 16: Montana Counselor Updates at various locations. For more information visit: www.montanacolleges.com/counselors/update.php

November 19: Letters sent to 2009-2010 Achievement Grant recipients inviting them to apply for the Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship

November 19: Montana GEAR UP student survey ready online

November 23: Montana College Access Network (MCAN) Education Call 3:30 pm - 4:30 pm. Topic will cover transition from high school to college. For more information visit: www.knowhow2gomontana.ning.com

December 10: Montana GEAR UP Poster Contest entries due to GEAR UP Liaisons. Contact Jessie Salisbury at 406-444-0056 or jsalisbury@montana.edu with questions

December 13: Parent survey closes. Please mail surveys to Education Northwest in pre-paid envelope

December 17: Poster Contest entries due to Montana GEAR UP. Please mail posters to Jessie Salisbury at PO Box 203201, Helena, MT 59620-3201

GEAR UP Spotlight: Marion Students Help the Community

BY WENDY DAVIS, GEAR UP LIAISON

Marion students began the school year with a number of community service projects. The students volunteered their time and hard work to better the Marion community. Groups of students initiated a number of programs designed to assist several county agencies including the local food bank and animal shelter. Over five hundred pounds of food were donated and presented to the food bank as well as birthday bags filled with supplies for families with small children. Boxes of pet food, toys, and supplies were also donated by the Marion students for the Flathead County Animal Shelter, which is currently filled to maximum capacity. Other students volunteered their time to assist neighbors in need with chores or cleaning.

Marion Middle School staff and students also participated in a road clean-up project. One nice day in October, the students spent the afternoon picking up trash from along the local roadways. All students enjoyed the sunshine and the opportunity to continue to ensure that their community stays pristine.

Tips for the College Application Process (continued)

waivers for students who qualify for free/reduced lunches, while other schools will defer the application fee and add the fee on to the tuition bill in the fall. If students cannot afford the application fee, they will need to contact the school to which they are applying to see what options they have. Encourage students to not let the application fee get in the way of applying for multiple schools.

Know the Requirements
Many schools set minimum requirements for GPA, test scores, as well as completion of specific core classes. On the other hand, some schools have open enrollment and only require a high school diploma or GED. If students have questions about the requirements, encourage them to contact the admissions office of the school they are interested in attending, and they will be able to walk them through the application process.

This is really an exciting, and sometimes scary, time for high school seniors. The earlier students are encouraged to complete the applications, the more likely it is that they will end up enrolling in college next fall.

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Our mission: Montana GEAR UP believes that postsecondary education is possible for all Montana students, regardless of economic background, and strives to empower them to realize that ambition. Montana GEAR UP brings this message to middle and high schools, students, their parents, and the community through early college and career awareness activities, scholarships, financial aid information, and improved academic support to raise the expectations and achievement of all.