



Next Step *Guide*

2026-27 Edition



MYTH VS REALITY



MYTH

College is so expensive only the rich can afford to go.

I have to have it all figured out right when I start.

I can make as much money without a degree.

If I go to college, I will graduate with a mountain of debt.

Trades careers have immediate job openings.

FACT

College financial aid is determined by financial need. The greater your financial need, the greater your opportunity to qualify for scholarships and grants.

Most colleges give you the first two years to decide what career pathway you want to take. It's important to dabble!

You may start making money earlier, but your wages increase with a degree and you will have more job stability and opportunities. Investing in a couple years of school could lead to higher wages.

There are multiple ways to make sure you graduate with a degree/certification with minimal debt. Take advantage of summer jobs, in-state tuition, and programs that offer credentials with shorter time-to-completion.

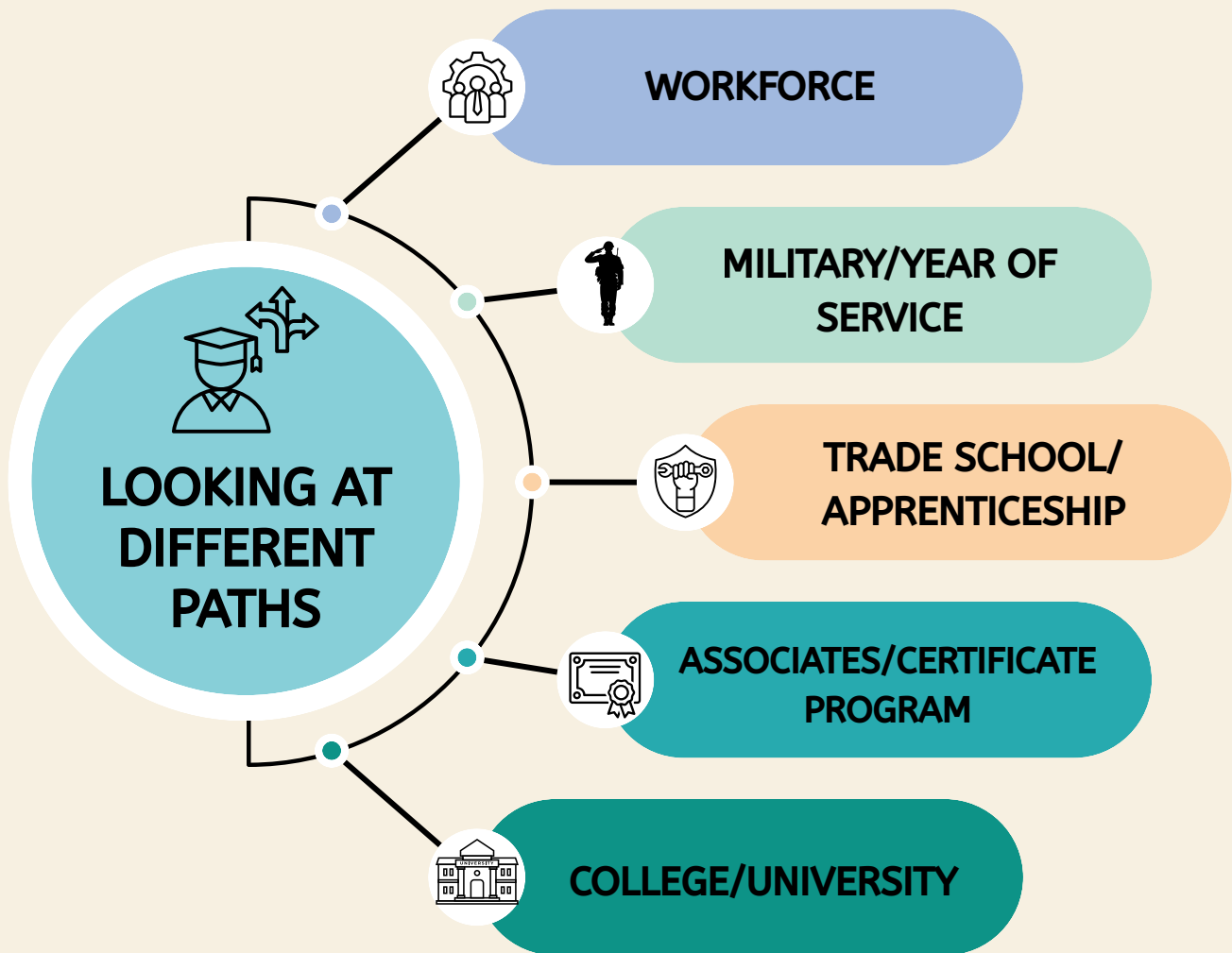
Trade careers are also in high demand, but most require postsecondary education. MUS resources can help you find quick, affordable career pathways that work for you.

