

CHANCELLOR CHECK-IN

MONTANA
TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY



March 25, 2025

[Athletics](#) | [Giving](#)

Dear Faculty, Staff, and Students,

I hope you all had a relaxing and enjoyable spring break. Like many of you, I was away from campus, attending a conference in New Orleans, followed by a presentation at a strategy conference in Boston. Engaging with colleagues, participating in thought-provoking discussions, and learning from others always reinforces the impact of our work—and, just as importantly, reminds me of the people and relationships that make it meaningful.

A perfect example of this happened the moment I landed in New Orleans, when I ran into one of my favorite alumni. He had just returned from a week in the field at one of his company's refineries, and in a quick but memorable ten-minute conversation, we shared updates, stories, and reflected on experiences that impacted who we are today. While the professional learning and discussions at both conferences were valuable, that unexpected moment reminded me that the relationships we build—through our time at Montana Tech and beyond—are often what matter most.

As we approach the home stretch of spring semester, with all the events, activities, and opportunities to connect, I encourage you to take a moment to nurture these friendships and appreciate the friendships we build and the connections that enrich our lives. Many of these moments are highlighted in this edition of the **Chancellor Check-In**—I hope you enjoy them.

Cheers and best wishes,

Les P. Cook
Chancellor



MONTANA TECH ANNOUNCES CANDIDATE VISITS IN ITS SEARCH FOR THE 13TH CHANCELLOR

Montana Tech's search advisory committee has announced the candidates for the chancellor position: Karen A. Marrongelle, Ph.D. and Johnny MacLean, Ph.D.

Karen Marrongelle, Ph.D. will visit campus on **March 23-24**. An open forum will be held on campus in the Copper Lounge on March 24 from 3:30-4:30 pm. A bio and interview schedule can

be found [here](#).

Johnny MacLean, Ph.D. will visit campus on **March 24-25**. An open forum will be held on campus in the Copper Lounge on March 25 from 3:30-4:30 pm. A bio and interview schedule can be found [here](#).

For more details, please visit the chancellor search website at www.mtech.edu/chancellor-search/.



MINING TEAM BRINGS HOME SEVERAL TROPHIES

Montana Tech's Mining Team brought home several trophies from the 47th International Collegiate Mining Competition held at the University of Exeter's Camborne School of Mines and the King Edward Mine Museum in Camborne, England on March 19-22. Montana Tech fielded five teams, comprised of 15 men and 15 women competitors. Every team placed in the top three in at least one event. The Orphan Girls Team took home second place overall out of 10 teams. [Read more](#)



Montana Tech FOUNDATION

THE FUTURE OF ENERGY DISCUSSION

Join us for an insightful discussion on the future of energy with these two industry leaders on the challenges, innovations, and opportunities shaping the global energy landscape, moderated by Lance Energy Chair Bob Morris.



Ryan Lance
CEO & Chairman
ConocoPhillips



Richard Adkerson
Chairman of the Board of
Freeport-McMoRan Inc.



Bob Morris
Lance Energy Chair
Montana Technological
University

Wednesday
March 26, 2025

Time
11AM - 12PM

Location
Copper Lounge
Student Union Building

PUBLIC WELCOME

FUTURE OF ENERGY DISCUSSION

You are invited to an insightful conversation on the future of energy with Ryan Lance, Chairman and CEO of [ConocoPhillips](#), and [Richard C. Adkerson](#), Chairman of the Board of [Freeport-McMoRan](#) on **March 26** at 11:00 am to 12:00 pm in the Copper Lounge. The event will be moderated by Lance Energy Chair [Robert Morris](#). This event is free and open to the public.

Don't miss this opportunity to hear from two of the energy industry's top leaders as they discuss the challenges, innovations, and opportunities shaping the global energy landscape. Please RSVP [here](#).



Montana Tech's Spring Commencement ceremonies will take place on **Saturday, May 10, 2025**, in the HPER. Ryan Lance '84, chairman and chief executive officer of ConocoPhillips will be the speaker.

