Welcome from the Director

BY SANDY MERDINGER, PROGRAM DIRECTOR

It’s hard to believe this is the start of the sixth and final year of the 2005 GEAR UP grant. We are looking forward to the many opportunities that are coming up this year. Before delving into some of them, I want to welcome Michelle DuMont to Montana GEAR UP! In a major structural change for Montana GEAR UP, both School Grant Managers will now be located in the GEAR UP office within the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education. Although we will miss the close contact with the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) through the School Grant Manager, we believe this restructure will provide better service to all Montana GEAR UP schools. We will continue our strong partnership with OPI, working with them to provide opportunities for students.

The sixth year of the grant means our first cohort of seventh graders who started in 2005-2006 are now seniors! Over the past five years this class has received cumulative services to prepare them for the journey from high school to college. This class participated in many career exploration activities; went on numerous college visits; took the EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT tests; received advising on high school course selection, including the college prep curriculum; participated in summer camps; learned about financial aid; applied for the GEAR UP Achievement Grant; enrolled in challenging classes; took advantage of tutoring if needed; and enjoyed academic enrichment activities.

Now in their senior year, they are considering what their life will be after high school. I hope that with all of the above named activities since seventh grade and your support and guidance over the years, they now have the opportunity to apply for college. There is much to do during the senior year so we encourage you to share the senior year insert in this newsletter with your students to help them stay on track to achieve those dreams they’ve developed over the last several years.

Senior year also means applying for the Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship for students who received the Achievement Grant their junior year. This four-year scholarship is approximately $22,000 and will be awarded to up to 40 GEAR UP students who are Pell Grant eligible. This means that one in ten of last year’s Achievement Grant recipients will be awarded the scholarship. It’s hard to find better odds when applying for a significant scholarship!

I challenge you to see that your students are taking rigorous courses, learning about career and college opportunities, and applying for financial aid and scholarships. Successful students still need the three R’s of Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships. You encourage the rigorous courses and provide relevance by exposing them to career and college options all while you are building relationships with them. Thank you for continuing to support students and provide opportunities for their future.

This last year of this grant also means that we are preparing to apply for a new grant to begin in September 2011. We will seek suggestions from various stakeholders. Additionally the passage of the Higher Education Opportunity Act, which includes the GEAR UP legislation, bring changes to Montana GEAR UP. If you have suggestions to improve Montana GEAR UP, please share them with us.

GEAR UP Welcomes New School Grant Manager Michelle DuMont

BY JESSIE SALISBURY, PROGRAM COORDINATOR

As the school year begins, we are very happy to introduce our new School Grant Manager, Michelle DuMont! Ms. DuMont is the new GEAR UP School Grant Manager for eastern schools and is a graduate of Red Lodge High School in Montana. Michelle received her bachelor’s degree in Political Science at the University of Colorado at Boulder. She has a Master’s in Education with an emphasis in curriculum and instruction along with an added endorsement for linguistically diverse instruction. Ms. DuMont has spent the past five years in the classroom teaching second and fifth grade students in Commerce City, Colorado, and she is excited to be back in Montana.

Michelle brings a wealth of information and experience to the School Grant Manager position, as well as a great perspective into early college and career awareness for middle and high school students. We are excited to have her as a part of the team. Welcome to Montana GEAR UP, Michelle!
Montana GEAR UP Says Farewell to Justine Jam

This has been a summer of hellos and goodbyes for Montana GEAR UP, and this time we are saying goodbye to Justine Jam, our School Grant Manager for the eastern schools housed in the Indian Education Division of the Office of Public Instruction (OPI). Our sadness at her departure is tempered somewhat by the fact that Justine will remain close by. She has accepted a curriculum specialist position and will remain in the Indian Education Division of OPI.