Road trip >

There are many roads you can take,
depending on what's right for you.



OPTIONS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL



you've got options..



Sprint Degrees



Learn quicker and start earning money sooner with Montana University System Sprint Degrees.

Sprint Degrees are accelerated, high-quality college programs offering flexible schedules and summer coursework to condense bachelor's degrees to 2.5 years and associate degrees to 12–18 months.

Apprenticeship/Career Training

Earn while you learn with Montana Registered Apprenticeships through the Montana Department of Labor & Industry.

Offering flexible, on-the-job training with experienced professionals in high-demand, high-paying fields.

 **110**

Occupations offering apprenticeships since 2000

 **660**

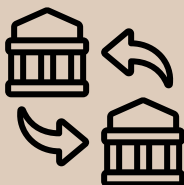
Businesses involved in MT apprenticeship programs

 **47%**

Of projected worker demand will be in apprenticeable occupations over the next decade



Transferring Colleges



Don't know what you want to study? Looking for more affordable education option? Consider starting off at a Montana University System 2-Year college to complete your general education requirements before transferring to a four-year school.

2 + 2 Honor Scholarships are annually awarded tuition waivers to students who graduate with an associate degree from a 2-year campus or community college within the Montana University System.

Flexible Learning Options

Online learning lets you take control of your learning on your own schedule. Take a peek at the online degrees offered by the Montana University System.



Want to make more money?

Having more education helps.

What is lost without further education



Upward mobility/ economic advancement



Self-growth and becoming a life-long learner



Reflection and critical thinking skills



Opportunities and choices



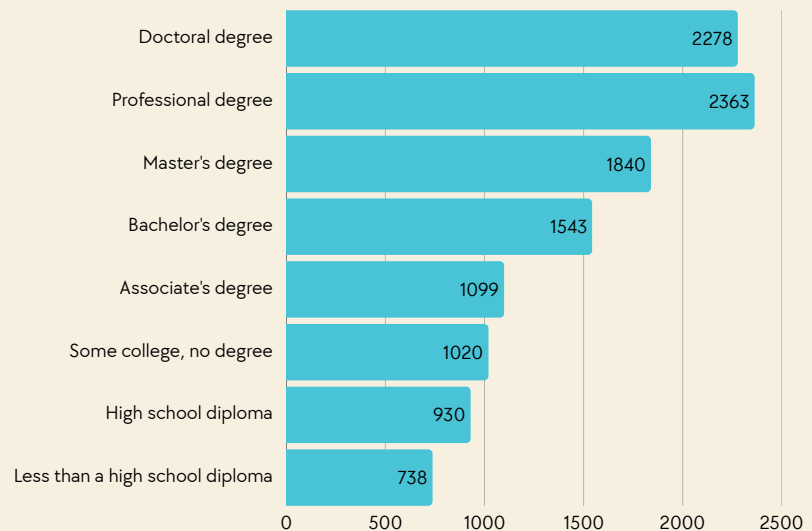
Social impact and progress in our communities



Security and stability

Jobs that do not require postsecondary education often offer lower pay and have high turnover rates as workers look for longer-term, more stable employment.

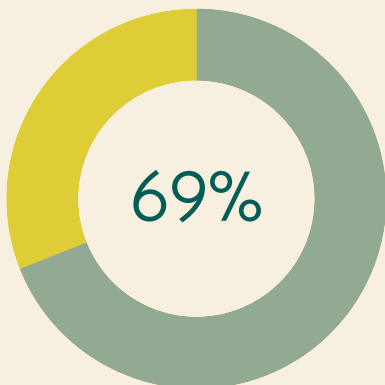
Median usual weekly earnings (\$)



Earnings and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment, 2024

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, [Current Population Survey](#).

More education = more opportunities, more confidence, and more money in your pocket.