CHANCELLOR'S RECEPTION

Friday, May 9
6:00 pm to 7:30 pm
Student Success Center

LINE RODEO

Friday, May 9
9:00 am-12:00 pm
Highlands College Pole
Yard

ORDER OF THE ENGINEER

Saturday, May 10
5:00 pm
Library Auditorium

NURSE PINNING CEREMONY

Saturday, May 10
8:00 am
Library Auditorium

COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY

Saturday, May 10
10:00 am | HPER

Lance College of Mines &
Engineering/Graduate
School

COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY

Saturday, May 10
1:00 pm | HPER

CLSPS and Highlands
College



FACULTY MERIT AWARD WINNERS

Congratulations to the following recipients of the 2024-2025 Faculty Merit Awards:

Doug Abbott, Professor, Business

Chris Danielson, Professor, Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences

Julie Hart, Professor, Safety, Health, and Industrial Hygiene

Rick LaDouceur, Associate Professor, Mechanical Engineering

Raja Nagisetty, Professor, Environmental Engineering

Brahma Pramanik, Associate Professor, Mechanical Engineering

Hilary Risser, Professor, Mathematics

Scott Risser, Professor, Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences

Kathy Roth, Associate Professor, Nursing

Brian St. Clair, Associate Professor, Chemistry

Sudhakar Vadiraja, Professor, Metallurgical and Materials Engineering

These faculty members exemplify excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service, making a lasting impact on our students, our institution, and beyond. Their dedication strengthens Montana Tech's mission, and we are grateful for their contributions.





Please join us for an afternoon of celebration and recognition as we honor our colleagues at the **2025 Annual Faculty and Staff Celebration**.

Wednesday, April 23 | 3:00 pm-5:00 pm | Copper Lounge

Appetizers, drinks, and great company

RSVP to Jodie Jones at jjones16@mtech.edu by April 16.



COOPER RECEIVES OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD FROM ACPA FOUNDATION

Montana Tech's Vice Provost and Dean of Students Dr. Joe Cooper received the Outstanding Service to the Foundation Award from the American College Personnel Association Foundation at the organization's convention in Long Beach, California held Feb. 16-19. [Read more](#)



PHASE 3 OF THE HEATING SYSTEM UPGRADE TO BEGIN IN MARCH

Montana Tech has begun Phase 3B of its campus heating system upgrade, installing a tunnel system, new steam supply piping, and condensate return piping. This phase will require closing the road between the Steam Plant and the Facilities building, as well as the north side of the Mill Building, raised mulch landscape area in the courtyard to be closed to foot traffic courtyard (between the Mill Building's outside staircase and the raised mulch landscape area) to pedestrian traffic. [Read more](#)



ENGINEERING STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANCE OF TRIO SSS

When Riley Huckins graduated from Cheney High School in Cheney, Washington over a decade ago, he did not even consider college as an option.

"I had no one to talk to me about college," Huckins remembers. "My high school didn't actively promote college attendance or offer related programs. My parents didn't attend college, so I thought I would go work wherever. Looking back, if I had somebody to teach me the importance of attending college, I would have gone a long time ago." [Read more](#)





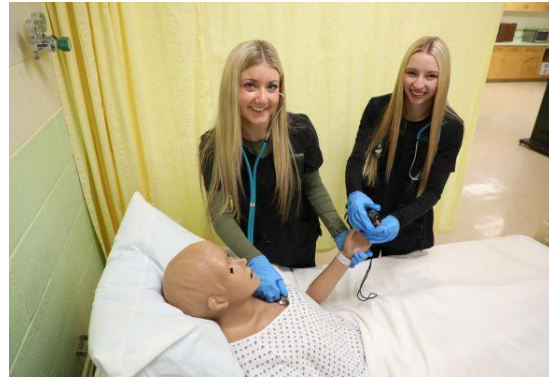
CRITICAL HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES AT HIGHLANDS COLLEGE

The Automotive Technology program, renowned for its career-ready graduates, is benefitting from a strong partnership with the Denny Menholt Ford dealership in Butte, ensuring students receive a high-quality educational experience.

In the past year, the dealership has donated four vehicles to the program, including a 2013 Ford F-150. "It's a great vehicle because it's a V-6 twin turbocharged, with direct injection," Instructor Jerry Stewart said. "It gives us something to practice on. We don't have the budget to go out and buy new vehicles, so we have to get vehicles where we can." [Read more](#)



HIGHLANDS COLLEGE EXPLORATION DAY COMING UP



HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS EARN CNA LICENSE

Thirty-three high school students have gained a head start in their healthcare careers through a partnership between Highlands College, MSU-Billings, Montana Futures at Work, and Billings Career Center. The partnership provided these students with tuition-free access to Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) licensure courses. The program launched in Fall 2024, with funding from Montana Futures at Work, and provided students with scrubs, study materials, instruction, a blood pressure cuff, and a stethoscope. It allows high school students to take dual enrollment classes and earn their CNA license prior to high school graduation, and takes one semester to one year to complete. [Read more](#)



HIGHLANDS STUDENT CONNECTS WITH RESOURCES

To say Luke Martin's start at Highlands College was rough, and required a lot of Oredigger grit to

Highlands College will host Highlands College Exploration Day for high school students on April 9, 2025. The event offers students hands-on experiences in their chosen field. Construction Technology-Carpentry will showcase a variety of carpentry projects, while tours of the Machining Lab will demonstrate precision manufacturing on CNC machines and lathes, tours of the Radiologic Technology lab will demonstrate simulation activities, and the line workers will practice knot-tying and explore the bucket trucks, which are part of the Pre-Apprentice Line Program. [Read more](#)

overcome, would probably be an understatement. He arrived on campus two weeks late, with plans to take a hefty 16-credit-hour course load, but no idea how to execute his financial aid award.