During Justine’s four years with Montana GEAR UP, she was a willing partner in the following major projects: the new liaisons coordinator. “We had 105 students and families attend webinars at three pilot sites

Transition to College: Senior Year Checklist

BY CORY CHENOWETH, FINANCIAL AID MANAGER

Wow…we’ve reached the sixth year of the grant, which means the students who started off as 7th graders are now entering their senior year. As such, this year I will be writing monthly newsletter articles relating to the students’ transition from high school to college. Topics will include searching for the right fit, the admissions process, financial aid, as well as what to expect socially and academically.

To kick off this year’s series of articles, I have enclosed a calendar of events that seniors should be aware of. This year

Montana College Goal Sunday: Better than ever in 2011!

BY STUDENT ASSISTANCE FOUNDATION

In the six years nonprofit Student Assistance Foundation (SAF) has coordinated College Goal Sunday in Montana, volunteers have helped more than 8,400 students and families negotiate the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) process.

In 2011, SAF hopes to reach more Montanans than ever as a result of changes slated to take effect in time for the Feb. 9 and Feb. 13 College Goal Montana events.

“In 2010 marked the first year SAF used webinars as a tool to help Montana students and families complete the FAFSA,” said Rhonda Safford, event coordinator. “We had 105 students and families attend webinars at three pilot sites — 49 completed their FAFSAs — and we received rave reviews.”

The FAFSA is the first step on the road to obtaining federal financial aid. In addition, information from the FAFSA may be used to determine eligibility for institutional aid.

According to Safford, SAF will continue to host the event — renamed College Goal Montana — at 18 sites across the state. However, SAF will be combining FAFSA completion webinars with financial aid nights in as many cases as possible, including during the week of the College Goal Montana event.

More than 100 Montana high schools have expressed interest in participating in the Webinar program.

“We don’t want any Montanan to miss out on the opportunity to receive financial aid instruction and FAFSA completion assistance,” said Safford. “We believe these changes will go a long way to ensuring the efficient delivery of this important service.”

In keeping with the Montana College Goal Sunday tradition of entering the Montana event.

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In keeping with the Montana College Goal Sunday tradition of entering the names of registrants at each event site in a drawing for a $500 scholarship to a Montana school of the winners’ choice, the names of webinar participants will also be entered to win a scholarship.

College Goal Sunday is a national program that was originally created by the Indiana Student Financial Aid Association with funding from Lilly Endowment, Inc. and with supplemental support from Lumina Foundation for Education.

To learn more about College Goal Montana locations in your area, or find out whether a webinar will be hosted in your community, visit with the counselor at your school or go to www.CollegeGoalMT.org. If you are a counselor who is interested in hosting a webinar at your high school, contact Rhonda Safford at 406-495-7750 or rsafford@safmt.org.
GEAR UP Summer Camps 2010

By Jessie Salisbury. Program Coordinator

As students head back to school, the obligatory “what I did over my summer vacation” assignment looms on the minds of many, but the 309 students who attended one of the seven Montana GEAR UP statewide summer camps will have lots to talk about.

The first camps of the summer were hosted by MSU-Northern in Havre. These 3½-day GEAR UP + SuperCamps were attended by 72 middle school students (June 6-9) and 65 high school students (June 10-13). 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.

This year The University of Montana hosted the first ever INDigi-Biz 101 middle school camp (June 13-19) where 26 middle school students from seven schools learned about business from a contemporary and indigenous perspective. Through a Native American lens, students saw snapshots of the business world, and mentors from the American Indian Business Leaders (AIBL) were on hand to share their knowledge, experience, and insight. Students discussed the economic situation in their communities and how they could help to develop new economic opportunities. They created and presented a marketing plan based on their discussions.

Dawson Community College hosted 48 middle school students from 14 GEAR UP schools at the week-long DCC + ME = Discovery camp, which was held in Glendive from June 20-26. 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. Some of the classes they took included Intro to Law Enforcement, Livestock Anatomy, Sign Language, and a new addition this year, Culinary Arts.

