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An Emergency Room for the Rule of Law: Sonia Mittal on Democratic Strain and the Role of Universities

BY HANNAH SMITH
FEATURES EDITOR

TEDDY ALMOND / NEWS EDITOR

The exterior of the Wegmans building as seen from the Engineering Quad.

Sonia Mittal began her lecture on Wednesday evening in Wegmans Hall by sharing footage from Jan. 6, 2021. These videos — of crowds pressing past barricades and into the U.S. Capitol — have circulated widely over the past five years. For Mittal, however, these visuals are also her professional history. As a former Senior Counsel and Assistant United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, she helped prosecute cases arising from the attack.

Mittal drew on her experience at the Department of Justice, describing the scale of the Jan. 6 prosecutions, which involved nearly 1,600 criminal cases. While the events were widely characterized as an unprecedented attack on democratic institutions, the legal system approached them through existing statutory frameworks. Many defendants were charged with offenses such as trespassing or destruction of property, crimes that typically carry relatively short recommended sentences.

"There is no 'attempted coup' clause in the Constitution," Mittal noted, emphasizing that courts are designed to apply established law rather than adjudicate political meaning. For her and her colleagues, the prosecutions required balancing urgency with procedural restraint — a tension she suggested is inherent to the rule of law.

'The talk examined how legal institutions respond to moments of political strain.'

Mittal, now a Clinical Lecturer in Law and Associate Research Scholar at Yale Law School, delivered this year's Cutler Lecture, titled "An ER for the Rule of Law: Lawyering in an Era of Democratic Erosion." Sponsored by the URochester Democracy Center and the Department of Political Science, the talk examined how legal institutions respond to moments of political strain — and what those responses reveal about the strengths and limits of courts in a constitutional democracy.

At Yale, Mittal co-directs the Peter Gruber Rule of Law Clinic, which engages in litigation and research related to constitutional governance. The clinic, she described, often operates in a rapid-response capacity, likening the long days of "cold dinners and missed bedtimes" to that of a shift at the emergency department. The team addresses cases that carry implications beyond the individuals directly involved, with the work feeling immediate and continuous.

Her federal involvement in the Jan. 6 prosecutions was one of the key reasons why Mittal joined the clinic as a co-instructor this past year. Since 2021, Mittal said, debates surrounding the cases have extended beyond the courtroom. She pointed to concerns about declining public trust in institutions, increased threats against judges, and broader questions about how criminal law is used in politically charged contexts. According to statistics shared during the lecture, reported threats against members of the judiciary have risen significantly in recent years.

Mittal framed these developments within a broader concept she studies: democratic erosion. Rather than describing democracy as something that fails suddenly, she characterized erosion as a gradual weakening of institutional norms, including expectations surrounding prosecutorial independence, judicial credibility, and the nonpartisan application of law.

Mittal acknowledged that courts are limited tools. Judges, she said, are typically cautious about expanding legal doctrines in response to political controversy. Criminal law, too, is a blunt instrument — one that can address specific violations but may not resolve deeper societal conflicts.

'Mittal acknowledged that courts are limited tools.'

During her lecture, Mittal continuously returned to questions she encourages her students to ask when evaluating contemporary developments: "Is this normal? Is this something we could expect from a country with strong rule-of-law traditions? What do we do with this information?" These questions are designed to assess whether certain actions align with longstanding democratic and legal traditions, or whether they signal shifts in institutional practice. Identifying such changes, she suggested, can be challenging, particularly amid fast-moving news cycles.

Mittal's experience working at Yale provided an additional dimension to the discussion. Mittal described her students as often feeling "overwhelmed and exhausted" by the pace and tone of political discourse. At the same time, she emphasized that institutions of higher education play a formative role in shaping future lawyers, policymakers, scholars, and citizens.

Universities, she suggested, are spaces where research, debate, and professional training intersect. In that capacity, they contribute to the development of legal norms and civic expectations that extend beyond campus. Mittal also noted her participation in a group of Senior Democracy Scholars, which includes URochester Political Science Professor Gretchen Helmke. The group aims to situate contemporary U.S. developments within comparative and international frameworks.

Rather than offering prescriptive solutions, Mittal concluded by emphasizing the long-term nature of institutional work. The rule of law, she suggested, is maintained not only through court decisions, but through sustained professional commitment and civic engagement across generations.