Without a car, he explored the public transportation options but ultimately found a solution with a local bike shop. His determination led to a successful negotiation, securing a BMX bike within the few dollars he had in his pocket. [Read more](#)



COLLEGE OF LETTERS, SCIENCES & PROFESSIONAL STUDIES UPDATE



ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION PROFESSOR PARTNERS WITH LEADING AUSTRALIAN ACADEMICS AND PROFESSIONALS

In the field of ecological restoration, the work done by the Australian scientists, the government and collaborating industrial partners sets a standard of excellence that leads the world. "In the U.S., restoration efforts often focus on reintroducing a select dozen species," said Dr. Robert Pal. "In contrast, Australia takes a far more comprehensive approach, aiming to restore entire ecosystems, sometimes reintroducing up to 2,000 species at certain mine sites." [Read more](#)



NURSING STUDENT OVERCOMES CHALLENGES OF TRANSFERRING FROM PHILIPPINES UNIVERSITY TO EARN CLINICAL SPOT

A Montana Tech sophomore has overcome obstacles that stood in the way of earning a nursing degree after moving halfway around the world from the Philippines to Butte.

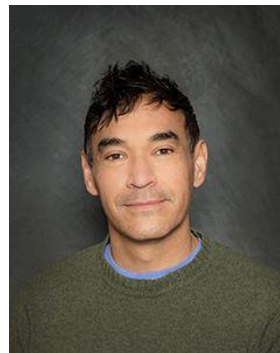
Nera Pelobello has earned a spot in Montana Tech's clinical portion of the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program at the Sherry Lesar School of Nursing. It's a journey that started back in her home country, the Philippines. [Read more](#)



ALUMNUS SAYS VALUE GENERATED BY DATA SCIENTISTS CREATE LONG-TERM CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

When you ask Chris Dienes (Mathematical Sciences, '08) about the evolution of his career, his job titles have morphed over the past decade nearly as quickly as the frontier of Big Data itself.

“At my first job, I was called a statistician,” Dienes said. “Then it became data scientist, and later it was AI/ML (Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning) engineer. Now you’re seeing generative AI (artificial intelligence) scientist. Some places still call it data science, and some places still call it machine learning, but we’re doing similar things, while maybe some roles are just adding more emphasis to the latest technology and the hottest buzzword.” [Read more](#)



HAYNES AWARDED PRESTIGIOUS FELLOWSHIP

Assistant Professor of Literature Matthew Haynes has been awarded a residency by the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts (VCCA) at Moulin à Nef in Auvillar, France. The VCCA was founded in 1971 by Virginia writers Nancy Hale and Elizabeth Coles Langhorn.

To be eligible for the residency, Haynes was first awarded a 50th anniversary writing fellowship at the VCCA's Mt. St. Angelo campus in 2023.

Each year, approximately 400 visual artists, writers, and composers participate in residences at the VCCA's campuses in the Blue Ridge Mountains at Mt. St. Angelo and Moulin à Nef in Auvillar, France. This summer Haynes will complete his residency at Moulin à Nef.

Fellows live at the Maison [Vieillescaze](#) in one of four apartments, and work in the studio building, La Cebo, which was converted from a 17th century house located next to the Fellows' residence. [Read more](#)





HANDS-ON LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES DREW STUDENT TO CAMPUS

When you ask Francisco Estatuet why he wants to be a mining engineer, his answer is simple.