On average, 69% of graduates were working in Montana after graduation.

And out of those..

Recent Montana graduates working year-round made

\$42,000

one year after graduation, which is above the state median wage.

[MT College Report 2022](#)

Nationally, there is a similar need for more healthcare workers and software developers.
Most of these careers require some sort of postsecondary education.

Top 10 Occupations Projected to Add the Most Jobs

	Employment change, projected 2023–33 (in thousands)	Percent change, projected 2023–33	Median annual wage, May 2024
Home health and personal care aides	820.5	20.7%	\$34,900
Software developers	303.7	17.9%	\$133,080
Cooks, restaurant	244.5	17.0%	\$36,830
Fast food and counter workers	212.5	5.7%	\$30,480
General and operations managers	210.4	5.8%	\$102,950
Registered nurses	197.2	6.0%	\$93,600
Stockers and order fillers	168.6	5.9%	\$37,090
Medical and health services managers	160.6	28.5%	\$117,960
Financial managers	138.3	16.5%	\$161,700
Nurse practitioners	135.5	46.3%	\$129,210

Note: Wage data are from the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics program, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
US BLS: Projected to Add the Most Jobs, by Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, 2023–33.

Careers Montana Needs Now



Social Work and Mental Health



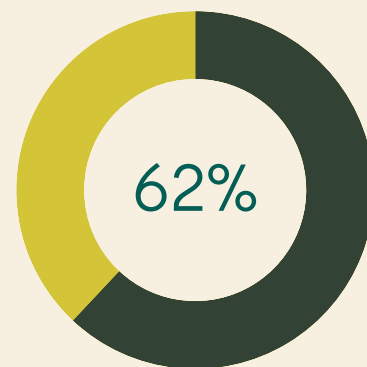
Construction



Early Childhood Education



Healthcare Professionals



Montana schools aren't training enough people for 62% of the top jobs that need some college or training after high school.

MT College Report 2022



WE'RE HIRING!

Montana has tons of job openings in these fields—and they're just waiting for someone like **you** to fill them.

Montana is in need of you! Choose a career that's not only exciting, but also in demand!

Check out the hot career picks below and start thinking about your next move!

Construction

Electrical
Plumbing
Heavy Equipment Operation

Humanities

Social Work
Law

Education

Elementary Ed
Special Ed
Early Childhood Ed (CDA)

STEM

Computer and Info Systems

Health Science

Nursing (CNA)
Physical Therapy
Medical Assistants
Substance Abuse and Addiction Counseling

Transferring Colleges

Have you thought about 2 years at community college, and then 2 years on a university campus?

2 years at a community college can cost about the same as just 1 year at a four-year university.

It's never been easier to take equivalent courses at different campuses to transfer across the Montana University System.

**Many programs can be completed in as little as 2 to 3 semesters.
Most are designed so you can balance them in the evening or part-time with a job.**

MUS Transfer

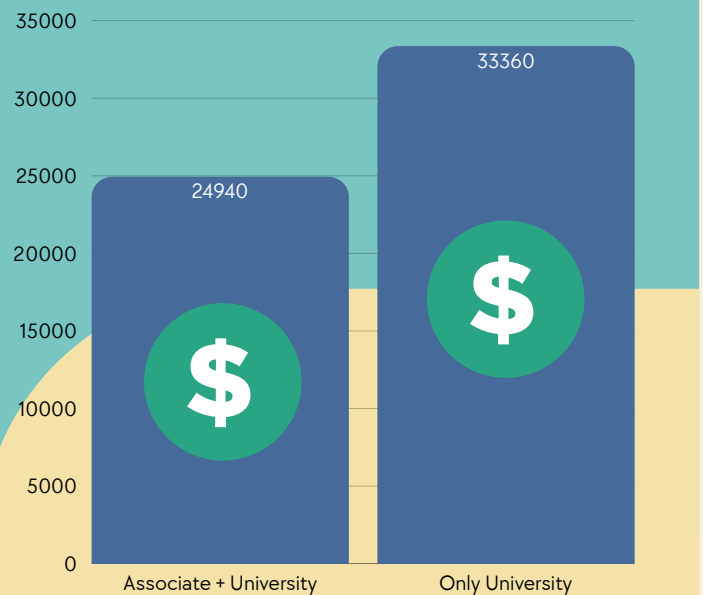
The Montana University System has created a common-course system to make sure courses are labeled the same. This makes it easy to know which courses taken at one campus have the same on another.