As Mittale concluded her lecture, the metaphor of the emergency room reemerged — not as a declaration of crisis, but as a reminder that legal systems are designed to respond to acute challenges while remaining anchored in established procedures. For students in attendance, the evening provided an opportunity to consider how those systems function under strain, and how universities contribute to the ongoing study and practice of democratic governance.

Smith is a member of the Class of 2027.

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A Look Inside the Gorbunova-Seluanov Lab: Studying the Science Behind Aging to Improve Human Health

BY MANGO NORENBERG
STAFF WRITER

MANGO NORENBERG / STAFF WRITER

Valentin Volobaev, a postdoc in the Gorbunova-Seluanov Lab, prepping mouse cells for DNA analysis.

While some say aging is a natural part of development, others see it in a negative light, in tandem with disease and death.

The Gorbunova-Seluanov Lab, led by URochester's Doris Johns Cherry Professor of Biology and Medicine Vera Gorbunova, as well as Dean's Professor of Biology and Medicine Andrei Seluanov, studies the molecular and genetic processes behind aging in different mammals, as this class of animals provides more insight on human aging and health.

'The Gorbunova-Seluanov Lab ... works to explore the question of what actually happens when living things age.'

"It's just a fascinating fundamental process of life," Gorbunova remarked. "Almost every living organism changes, and we want to understand it. Some people viewed [aging] as maybe another end of developmental biology, while [other] people figured out specific genes had tribulated." In other words, aging is manifested by genes and is not a random event in development.

One of the main projects the lab takes on is comparing the mechanisms behind aging in different mammal species. Ph.D. candidate Zack Vanderhoff is one of many graduate students who compares the aging processes of humans with that of bowhead whales, which are known for their incredibly long lifespan of 200 years or more. For Vanderhoff, studying aging is important for understanding how humans can live longer and healthier lives.

'For Vanderhoff, studying aging is important for understanding how humans can live longer and healthier lives.'

"We want animals to live longer, but also to be healthier, because no one actually wants to live like a 90-year-old for 10 more years," Vanderhoff said. "So it's important that when we're doing these studies, we're assessing the fitness of the mice. Even if [the mice] don't necessarily live longer, they may live healthier for a greater amount of their life."

Vanderhoff also researches the lifespan of bowhead whales, who possess a gene that enables them to live longer and healthier lives than most mammals. His group tested their hypothesis that this gene could be cultivated in other mammals by inserting that gene into a group of mice while assessing their fitness. They found that mice with the gene showed fewer signs of inflammation — a common sign of aging — and willingness to exercise, though it may not necessarily prolong their lifespans.

Aging can be seen as the accumulation of mutations, which leads to genome instability. Aging is linked to genetic conditions including Huntington's disease and chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and dementia. Gorbunova believes that studying aging can advance human health care by extending our lifespans.

"From the societal point of view, that is extremely important because almost every disease is because of aging, and if we learn how to prevent or to slow aging, we can cure many diseases at once, because aging is the cause," she said.

In another ongoing project, the group discovered how developed countries, such as Japan and South Korea, appear to have populations with long lifespans. It was revealed by studies that parts of the diets of these populations are linked to a prolonged life expectancy. Common food items in these countries, especially brown seaweed, which contains a sugar called fucoidan, have been shown to increase lifespan and health expectancy by promoting genomic stability. Fucoidan suppresses the effects of selfish genes: parts of the genome that increase its size but do not contribute to its function. The sugar achieves this by activating the protein Sirtuin-6 which is primarily involved in DNA repair and the prevention of inflammation.

'"From the societal point of view, that is extremely important because almost every disease is because of aging, and if we learn how to prevent or to slow aging, we can cure many diseases at once, because aging is the cause."'

"We wanted to find ways to activate Sirtuin-6. We searched for different molecules, and one of those molecules was this natural compound [fucoidan]," Gorbunova said. "It was so exciting that we know that countries with the longest life expectancy [were] where people consume a lot of brown seaweed. And here we are, finding this compound in brown seaweed that stimulates longevity."

The lab eventually took on further testing by giving mice small samples of fucoidan, and they observed them living longer than average. They will continue studying the effects of fucoidan by testing a small group of people in Singapore and are in the midst of publishing a scientific paper. This effort will be funded by the National Institute of Health along with the Advanced Research Project Agency of Health.

The Gorbunova-Seluanov Lab frequently collaborates with the University of Rochester Medical Center (URMC), which advances physicians' research on age-associated diseases. Associate Chief of Research for URMC Division of Geriatrics and Aging and Professor of Nursing, Medicine, and Psychiatry Kathi Heffner is one of many researchers collaborating with Gorbunova. She mostly studies the implications of healthy aging and stress in people at risk of conditions such as dementia.