“For me, mining is the basis for everything,” Estatuet said. “Everything we have, everything we own, everything we use on a daily basis is a product of mining. The fact that it is an industry that will never cease to exist is also reassuring. Plus, I think mining is really hands-on with fieldwork, too, and then you transition into an office job.” [Read more](#)



MONTANA TECH TEAM COMPETES AT PETROBOWL

Five Montana Tech students recently traveled to the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE) North America Student Symposium, held February 20-22 at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, where they competed in the North America PetroBowl Championship. [Read more](#)



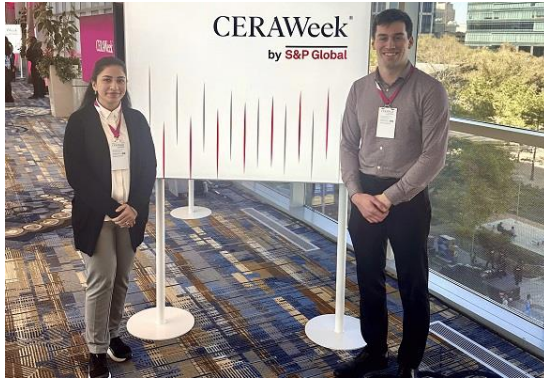
METALLURGICAL AND MATERIALS ENGINEERING SUMMER PROGRAM

High school students are invited to apply for the free Metallurgical and Materials Engineering Summer Program from June 15-20. The week-long residential program is open to high school sophomores and juniors who are interested in exploring careers in science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM) fields. It features hands-on learning, field trips, and presentations by subject matter experts. [Read more](#)



TEAMS COMPETE AT THE ASC CONSTRUCTION BIDDING COMPETITION

Two teams and one alternate competed in the 2025 ASC Region 6/7 annual construction bidding competition, held in Sparks, Nevada on February 5-8. Montana Tech competed in the Alternate, Commercial, and Heavy Civil Divisions. [Read more](#)



GRADUATE STUDENTS ATTEND CERA WEEK

Two graduate students from Montana Tech traveled to Houston, Texas in mid-March for the world's premier energy conference, CERAWeek.

Materials Science Ph.D. students Zainab Nasrullah, from Lahore, Pakistan, and Max Triepke (B.S. Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, '22; M.Eng Materials Science, '24) from Missoula attended the conference as part of NextGen cohort, which is a new initiative by CERAWeek to bridge the gap between the academia and industry to facilitate the discovery of new pathways for energy transition, find talent and build alliances. Nasrullah and Triepke's attendance was facilitated by Lance Energy Chair Bob Morris and Vice Chancellor for Research and Dean of the Graduate School Dr. Angela Lueking. [Read more](#)



TEAM PLACES AT NATIONAL CYBER DEFENSE NATIONAL COMPETITION

Students studying computer networks and cybersecurity at Montana Tech and Highlands College took third place in the National Collegiate Cyber Defense Regional Competition held March 1-2, 2025. Participants included: Yen Fan, Avery Anderson, Garrett Pruttis, Ken Curran, Morgan Hendrickson, Tyce Erickson, and Konner Ferguson. The team was supported by Instructor Jason Rackham. The competition pits teams against cybersecurity professionals who create a scenario where the students represent a fictional company under active attack by cybercriminals.

"They're professional hackers that work against you," Pruttis, a senior from Chinook, said. "The competition takes two eight-hour days over the weekend. The first day, they're just trying to implement their hacks into your environment. Then, on the second day, they start executing rules and trying to bring down your services." [Read more](#)





CRITICAL PIECE OF EQUIPMENT IN UMEC GETS REPAIRED

Students will continue to have important hands-on experiences that help them land careers in the mining industry thanks to a recent generous donation by Komatsu Mining Corp. in Billings and Cummins Inc. [Read more](#)



GLOWING SPECIMENS BACK ON DISPLAY AT MINERAL MUSEUM

The most popular exhibit at The Mineral Museum, featuring fluorescent minerals that glow in the dark under UV light is back on display, thanks in part to the hard work of members of the Montana Tech Robotics Club. [Read more](#)



WORKSHOP CONNECTS TEACHERS WITH OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

Montana Tech will hold a free workshop from June 10-14 in Billings for K-12 teachers to learn about the petroleum industry and its impact on their local community. Sponsored by Hess Corporation, the Montana Petroleum Resources Workshop will include room and board for the week. Teachers receive 31 License Renewal Units or two graduate college credits from MSU-Billings. Petroleum Engineering faculty will lead the workshop. [Read more](#)



MONTANA TECH COMPETES AT SAFETY OLYMPICS

The Safety, Health and Industrial Hygiene Department sent six students to defend its spot as reigning champions of the Safety Olympics on February 27-28 at Southeastern Oklahoma State University. They took home third place. This year's team consisted of first-time senior competitors. The event requires participants to exhibit their skills in occupational health, safety, and industrial hygiene through a series of challenges. [Read more](#)



STUDENTS, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR ATTEND IADC/SPE CONFERENCE

Five students and one assistant professor traveled to the International Association of Drilling Engineers/Society of Petroleum Engineers (IADC/SPE) Conference, held March 4-6 in Stavanger, Norway. Students Mackenzie Cook, Shaena Jackson, Kyle Mitchell, Audrie Jensen and Marcus Hermes joined Assistant Professor Dr. David Rathgeber at the journey. [Read more](#)



STUDENTS STUDYING IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Three Metallurgical and Materials Engineering juniors, Cooper Cervelli, Carson Le Lacheur, and Daniel Ziesing, are doing their Spring semester courses at the Western Australia School of Mines in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia.



