MONTANA COLLEGE APPLICATION WEEK

2014 FINAL REPORT

2014 Montana College Application Week Launch at Capital High School—Helena, MT

Montana GEAR UP • 2500 Broadway • Helena, MT 59601

www.mus.edu/gearup/caw.asp
Purpose

In 2012, Montana joined the American College Application Campaign (ACAC) national effort to increase the number of first-generation and low-income students pursuing a college degree or other higher education credential by piloting Montana College Application Week (MCAW). The purpose of this initiative is to help all high school seniors navigate the complex college admissions process, with a focus on those who may not otherwise apply.

College Application Week in Montana

After the successful pilot in 2012 in four schools, Montana GEAR UP and the Office of Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) launched a statewide College Application Week in collaboration with the Office of Public Instruction (OPI), the Governor’s Office, and Montana College Access Network (MCAN). In spring 2014, a steering committee comprised of K-12, postsecondary, and college access program representatives was formed to further guide this initiative. This fall, President Obama declared November National College Application Month, with all 50 states participating in College Application Week.

Recognizing continued growth of College Application Week in Montana, 2014 was the biggest success yet. In 2014, 138 high schools signed up to participate, with 126 submitting data to Montana GEAR UP. All Montana University System, tribal, and private colleges participated. Seniors submitted 2736 applications with the application fee either waived or deferred, reducing a barrier for low-income families. An additional 300+ applications were submitted to in state and out of state colleges during the week.

Why does it matter?
Montana needs more postsecondary graduates. By 2020, it is projected that 69 percent of Montana’s jobs will require some form of postsecondary education.

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, June 2013
Where Did Students Apply?

Of the 2736 applications submitted, the majority were to four year colleges. Seventy-six percent of applications submitted were to four year colleges and sixteen percent to two year colleges. Four percent of applications submitted were to either a private or tribal college.
Student Survey Results

What Students Said:

“I think it is a great idea. It helped me better understand what to do and I wasn’t afraid to ask about it anymore.”

“College Application Week has helped me to get my options organized and understand the process it takes to financially be ready for my college experience.”

Best Practices

With 2 years of successful College Application Week campaigns realized, best practices are emerging at schools across the state. High schools are providing time during the school day for seniors to complete a college application; incorporating college and career readiness activities into the curriculum; and involving parents, businesses, and community members in their week’s events. Lending credibility to Montana College Application Week, education leaders are lauding the benefits of postsecondary education and College Application Week’s role in accessing it. The Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Commissioner of Higher Education visited Capital High School in Helena for the school’s launch event. “This week, College Application Week, is really about taking the next step.” “I encourage students who have not thought that college is for them to fill out an application,” state Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau told Capital High seniors.

Other best practices include:
- Attend college fairs and/or visits in conjunction with Montana College Application Week
- Hold events during school hours and get buy-in from teachers (e.g. assignments in English and Government classes)
- Invite guest speakers such as college students, college representatives, Student Assistance Foundation, community members, etc.; hold senior college assembly
- Have students get residency information, transcripts, and complete practice applications prior to event
- Create college-going culture (e.g. bulletin boards, announcements featuring staff and their college, hang college pennants/posters, students create pennants for staff, staff and students wear college gear, teacher interviews)
- Celebrate students submitting applications and receiving acceptance letters
- Include scholarships and next steps with event
- Involve younger students in college and career readiness activities
Student & Site Coordinator Recommendations

One thousand students and 85 site coordinators responded to the survey and the following recommendations emerged as most common:

1. Hold college application week earlier in the school year
2. Allow students to apply to more than one college with the fee waived or deferred
3. Consistency from colleges (all either waive or defer, preferably waive; all either have online or paper applications)
4. Utilize a common application for all Montana colleges

Conclusion

Higher education will determine the future of our nation. The economic health and social viability of a democratic society is determined by the education of its citizens. The barriers to postsecondary education access must be removed. Montana College Application Week is just one effort in a collection of efforts that educational leaders in Montana have initiated and are invested in to ensure more students have access to postsecondary education opportunities. “We literally have something for everyone,” Montana Commissioner of Higher Education Clayton Christian said of the higher education system in Montana, offering everything from certifications that take only a few weeks to doctoral degrees. Commissioner Christian said he thinks College Application Week is especially important in Montana where many first generation students may be applying to college.

Montana College Application Week proves to be an unprecedented event that brings the Governor’s office, OPI, OCHE, K-12 and postsecondary educators, college access programs, and community members together for a common goal: increasing postsecondary enrollment especially among low income, first generation students. Although Montana GEAR UP is currently spearheading the Montana College Application Week campaign, the goal is to advance it to a self-sustaining initiative while engaging postsecondary system leaders in supportive policy discussions, such as waiving the college application fee for all low income students.