Forty-four middle school students attended the Carroll College: Preserving the Planet Environmental Studies Camp in Helena from July 18-24. 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, a pine bark beetle activity on Mount Helena, and star-gazing using the Carroll College observatory. Students also participated in an evening powwow with the Helena Indian Alliance.

UM-Western in Dillon hosted their second CSI: Birch Creek camp (July 18-24), which had a forensic science theme, and 31 middle school students spent the week conducting a forensic investigation of a fictitious cold-case file involving a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) enlisee. To solve the case, students were introduced to historic camp documents, CCC history, crime scene investigatory procedures, field observation, DNA testing, and collecting/identifying botanical evidence. Students also wrote an investigative report and presented their research findings in a symposium.

The second high school camp of the summer, GEAR UP for College, took place at MSU-Bozeman July 25-28 and rounded out the summer with 22 students. Students learned about the different types of degrees offered at MSU, participated in hands on activities such as Lego Robotics, and enjoyed a trip to the Museum of the Rockies.

More information will be available to GEAR UP schools regarding summer camps for next year in early March.

Survey Says...

The following charts illustrate Montana GEAR UP students’ perceptions about their parents’ and teachers’ expectations of them to go to college as well as their own opinion on the importance of a college education to their future. They were drawn from the 2009-2010 Montana GEAR UP student survey.

**Do you think your teachers expect you to go to college?**

- Yes: 79%
- No: 4%
- Not Sure: 17%

*Source: 2009-2010 Montana GEAR UP Student Survey (n=2275)*

**Do you think your parents expect you to go to college?**

- Yes: 87%
- No: 8%
- Not Sure: 5%

*Source: 2009-2010 Montana GEAR UP Student Survey (n=2783)*

**How important to your future is getting an education beyond high school?**

- Very important: 71%
- Somewhat important: 23%
- Not important: 4%
- Not sure: 2%

*Source: 2009-2010 Montana GEAR UP Student Survey (n=2814)*
**Montana GEAR UP Reminders & Upcoming Events**

**September 13-30:** MPSEOC College Fairs, various locations. Visit [www.montanacolleges.com/college-fairs/college-fairs.php](http://www.montanacolleges.com/college-fairs/college-fairs.php) for more information

**September 26:** Montana GEAR UP Fall Liaison meeting 5:30 pm - 8:00 pm at the Great Northern Hotel in Helena. Parent surveys will be distributed at the meeting and attendance is required for all liaisons

**September 27-28:** Montana GEAR UP Fall Conference - *Finish the Mission: GEAR UP for College* at the Great Northern Hotel in Helena. Please call the hotel directly at 406-457-5500 to reserve your room in the GEAR UP block by September 10th. Mail or fax (406-444-0425) your registration form to Jessie Salisbury at PO Box 203201, Helena, MT 59620-3201 by September 17th. You can download a registration form at [www.gearup.mus.edu](http://www.gearup.mus.edu)

**October 1:** Deadline for entering all new students and creating new 2010-2011 student performance records for continuing students in GEARS. Contact Andi Rankin at arankin@montana.edu or 406-444-0674 or Jessie Salisbury at jsalisbury@montana.edu or 406-444-0056 for more information

**October 4-15:** EXPLORE and PLAN testing window for Montana GEAR UP schools

**October 21-22:** MEA-MFT Conference, Helena

**October 24-26:** GEAR UP West Conference, Vancouver, WA. Applications were mailed to GEAR UP schools and are available at [www.gearup.mus.edu](http://www.gearup.mus.edu)

**October 29:** EXPLORE and PLAN documents due to ACT: Mail tests directly to ACT to arrive no later than October 29th. Test packets will be distributed at the Fall Conference

**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 19:** Montana GEAR UP student survey ready online

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**Montana GEAR UP Staff Directory**

<table>
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**Montana GEAR UP**

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Visit us on the web at [www.gearup.mus.edu](http://www.gearup.mus.edu)

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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.
You are almost there! You’ve made it to your senior year and this checklist will help guide you through the steps you need to take in order to apply to college. Take your senior year seriously because colleges will be looking at your final transcript. Good luck and don’t be afraid to ask for help!

