



February 2026: A Newsletter for Salish Kootenai College

Integrity ~ Respect ~ Relationships ~ Reciprocity ~ Equity ~ Equality

Upcoming Dates

February 2nd - 6th
Midterm

February 5
Employee Virtual Meeting

February 9th
Spring Quarter Registration Begins

February 20th
Last Day to Withdraw from Classes

President's Welcome

Happy Winter! sʔistč ~ wanuyitnamu is one of my favorite times of the year, especially when snow rests on our valley floor. Winter invites mindfulness, prayer, comfort, and the sharing of our stories and teachings. It is a season for community, reflection, and preparing for the year ahead. These past months have focused on strengthening our team and setting intentions for our future.

In November, the Board approved two long-considered initiatives: Rebranding *Salish Kootenai College* as *Séliš Ksanka Qlispé University* and

transitioning from a quarter to a semester system. Implementation will be gradual and guided by input from employees, students, and other stakeholders. While 2027 was an initial target, 2028 may be more appropriate given our Fall 2027 accreditation visit, and we will remain flexible as conversations continue.

We are celebrating an award from the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, which supports a campus-wide effort focused on sustainability and culturally grounded education. A gaps analysis and needs assessment will help guide youth development and strategic planning, with emphasis on cultural integration, collaboration, and long-term sustainability. Lemlmtš ~ hu sukiḥqukni to all who have contributed to this work.

We are also deeply honored to have received a significant donation from Mackenzie Scott and Yield Giving. The Board and Executive Council are developing a plan to ensure these funds strengthen fiscal sustainability, ensure honorable wages, and perpetuate our culture and language.

Budget managers have received the 2025–2026 budgets from the Vice President of Business Affairs, Audrey Plouffe, and are asked to review them and make realistic adjustments as we move forward together.

My travel will increase in the coming weeks. In February, I will travel to participate in the AIHEC Legislative Summit, Cultural Leave, and the three March conferences. I am working to limit travel while balancing campus priorities. Please reach out to Loni Grant and me if you need support.

I remain grateful for all you bring to SKC, our students, and our community. Lemlmtš ~ hu sukiḥqukni for sharing your gifts with us.

Salish Corner

Séliš u Qlispé (Salish and Pend d'Oreille)

stapsqé spqniʔs: shooting month, January

čqʷosqn spqniʔs: curly hair month, February

kʷsixʷ spqniʔs: geese month, March

ne xest tu a spuʔus u nem i toxʷ tu a šušwet
When your heart is good, your path will be straight.

Kootenai Corner

Ksanka (Kootenai)

kmitxattitnam: shooting month, January

nupqu nataniḥ: bear month, February

ḥikuq: melting snow month, March

nis wuniḥxuniʔtik kʷakniknamunaḥa kuč ʔḥakiḥnanaḥni
ʔuti-qawxaniḥwiynaḥa ʔan ʔatu qasčumqawḥaḥni.
We need to love and hold each other up to be a strong people.

SKC Engages with CSKT Tribal Council on Groundbreaking Grant for STEM Pathways

Recently, SKC had the honor of hosting a significant meeting with Tim VanRaken, the Regional Innovation Officer and statewide head of the Headwaters Tech Hub consortium. Alongside Eva Oruste, Eric Hogenson, and members of the SKC administration presented to Tribal Council, this meeting highlighted the pivotal role SKC plays in a transformative \$42 million grant awarded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). This grant, part of the Tech Hubs program established by the CHIPS and Sciences Act of 2022, aims to enhance Montana's technology sector, stimulate job growth, and train a skilled workforce across various industries such as optical sensing, autonomous vehicles, and advanced manufacturing.

As part of the Headwaters Tech Hub (HTH) initiative, SKC is proud to be one of several component projects receiving \$7.2 million for our project titled "Supporting Tribal Education Pathways" (STEP). We have already begun utilizing these funds to create clear pathways for students from middle school to careers in STEM fields, thereby enhancing job opportunities and cultivating a new generation of skilled professionals.

In its initial planning year, the STEP project has already achieved remarkable milestones:

- Enrollment of 209 students in HTH-aligned programs, focusing on hands-on learning in fields such as Building Trades, Computer Science, and Natural Resource Management.
- Distribution of \$250,166 in scholarships to support 55 students in their educational pursuits within STEM and workforce development.
- Collaborations with local stakeholders to enhance existing programs and develop new initiatives in emerging fields.



To showcase our efforts, we invite the community to view our promotional videos highlighting the following initiatives:

- [SKC Drone/UAV Symposium Promo Video](#)
- [SKC College Tour Video](#)

Our work has been featured in several media outlets. Explore the articles below:

- [Philanthropy News Digest](#)
- [Tribal College Journal](#)
- [The Missoulian](#)

Over the past year, SKC hosted STEM camps, educator trainings, and community events focused on strengthening STEM education and exploring career pathways in emerging fields.

