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IMAGE: MCC Instructor Garth Sleight

MCC Instructor Sleight Retires After 40 Years of Service

MILES CITY, MONTANA: After four decades of teaching, mentoring, and building lasting relationships with students, Miles Community College instructor Garth Sleight is retiring, closing the chapter on a 40-year career that has shaped the lives of thousands.

Over the course of his time at MCC, Sleight estimates he has taught between 3,000 and 4,000 students, with each one contributing to a career defined not just by longevity, but by connection.

"I have truly been living my dream to teach at a small community college where I could make a difference," Sleight said.

“Garth’s 40 years at MCC is an incredible accomplishment,” stated MCC President Ron Slinger, “but it’s his care for students and the impact he’s had on thousands that truly define his legacy.”

For Sleight, teaching was never just a profession—it was something he knew he wanted to pursue from a young age. As an eighth-grade student studying German, he discovered his passion for education. While he initially set out to teach at the secondary level, his path evolved, eventually leading him to earn a graduate degree and pursue his goal of teaching at a junior college.

That goal became reality at Miles Community College, though the journey wasn’t easy. After working in a position with a three-year term limit, Sleight sent out nearly 100 letters to colleges across the country. MCC was the only institution to respond—a moment that would ultimately define the next 40 years of his life.

Throughout his career, Sleight adapted to meet the needs of the college and its students. While he began with a background in Spanish, he expanded his teaching areas with encouragement from the dean of instruction. He taught composition review and college writing, began teaching public speaking in 1987, and later took on interpersonal communication.

What kept him at MCC for so many years was a deep appreciation for both stability and community. Having grown up in a military family, with his father serving in the Air Force, Sleight was used to frequent moves. In contrast, his wife had grown up in one place, and he admired that sense of rootedness. When he arrived in Miles City, he made the decision to stay as long as he could—a decision that turned into four decades.

Over time, he witnessed major changes in education, particularly in technology. Early in his career, classrooms relied on overhead projectors, chalkboards, and VHS tapes. Today’s tools look very different, but one thing has remained constant—his focus on students.

Sleight says his favorite part of teaching has always been the relationships he built with students—connections that often extended far beyond the classroom.

“They are better at remembering my name than I am of theirs,” Sleight said. “They tell me what they’re doing these days. Speech students always remember, ‘Prepare, prepare, prepare.’”

His teaching style, reflected in student feedback over the years, emphasized approachability, patience, and engagement. One student described him as “a friendly, very knowledgeable professor who made learning fun and was patient and helpful with everyone in class—an excellent educator.”

Beyond course content, Sleight believed in something deeper. Drawing on the work of psychiatrist William Glasser, he focused on helping students feel both valued and connected.

“People have two basic needs—to love and be loved, and to feel worthwhile to themselves and to others,” Sleight said. “That’s what I aimed for in my own imperfect way.”

That philosophy was evident in moments like one he recalls from his public speaking class. A student, overwhelmed by anxiety, repeatedly enrolled and dropped the course. When she finally stayed, she struggled to even stand in front of her peers. But with encouragement from her classmates, she gradually found the confidence to succeed.

"It was the students, not me," Sleight said.

Looking back, Sleight takes pride not only in reaching the milestone of 40 years, but in the relationships he built along the way—including the opportunity to teach all four of his own children. He also reflects on the role MCC has played in his life.

"Being at MCC in southeastern Montana has brought immense growth, satisfaction, and fulfillment," he said. "It has given me the opportunity to provide for my family and develop many relationships."

As he retires, Sleight hopes students remember one simple thing—that they mattered.

"I always wanted students to know they were valued," he said. "I never thought of them as anything less than important."

For current students and future educators, his advice remains simple: "Lose the ego and love the students."

Beyond the classroom, Sleight became a familiar and welcoming presence on campus for both students and coworkers. Known for his fleece Pioneer vest lined with years of service pins, his signature fist bumps in the hallways, and occasionally sporting an Avalanche jersey, he brought a sense of consistency and personality that students and colleagues came to appreciate and rely on.

Those everyday interactions, just like his time in the classroom, reflected the same approach that defined his career—making people feel seen, valued, and connected.

While he looks forward to stepping away from the increasing demands and regulations of the profession, Sleight leaves behind a legacy defined by dedication, humility, and a genuine commitment to student success.

"He has impacted thousands of students," continued Slinger. "Our college, community, and everyone who has worked with him are better because of it."

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