September - October:
- Challenge yourself
  - Talk to your school counselor or GEAR UP liaison and make sure you are on track to meet the college prep or rigorous core requirements for the Montana University System.
  - Take the harder classes that your school offers like Advanced Placement (AP), honors, or dual enrollment classes, and take a 4th year of math to help you prepare.
- Attend a local college fair
  - The MPSEOC College Fair Tour takes place September 13-30. Attend the college fair near you and sign up to receive information from all colleges you might be interested in attending. Make a list of questions and bring them with you to ask the college representatives. For more information visit www.montanacolleges.org.
- Update your resume and portfolio
  - This will come in handy when applying for college admission as well as scholarships. Include activities, awards you have won, and work that you have done.
- Search and apply for scholarships
  - Talk to your high school counselor or GEAR UP liaison to see what is available and which deadlines are approaching.
  - Many scholarship applications are due starting in October. Additional scholarship opportunities will be available throughout the year.
  - Seek out teachers/mentors to write letters of recommendation.
  - Talk to your GEAR UP liaison about whether you can apply for the GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship.
- Take/Retake the ACT or SAT
  - If you aren’t happy with your ACT/SAT score or haven’t taken one of these tests yet, this is a perfect time to do so. Ask your school counselor whether or not you qualify for a fee waiver to take the test. Both ACT and SAT offer two fee waivers for qualifying students.
- Sign up for Selective Service (males only)
  - Within 30 days of your 18th birthday, you will need to register for Selective Service. You cannot receive federal student aid (grants, loans, work-study) if you have not registered.
- Plan to visit colleges
  - If you haven’t done so already, make plans to visit the colleges in which you are interested.

November - December:
- Apply to colleges
  - You should have received a sufficient amount of information from colleges to determine which schools you want to apply to. Apply to two or three of them.
  - Generally schools will charge an application fee of $30-$50.
- Apply for scholarships
  - Continue to work with your counselor and GEAR UP liaison to identify scholarship opportunities.
- Get your PIN (www.fafsa.ed.gov)
  - Both you and your parents will need to register for a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) PIN number before completing the FAFSA. Keep it in a safe place, as you will be asked for it again when filling out the FAFSA.

January - March:
- Fill out the FAFSA
  - It is expected that everyone who is planning to pursue some sort of postsecondary education will complete the FAFSA.
January - March (continued):

- The priority deadline for most schools in Montana is somewhere between February 15th and March 1st (February 1st for many out-of-state schools). The earlier you can complete the FAFSA, the better chance you have of maximizing your financial aid package.
- It is helpful (but not required) that your parents have a completed 2010 tax return when filling out the FAFSA.
- Check with your counselor and GEAR UP liaison about attending College Goal Montana to get help from professionals with filling out your FAFSA. It takes place at various locations around the state on February 9th and 13th. Visit www.collegegoalmt.org for more information.
- Complete your Pathways Scholarship application and project
  - This will be due at the end of February and is your chance to earn a $22,000+ scholarship.
- Determine what the best college is for you
  - Hopefully you have received your admission decision letters from the schools to which you’ve applied; now is the time to decide which school will be the best fit for you.
- Plan to visit colleges to which you have been accepted
  - This would be a great time to visit two or three of your top choices. You have already been accepted to the schools, so this will be your chance to interview them - be prepared to ask them the “tough questions.”
- Take/Retake Montana University System Writing Assessment (February)
  - You should have taken this as a junior, but if you missed it, or didn’t receive a passing score (3.5 or higher), this is your last chance.
- Montana American Indian Fee Waiver
  - If you are at least 1/4 Native American and plan on attending a campus of the Montana University System, you will want to complete the Montana American Indian Fee Waiver at this time. Talk to your high school counselor or GEAR UP Liaison or visit www.mus.edu/students.asp for further details.