STUDENTS TOUR BAKKEN OILFIELD OPERATIONS

Thirty-five students joined Petroleum Engineering Professor Dr. Todd Hoffman in an educational field trip to the Bakken oilfield on March 7-9 to learn about energy production. Many of the students were in Hoffman's Intro to Petroleum Engineering class, however some were also geological and mechanical engineering students interested in working in the petroleum industry. [Read more](#)



GIFT TO METALLURGICAL AND MATERIALS ENGINEERING

The Bull and Jan Dawson Trust provided the Metallurgical and Materials Engineering Department with a \$50,000 gift for infrastructure improvement and \$20,000 to help support the Metallurgical and Materials Engineering Summer Program.





The **Oredigger women's basketball team** rose to new heights in 2024-25, winning the program's most games in more than a decade. Picked last in the Frontier Conference's preseason poll, Montana Tech quickly put that underestimation to rest with a 5-1 start to the year.

Tech finished with an 18-12 mark, the program's first NAIA national tournament berth since 2011, and a 9-6 record in Frontier Conference play. Junior Hadley Humphreys made an immediate impact after transferring in, leading the Diggers in scoring and rebounding on her way to first-team All-Frontier honors. Senior Aubrie Rademacher and junior Liv Wangerin landed honorable mentions on the all-conference list, and senior Macy Mayer earned a spot on the all-defensive team.

The Orediggers earned five wins over teams ranking in the national top 25 and finished the year receiving votes in the poll themselves.

Montana Tech's men's basketball team made history in 2024-25, becoming the first Frontier Conference program in the league's history to win four consecutive conference tournaments. The Orediggers finished the year with a 24-7 record, going 10-5 in conference play to also win the league's regular-season championship for the fourth-straight year.

Hayden Diekhans swept the conference's player of the year and defensive player of the year awards, and the junior landed a first-team all-conference selection as well. Senior Keeley Bake joined Diekhans on the first team, while senior Ifeanyi Okeke was a second-teamer. Diekhans and Okeke both earned all-defensive team accolades. Head coach Adam Hiatt was voted the Frontier's coach of the year.

Tech earned three wins over nationally ranked programs during the season and reached as high as No. 5 in the NAIA's rankings itself. The Orediggers' postseason run ended in the NAIA national tournament's first round with a loss to Southern Oregon.



TRACK AND FIELD SUCCESS

The Montana Tech track & field team added two more All-America honors to the trophy case, one on each side of the 2025 NAIA indoor national championships in Gainesville, Fla.

Junior Cade VanVleet toppled his own program record in the men's shot put with a 17.14-meter throw that made him national runner-up. Senior

Jadyn Vermillion led the way for the women, placing fifth in the long jump at 5.80 meters.

VanVleet was the highest NAIA championships finisher in the history of the Montana Tech men's track & field program. Vermillion became the third Oredigger woman to earn All-America accolades at the indoor national meet.

Eight other Montana Tech student-athletes competed at the meet: Alyssa Plant (15th, 3,000m run), Kamryn Comba (18th, 600m), Ayla Janzen (22nd, 60m hurdles), and Rylee Armstrong (28th, long jump) also represented the Orediggers on the women's side. The men's 4x400m relay of Adam Schrader, Morgan McClellan, Matthew Moreni, and Will Wagner took 25th.

Photo courtesy of Sofia Brotherton



HOCKEY TO HOLD INAUGURAL PROSPECT CAMP

Montana Tech's Oredigger Hockey Club team will host its first-ever Prospect Camp in Butte from March 27-29, 2025, offering prospective players a glimpse into the university's academic offerings, athletic facilities, coaching staff, and team resources. [Read more](#)



Upcoming Events

3/25: [Johnny MacLean Ph.D. Interview](#)

3/27-29: Hockey Prospect Camp

4/09: Highlands Exploration Day | Blood Drive (12:30 pm-4:00 pm, Big Butte Room)

4/10-12: John "Jocko" Evans Petroleum Symposium | Foundation Board Meeting

4/12: Digger Auction

4/23: Faculty/Staff Awards | Early Impact Alumni Awards

4/24: Techxpo | Student Awards Ceremony

4/25: Scholars Day

5/09: Line Rodeo | Order of the Engineer | Chancellor's Reception for Graduates

5/10: Nurse Pinning | Commencement