2 + 2 Honor Scholarship

You could go to school to receive your Bachelor degree and have your tuition waived for 2 years!

AWARD MONTANA

Overall Tuition Cost Comparison

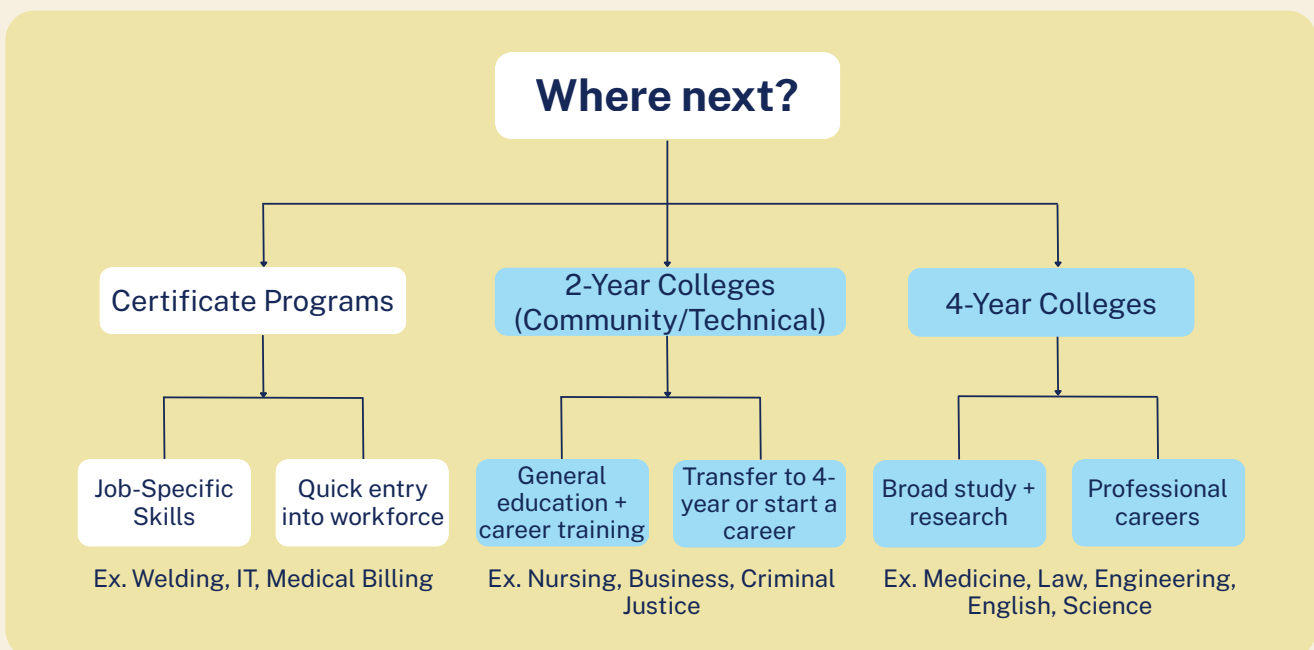
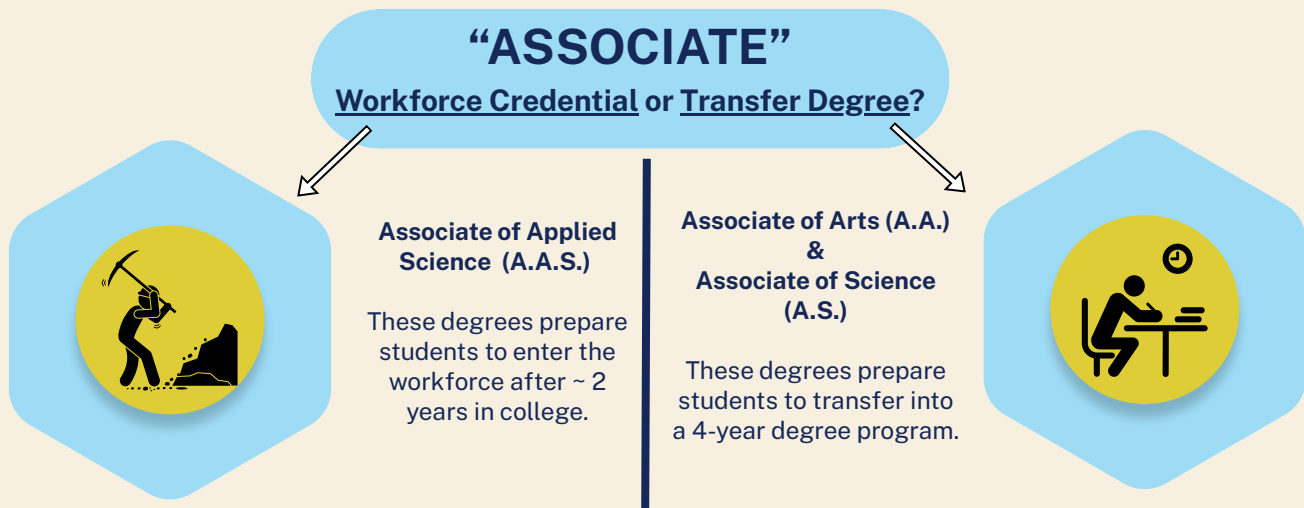