April - May:

- Compare financial aid packages
  - You should be receiving your financial aid package from all of the schools where you have been accepted.
  - Compare what each school is offering with their cost of admission to find out which school will be the best fit financially.
- Make your decision
  - After seeing what schools offer in terms of academics, financial aid, campus living, support services, extra-curricular activities, and other things that are important to you, you should now be ready to make your decision.
  - You will need to review your award letter and choose which awards you will be accepting. Typically this is done online through the college or university you will be attending.
  - If you are taking out a loan to pay for all or a portion of college, you will also need to participate in loan counseling. Many schools offer this online.
- Send your transcript
  - Upon graduation, you will need to request to have your final high school transcript sent to the college you plan to attend.
- Pay a deposit for housing
  - Once you make your decision, many schools will require that you pay a deposit. If you do not have this money, you can contact the financial aid office, and they may be able to include the deposit in your financial aid package.
- Sign up for orientation
  - Many schools have a freshman orientation program they require all freshmen to complete. Sometimes it’s during the summer, and sometimes it takes place two or three days before the first day of class.
- Watch the mail for important information from the college you plan to attend
  - Make sure to read any letters carefully, pay attention to important deadlines, and respond in a timely manner.
August
17 New Liaisons Orientation, Helena
31 2009-10 Final Fiscal Reports & Match Documentation due

September
13-30 MPSEOC College Fairs, various locations
26 Montana GEAR UP Fall Liaison meeting, Helena; parent surveys distributed
27-28 GEAR UP Fall Conference, Helena; poster paper, EXPLORE & PLAN tests distributed
28 National Training for Counselors & Mentors (NT4CM), Helena

October
1 Deadline for entering all students into GEAR
4 EXPLORE & PLAN testing window opens
15 EXPLORE & PLAN testing window closes
21-22 MEA-MFT Conference, Helena
24-26 GEAR UP West Conference Vancouver, WA
29 EXPLORE & PLAN tests due to ACT; mail tests back to ACT in pre-paid envelope

November
5 Achievement Grant application deadline for students to submit to liaison
12 Achievement Grant application deadline for liaisons to submit to Montana GEAR UP
19 Student survey ready online

December
13 Parent survey closes; mail surveys to Education Northwest in pre-paid envelope
10 Poster contest entries due to Liaisons
17 Poster contest entries due to GEAR UP
TBA Schools receive EXPLORE and PLAN results
TBA Pathways Scholarship applications available for Montana GEAR UP seniors

January
14 Educator surveys ready online
25 Student surveys close
25-26 Winter Liaisons Meeting, Helena
28 Mid-Year Fiscal & Program Reports due

February
9 & 13 College Goal Montana, various locations
12 ACT Test Date
13-16 NCCEP Capacity Building Workshop, Orlando, FL
28 GEARS student performance data due for Annual Performance Report (APR)
28 Educator survey closes
TBA Pathways Scholarship Applications due

March
1-24 CRT testing window
4 Local Summer Program Proposal due
31 GEARS student & parent activities due for APR

April
9 ACT Test Date
10-11 MT Indian Education Association (MIEA) Conference, Great Falls
14-15 MT School Counselor Association (MSCA) Spring Conference
15 APR due to U.S. Department of Education
TBA Spring Liaisons Meeting

May
1 Final date to submit Budget Amendments for 2010-11
13 Draft 2011-12 Implementation Plans & Budget Narratives due

June
10 2010-11 Final Program Reports due
11 ACT Test Date
15 Remaining student performance & activity data due in GEAR
17 2011-12 Implementation Plans & Budget Narratives due

July
17-20 National GEAR UP Conference, San Francisco

...College is possible for all Montana students