SKC remains committed to advancing tribal education and supporting the next generation of innovators and leaders. For more information about the STEP project and upcoming events, please contact Eva Oruste at eva_oruste@skc.edu.

SKC Board of Directors

The current members of the SKC Board of Directors, as per the Bylaws, are:

- Eldena Bear Don't Walk, Chairperson
- Germaine White, 1st Vice Chairperson
- Vernon Finley, 2nd Vice Chairperson
- Jim Durglo, Board Member
- Selina Kenmille, Board Member
- Arrianna Henry, Board Member
- JaNeal McDonald, Board Member

Please note that SKC Board of Directors meetings are open to the public and offer opportunities for public participation at the beginning of each meeting (typically between 12:30 and 1:00 p.m.).

You can attend in person in the Big Knife Conference Room or via Zoom:

<https://skc-edu.zoom.us/j/84271424327>.

Upcoming Board Meetings are scheduled for:

- February 20
- March 20
- April 17

Winter Enrollment Update

These results reflect the continued dedication of our SKC community to advancing the College's mission. Lemlmtš ~ hu sukičukni!

- Student Headcount is 668.
- Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) is 667.
- This is a 95% retention rate since the Fall quarter.
- Tribal Student Enrollment is 75% (this includes Enrolled, 1st and 2nd Descendants from all tribes and Canadian Indian)
- Flathead Reservation Permanent Residence Students: At 67%.



Events and Reminders.....



• **Night of Fine Arts**

The American Indigenous Business Leaders (AIBL) of SKC cordially invite you to an evening of music and visual art featuring the University of Montana Quartet on February 6th at 6 PM in the JAVC Theatre. [View full details](#)

- The **Payroll Deduction** form has been updated. SKC and CSKT employees are invited to support student success through monthly contributions of any amount, helping sustain scholarships, cultural programming, and campus resources. [Click here](#) to download the form. Please return to Carol Burt in Payroll at carol_burt@skc.edu.

- Sadly, SKC's Business Program does not have the capacity to offer the **Free VITA Tax Clinic** this year. This service has been discontinued and will not be available moving forward. We encourage community members who previously used this service to seek alternative tax assistance options. [Click here](#) for a list of free and paid tax preparation services available in Polson and the surrounding areas. Please help share this update with others who may be impacted.

A Message from the Staff Council

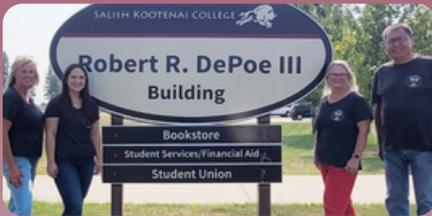
The Staff Council is here to champion our amazing team! We're dedicated to ensuring every staff member's voice is heard and that ideas and concerns are taken seriously. Our goal is to foster a warm and inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and empowered to contribute. We are committed to supporting professional growth, enhancing workplace well-being, and keeping communication open. Together, let's build a thriving atmosphere where everyone can shine!



Pictured l to r: Luthea Tryon, Mary Ann Running Crane, Kim Barber, Sheldon Shepherd, Sunshine Gaither (Chair), Dustin Hutchins (Co-Chair), Joshua Boggess, Lindy Warden, Secretary (not pictured)

TRIO Staff to Attend MT ASPIRE Conference

The SKC TRIO Department will participate in the MT ASPIRE Conference, February 22–24, at the Red Lion Ridgewater Inn in Polson. Attending the event are Director Kathie Maiers, along with Allen Addison, Sunshine Gaither, and Montana Campbell. As a key host site, SKC is proud to support this gathering, which offers engaging sessions focused on collaboration and professional growth to help our team strengthen their support for student success.



SKC's Life Sciences Master's program in full swing!

The three-year research driven degree path is for students who are interested in advancing their research skills in cellular chemistry, biochemistry and genetics. Masters of Life Science students will have the chance to have their research published in a peer-reviewed journal and a thesis document in the Salish Kootenai College Library. Caitlyn Farris, a Salish Kootenai College alumni, is currently working on wrapping up a project that is Identifying mercury methylating bacteria in Flathead Lake. Caitlyn is planning on starting her own research project within the next few months.



Student-Led Impact Supporting Future Bison

The SKC Entrepreneurship class is bringing ideas to life while supporting the Future Bison Scholarship, a new fund created through their class efforts. Students have designed fun, Bison-inspired merchandise now available at the Bison Hub on campus. Every purchase directly supports the Future Bison Scholarship Fund. Stop by to shop t-shirts, hoodies, and stickers and help make a difference for future Bison. [View flyer](#)



Charge Into Your Future.

Your future, your path. Choose from over 41 diverse programs—from workforce certificates to master's degrees—and apply to SKC today to start your journey.

[Apply to SKC Today](#)

Interested in Donating to SKC?

Help cultivate the next generation of community leaders by supporting SKC's unique educational framework that encourages lives of purpose and leadership.

[Donate to SKC](#)