Attending your local community college allows you to keep costs down and to make the transition to a large campus a little easier.

What does your degree mean?

ARTS vs SCIENCES

Degree Level	Arts (A.A., B.A., M.A., Ph.D.) 	Sciences (A.S., B.S., M.S., Ph.D.) 
Focus	Creative, Humanities, Social Sciences	Analytical, Technical, Math/Science
Common Majors	English, History, Psychology	Biology, Engineering, Computer Science
Career Paths	Writing, Education, Law, Arts	Medicine, Tech, Research, Engineering



College can sound like an expensive choice.

Scholarships, grants, and aid can make the cost of your education in Montana more manageable.

Grants

Grants are financial aid that doesn't have to be repaid.
After you fill out the FAFSA, you could qualify for up to
\$7,000!

Scholarships

Like grants, scholarships are money for college that you don't have to repay. These can be local, national, or even offered by your college.

Work-study

A federal work program where you earn money to help pay for college expenses.

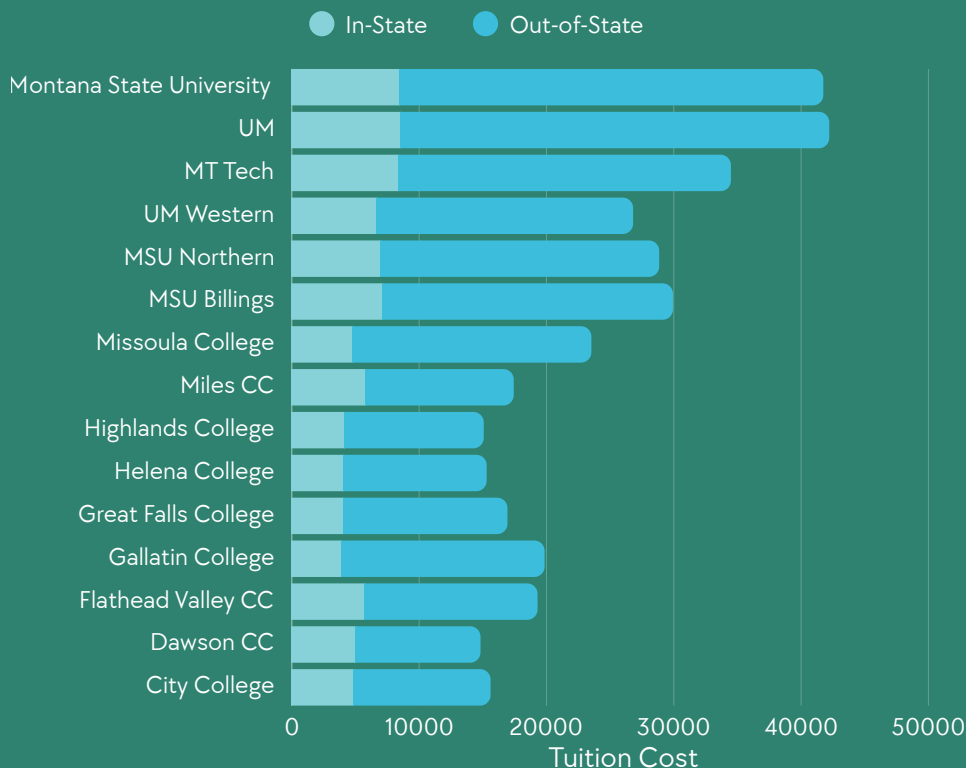
Have you heard of **FAFSA**?

