

PIONEER PROFILES



IMAGE: MCC Director of Student Success and Retention Holly Snell

Pioneer Profiles: Meet Holly Snell

MILES CITY, MONTANA: Holly Snell grew up in St. Ignatius, learning the value of hard work early on while changing handlines on her family's ranch for five dollars a line at just nine years old. That early responsibility shaped a work ethic and resilience that still define her today as the Director of Student Success and Retention at Miles Community College, a role she has held since August 2022.

Holly's days move at a steady, purposeful pace, shaped by constant connection with students and colleagues.

"My days are a constant rhythm of support and problem-solving," she says.

Mornings often begin with student athletes looking for a quiet place to study, and from there, the Learning Center fills with activity. She moves seamlessly between tutoring sessions, advising conversations, accommodation planning, and moments of what she affectionately calls "mom support."

Emails, phone calls, meetings, reports, and proctored exams fill the hours between, each one tied to a student or campus need.

"There's always something happening—and always a student who needs guidance," Holly says.

By late afternoon, as practices begin and campus settles, she finally finds a brief window to catch up on administrative work and prepare for the next day.

What she values most about Miles Community College is the family atmosphere. In her view, MCC is a place where people genuinely care about one another, and she takes pride in helping cultivate that environment. The Learning Center is central to that mission—a space she has worked intentionally to make comfortable, welcoming, and supportive. It's a place where students can study, eat, relax, ask questions, or simply take a breath, knowing they belong.

Holly describes herself as passionate, supportive, diligent, resilient, and empathetic—qualities that show up in both her leadership style and her advice to others. She believes deeply in perseverance, encouraging students and colleagues alike to keep trying, even when things get hard. She also emphasizes empathy, recognizing that everyone carries unseen challenges, and reminds people that courage often means moving forward despite fear.

Looking back on her career, Holly points to two achievements that stand out. In adult education, she took on the Havre Adult Education Program and helped bring 100 new adult learners into the community. In higher education, she is most proud of creating a Learning Center where students want to be—a space defined not just by academic support, but by warmth and connection.

Outside of work, Holly gravitates toward sunshine and open spaces. She enjoys riding her horses, hiking, paddle boarding, kayaking, traveling, teaching yoga, and spending time with family. She loves cooking and baking for others and canning—especially salsa. If she weren't in her current role, she jokes that she would run an equine facility offering therapeutic riding lessons, if only hay didn't cost so much.

Her list of future adventures is long and full of intention: training another pro-level barrel horse, reading a book a month, becoming a seasonal snowbird, and traveling the Pacific Coast Highway—camping and riding along the way, while she's still young enough to fully enjoy it.

Holly's work at Miles Community College is grounded in care, perseverance, and a belief in people's potential. Every day, she helps ensure that students not only succeed academically, but feel supported, seen, and valued along the way.

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