"It's exciting to now merge our interests in animal and human research to help advance understanding of drugs that could extend healthspan and longevity," Heffner remarked.

'"It's exciting to now merge our interests in animal and human research to help advance understanding of drugs that could extend healthspan and longevity."'

For student researchers like Vanderhoff, working in the Gorbunova-Seluanov Lab has been a wonderful opportunity to learn more about aging and collaborate with other researchers.

"[This lab] just gives me the opportunity to design experiments with less restrictions than I would have maybe in other places," Vanderhoff reflected. "Moving to a new city to start my Ph.D., I've met lots of interesting people. But I also have, in this lab, many different people to ask questions of; to be my mentors."

Norenberg is a member of the Class of 2028.

Erin Anderson Appointed as New Director of the Center of Urban Education Success

BY ELENA BACHMANN
PUBLISHER

BY MANGO NORENBERG
STAFF WRITER

Dr. Erin Anderson will begin as the new William and Sheila Konar Director of the Center of Urban Education Success (CUES) Aug. 15. CUES is a program run by the Warner School of Education and Human Development, which focuses on educational development programs in schools in urban settings. Anderson has an extensive background in urban education research, leadership and leadership development, and K-12 practice, which makes her a fitting replacement for former Director Dr. Shaun Nelms.

'CUES is a program run by the Warner School of Education and Human Development, which focuses on educational development programs in schools in urban settings.'

Dean of the Warner School Melissa Sturge-Apple commented, "We were looking for someone who's visionary and strategic, and kind of wants to think about what the next 10 years of CUES and urban education work and transformation looks like."

Anderson's research — which centers on leadership development and the systems-level changes needed to improve educational outcomes, especially in historically underserved communities — made her an especially attractive candidate.

"The biggest levers for change in schools are school and district leaders," Anderson said. "I have been very interested in trying to understand how we prepare them to lead within the school system, in ways that will lead to the types of outcomes that we're hoping for in schools."

'Anderson's research — which centers on leadership development and the systems-level changes needed to improve educational outcomes, especially in historically underserved communities — made her an especially attractive candidate.'

According to Anderson, the most essential aspects of improving education programs are knowing the needs of the school districts and the greater community and promoting equity.

Anderson described her approach to education as "very user-centered," emphasizing that her first priority will be listening.

'"I have been very interested in trying to understand how we prepare them to lead within the school system, in ways that will lead to the types of outcomes that we're hoping for in schools."'

"When I arrive, the first thing that I will do is talk to as many people as possible and ask people what they want and what they feel like they need," Anderson said, adding that she hopes to meet with faculty, district leaders, and community members early in the transition.

Nelms served as the chair for the committee searching for his successor. In chairing the committee, Nelms hoped to signal to the candidates that the University of Rochester would welcome and support the new Director. "[In] the interview process, we also included not just Warner faculty, but other faculty members throughout the university who are also engaged in community partnership and community-engaged work," explained Nelms.

'"I see Rochester as a place that really seeks to address our complex societal problems in important ways."'

By ensuring that members of the committee come from varying academic backgrounds, serve different roles in the University, and will maybe help Anderson do her work, Nelms "wanted [the candidate] to understand that this work is not done in a silo, that you have partners across the university that will help to synergize and bring this work forward."

Nelms worked closely with philanthropists William and Sheila Konar, whose support helped establish the center. Sheila Konar, who died in 2021, was "especially interested in literacy and helping provide resources for reading programs for Rochester area kids," according to WXXI. "She wanted to help make sure that every child in Rochester not only had a great education but appreciated and loved reading."

This passion manifested itself in a partnership between the University and East High School, which in the past decade has become a nationally recognized model for secondary school turnaround and sustained university engagement in urban education.

That relationship has already produced tangible results. "At one point, the graduation at East was 29%, and at its highest point, it was 86%," Nelms said. The partnership between URochester and East High is officially over, but Nelms emphasized the importance of maintaining a working relationship with the city school district, "so that they can continue to explore and expand upon some of the work that we accomplished over those 10 years," Nelms said.

'"At one point, the graduation at East was 29%, and at its highest point, it was 86%."'

Anderson plans to uphold the relationship between CUES and East, and to strengthen community-rooted partnerships. Anderson understands Rochester as a city willing to take on this complicated work. "I see Rochester as a place that really seeks to address our complex societal problems in important ways," Anderson said. "I see that in the philanthropic world, and I see that in the school system."