(Free Application for Federal Student Aid)

FAFSA is a FREE application you fill out that tells you how much financial aid you are eligible for. This aid will come in the form of Pell grants (doesn't need to be repaid), federal loans, and work study.

This is one of the best opportunities for getting help with costs!

Cost of Tuition In-State vs. Out-of-State



Montana University System offers a broad and diverse amount of programs throughout our state.

Choosing to go to school in-state versus out-of-state is financially the far cheaper option. Make sure to explore all campuses and tribal colleges for the program that fits best for you to save BIG money!

Tuition & Support Programs



**MONTANA
STATE UNIVERSITY**

MT Treasure State First Generation Scholarship

MSU supports their first generation students by offering a \$1,500 scholarship per year. The award is given to MT residents who self-report they are the first person in their family to go to college.

Hilleman Scholars Program

The Hilleman Scholars Program supports high-achieving, Pell-eligible Montana students with scholarships, mentoring, and leadership development. Scholars join a Summer Success Academy, earn up to \$19,000 in support, and commit to community engagement and academic excellence.

MONTANA 10 is a multi-year scholarship and student success program designed to help you graduate on-time, with less debt, and on a strong path to your career

**MONTANA
10**

The Grizzly Promise funds up to four years, or eight semesters, of UM tuition and fees. If you're from a family with an income of \$50,000 or less, UM is dedicated to making sure your tuition is covered so you can attend University of Montana tuition-free.

Carroll College will cover the remaining tuition for first-time, resident freshmen enrolled in an undergraduate program who are federal Pell grant recipients.

Dawson Promise



Dawson Promise is a supportive program aimed at helping youth aging out of the foster care system, unaccompanied youth, or homeless youth to obtain a 2-year education without debt.

Students will have a mentor to assist in navigating financial aid, campus resources, on-campus employment, and housing.

Dual Enrollment + One-Two-Free

Save your time, money, and help while transitioning to college

Dual Enrollment provides high school students the opportunity to take college courses while still in high school.

Dual Enrollment allows students to take 100 and 200 level college courses.

To enroll in the One-Two-Free Dual Enrollment program, ask your school counselor for approval and the proper course registration form.

**ONE
TWO
FREE.**



ONE SYSTEM.
TWO COURSES.
**FREE ACCESS TO
HIGHER EDUCATION.**

Get college credit for
taking your high
school classes

Students
demonstrating
hardship

**Tackle two things
at once**

**May apply for scholarship
for additional courses**

First 2 courses,
or up to 6
credits

Additional
courses

FREE

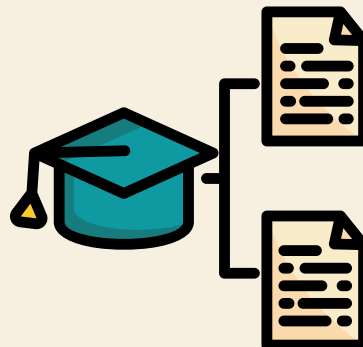
**50% 2-year
resident tuition**

88.9% of Montana public high schools offer dual enrollment courses.

On average, about 60% of dual enrollment students attend a college in the Montana University System.

Upon graduation, Dual Enrollment (DE) students average \$570 less in student loans per credit than non-dual enrollment graduates.
That's over \$1700 in savings!

Source: Dual Enrollment Data and Reports



Want to learn more?
Check out the Future
Ready Toolkit!



You're In! Now What?

Next Steps Checklist

Stay on track. Stay supported. Start strong.



1. Set Up Your College Accounts

Activate your email and student portal so you don't miss important information.



5. Check Your Email & Messages Weekly

Your college will send important updates about orientation, housing, and financial aid – don't miss them!



2. Register for Orientation ASAP

Orientation is a key milestone. Missing it can delay class registration and next steps.



6. Stay Organized with a Checklist

Keep track of deadlines, logins, and tasks – small steps make a big difference.



3. Finish Your Financial Aid (FAFSA + Tasks)

Finish all steps for your FAFSA and accept your aid package. Don't assume it's automatic!



