MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY BILLINGS

MSU Billings began the 2026-27 academic year with its highest retention on record. Data for fall semester of 2026 shows that a record 62.2 percent of new freshmen and transfer students who enrolled at MSU Billings in the fall of 2025 returned to college for fall 2026. The retention achievement is 5.7 percentage points higher than a year ago.

The university achieved its highest fall enrollment since 2019, welcoming 872 first-time freshmen and transfer students this fall. This is an 8.2 percent increase from fall 2025. That growth builds on the momentum of the previous year, when first-time freshman enrollment alone increased 9.1 percent from fall 2024.

Dr. Mel Walker, Associate Professor of Special Education in the College of Education, was awarded a $1.2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Her project is called *Project TREASURES: Teaching & Reaching: Expanding Access to Special Education in Underserved and Rural Areas.* The overall goal is to increase the number and retention rate of rural special educators in Montana, giving scholars enrolled in the program the necessary knowledge and skills to implement evidence-based practices in K-12 schools.

Lisa Blomquist, a non-traditional student, has a youthful exuberance for what the arts can do for Golden Valley County. The 68-year-old student, completing an art degree at MSU Billings, is working to transform the historic Adams Hotel in Lavina into a cultural center serving Golden Valley County as part of her capstone project. Partnering with Jean Wallace, the executive director of the Golden Valley Community Foundation, Blomquist secured funding from the Montana Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts to purchase supplies for a workshop she hosted in the hotel.

The annual fall Library Lecture Series with the theme "America Turns 250" began on October 6, with weekly events through November 3. In addition to the lectures, the MSU Billings Library hosted two traveling exhibits related to the America 250 celebration: *The Montana Tapestry: Pepple and Places from 1776 to Today* and *The American Revolution Experience.*

Keeara Rhoades, Associate Professor of New Media and Photography, was featured in her latest multimedia exhibition, *Margins & Arm Ends,* October 6 through November 19, at Northcutt Steele Gallery.