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CAMPUS REPORT | Board of Regents Meeting | March 15-16, 2023



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Great Falls College is proud to be the [River Otters](#). The process started with an invitation for campus and the community to propose ideas. More than 500 suggestions flooded in. The college then narrowed the choices down to about 125 when reviewing the proposals against the set criteria. A mascot committee made up of students, faculty, staff, alumni and the community then narrowed it down to a Top 10 before a campus vote winnowed it down to a final three: River Otters, Electric Elk and Wolverines. A community-wide vote that reached more than 2,300 people revealed the River Otters to be the winner. The objective will be to enhance brand identity, boost school spirit and have fun.

Great Falls College's Continuing Education and Training held a celebration for the graduates and partners of its innovative [commercial driver's license program](#). The program helped 10 students obtain their CDL with another 20 earning their CDL permit enroute to getting their full license. Students start their program with Great Falls College's instructors in the classroom, on the school's state-of-the-art simulator and on a tractor-trailer for about three weeks to get their permits before being paired with industry partners who give them experience. Employers also can send their current employees through the program. The celebration included state and local leaders in addition to the students and industry partners. "You've been involved in creating one of the most creative solutions to workforce development Montana has seen," Dr. Stephanie Erdmann, CEO/dean of Great Falls College. "I guarantee this model will be used and promoted as best practice to guide industry and education partnerships in the future."

The popular [Bringing the U to You](#) lecture series featured Montana State University professors Mark Fiege and Jeffrey Conger speaking on "Public Lands, Public Unifiers" and the "Hidden Strengths of Dyslexia," respectively. University of Montana professors Dexter Roberts and Hilary Martens presented discussions on the "Myth of Chinese Capitalism: Challenges to China's Future as a Global Superpower" and "Tracking Water Resources and Drought Condition with Space Satellites," respectively.

Great Falls College's [physical therapist assistant](#) program is addressing a shortage of physical therapist assistants throughout Montana by moving to a limited-residency option so that students can stay in their home community and get a degree in a high-wage, high-demand field in less than one year once pre-requisites are filled. "Students from all over Montana now will have access to the program," said Dr. Brad Bechard, PTA program director. "There is a shortage of physical therapist assistants throughout Montana, and we are hopeful that we can help fill those voids. And students don't have to uproot their lives and move to Great Falls. It's a win-win for everyone."

[Ashley Haley](#) has been hired to be the ambassador for the Native American Enrichment Center. The position is a new grant-funded role that will help provide a safe haven for students to reach out to Ashley for scholarship information, assistance with navigating higher education, academic support, study skills, student engagement, cultural opportunities, mentoring, networking and more. She will assist students in becoming more independent, self-confident and efficient learners while providing advocacy that contributes to the overall academic success and persistence of Indigenous students. Ashley is a student in the college's new Substances Abuse and Addictions Counseling program. "Having a connection to your cultural identity is very important, but living away from home can make that connection harder," Ashley said. "I want to help increase access to cultural resources, and educational and employment opportunities, while still maintaining a strong tribal identity."