7. Prepare for Start of School

Make a plan for starting college by arranging transportation, packing what you need, reviewing your schedule, and preparing for move-in.



4. Submit Final Documents

Send your final transcript and any required documents (like immunization records or forms) to your college after graduation.



8. Use Campus Support Resources

Contact advisors for help and use campus resources like tutoring and support services.

Are you graduating from a GEAR UP school?

Make sure to claim your 21st Century Scholarship!

Create an account on Award Montana and claim your \$1,000 scholarship.



Don't let small tasks turn into big barriers. Stay connected and take action early!

Where To Turn For Help On Campus

You Don't Have to Figure It Out Alone

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Advising Office

Help choosing classes & staying on track

Tutoring Center

Free help with homework, writing, & more

Library

Research help, study spaces and resources

FINANCIAL HELP

Financial Aid Office

FAFSA, grants, loans, scholarships, & bill help

COMMUNITY & CONNECTION

Student Organizations

Find your community and get involved

TRIO/Student Support Services

Extra support for first-gen & eligible students

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Counseling Services

Mental health support & stress management

Health Center

Basic medical care & wellness visits

CAREER & FUTURE PLANNING

Career Services

Resume help, internships, job search support

CAMPUS LIFE & SUPPORT

Student Affairs

Help with personal challenges or emergencies

Residence Life

Support for students living on campus

Campus Security

Safety concerns or emergencies



Tip: If you're not sure where to start, ask ANY campus office. They will point you in the right direction.

Not Sure What To Say?

Start here



Email Starters

General Questions

"Hello, my name is [Name], and I'm an incoming student. I had a question about..."

"Hi, I was recently accepted to [College Name], and I am reaching out to ask about..."

Admissions / Next Steps

"Hi, I've been accepted to [College Name], and I want to make sure I'm completing all my next steps..."

"Hello, I'm an admitted student and had a question about enrollment requirements..."

Financial Aid / Scholarships

"Hello, I'm a prospective student and had a question about my financial aid offer..."

"Hi, I'm trying to better understand my scholarship/aid package and was hoping you could help..."

Housing / Orientation / Registration

"Hi, I'm an incoming student and had a question about housing/orientation/registration..."

"Hello, I'm preparing for my first semester and was wondering about..."



Phone Call Starters

General Call

"Hi, my name is [Name], and I'll be attending this fall. I have a question about..."

"Hello, I'm an incoming student calling to ask about..."

Leaving a Voicemail

"Hi, this is [Name], an incoming student. I'm calling with a question about [topic]. You can reach me at [phone number]. Thank you!"

If You're Not Sure Who to Talk To

"Hi, I'm not sure who to speak with, but I have a question about [topic]. Could you point me in the right direction?"

MONTANA GEAR UP

21st Century SCHOLARSHIP

\$1,000 Award Opportunity

If you attended a GEAR UP school for your entire senior year or for at least half of your time in grades 7–12 (3 years) between Nov. 2024 - Oct. 2031, you may qualify for a \$1,000 GEAR UP Scholarship.

Eligible students can claim their scholarship during the spring of their senior year by:

- Creating an account at <https://oche.my.site.com>
- Clicking on “Montana GEARUP - 21st Century Scholar Award”



LIST OF GEAR UP SCHOOLS FOR 2024-2031 GRANT CYCLE

- ARLEE SCHOOL DISTRICT
- BOX ELDER SCHOOL DISTRICT
- BROWNING SCHOOL DISTRICT
- HARDIN SCHOOL DISTRICT
- LIBBY SCHOOL DISTRICT
- LODGE GRASS SCHOOL DISTRICT
- PRYOR SCHOOL DISTRICT
- ROCKY BOY SCHOOL DISTRICT
- ST IGNATIUS SCHOOL DISTRICT
- ST REGIS SCHOOL DISTRICT
- SUPERIOR SCHOOL DISTRICT
- THOMPSON FALLS SCHOOL DISTRICT

As part of the process, you'll be asked to share where and when you plan to start college.

Once your eligibility and enrollment are confirmed, the scholarship funds will be sent directly to your institution at the beginning of the term.

 Important: You must claim your award before the semester you turn 22 years old—don't miss out!



QUESTIONS?

Contact Madie Moore at
mmoore@montana.edu or 406-449-9129