'"And what we've proven is that if you give the kids the right resources and the right structures and the right people, [those] kids can thrive in any environment."'

More than a dozen students from East High now sit enrolled on campus at the University of Rochester — a pipeline Nelms hopes will only grow. "I would love to see more students from the Rochester communities, you know, urban, rural, and suburban, who have a connection to the University of Rochester through our various programs to become full-time students here at the university," Nelms said. "I think they have a unique perspective on life and education that will benefit all students here." His vision extends beyond East, to any underfunded community that has yet to see itself reflected in University life. "These kids are excelling academically," he said. "And what we've proven is that if you give the kids the right resources and the right structures and the right people, [those] kids can thrive in any environment."

Bachmann is a member of the Class of 2027.

Norenberg is a member of the Class of 2028.

Meliora Midi

BY CALEB OSHINSKY
STAFF PUZZLER

This crossword can be found on page 16.

OPINIONS

Do Authors Have Moral Duties When Confronting Sociopolitical Issues in Their Work?

BY MILES MCCORTNEY
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Between my work as a sci-fi author, my creative writing courses at the University, and an earlier article I wrote for the *Campus Times*, I've started to face an age-old question surrounding authors' moral obligations. I have been considering darker content and themes like violence, war, and political extremism that can be either deep and informational or shallow and toxic depending on their execution. Though I recall a wealth of discussion about the role of violent or toxic video games and films in society, the role of written speculative fiction seems less discussed in my lifetime.

A spectrum emerges in these works between the most complex examinations of themes like war and genocide (for example, Adrian Tchaikovsky's "The Final Architecture") to the most oversimplified, propagandistic, or otherwise "pulpy" depictions of violence seen elsewhere. Most stories in modern fiction seem to fall somewhere in the middle, with an increasing number reaching toward the complex edge. Pierce Brown's "Red Rising" series is perhaps the best example of this. At its heart, the series has far more elements of extremely violent action-adventure than of philosophical introspection. But on reexamination, characters who use war, violent uprising, and political extremism are depicted as complex individuals who inevitably face direct social, political, physical, and moral consequences for their actions.

This presents an important question: Is this just another story about ragtag revolutionaries ultimately overcoming evil foes, or is there more here that contributes positively to society, beyond simple entertainment?

In the speculative genres of science fiction and fantasy — those at the center of my study, reading, and writing — themes of violence, politics, and war are not always central in every work (i.e., compared to war films or political thrillers), but nevertheless these themes often appear as backdrops for epic adventures, sources of antagonism or danger, or stimuli for in-depth moral and social examination. Often, morally questionable methods like political violence, violent resistance, or (in the most extreme cases) terrorism and war crimes are also used by both protagonists and antagonists in the most sweeping plots of war and social upheaval.

Depicting fictional war, violence, and extremism in my own writing, I often face this question as well. Perhaps ironically, one of the reasons why I started writing in the first place was because I felt that some of my favorite franchises (like the original "Star Wars") were insufficiently complex in terms of their fictional depictions of these themes. I wanted to write fiction that, while still being transportive and dramatic, also featured the moral and sociopolitical complexity of the real-world events I learned about in school or in hour-long dives through Wikipedia pages.

'Fiction on these themes has a place on bookshelves and in society as a whole, only if it is done responsibly.'

As such, I believe that fiction on these themes has a place on bookshelves and in society as a whole, only if it is done responsibly. Wars should not be simple clashes between good and evil, but complex conflicts with a wide range of aftereffects. The balance of "good" and "bad" aftereffects should further be dependent not on the tone of the story, but on the circumstances. This allows for moral examination of violence with the "lure" of gripping action and well-written characters that still appeal to wide audiences. Politics and political violence should likewise appear not as simple binaries, but as more realistic symptoms of a sociopolitical spectrum between "bad" and "relatively better," ripe with moral grayness and unpredictable consequences.

In short, those authors (myself included) who aim to publish such stories should take into account the realistic complexity of the aforementioned themes, whether we aim to tell a comprehensive philosophical narrative, provide simple entertainment, or even subtly discuss political viewpoints. Since moral complexity often goes hand-in-hand with memorable characters and plots, I see no reason why oversimplified fictional violence in literature would necessarily be more appealing than something that is complex, thought-provoking, and likely more entertaining. After all, isn't the old good-beats-evil war plot getting a little old by now?

And while written fiction remains only one influence among many in modern culture, treating these themes properly could help authors avoid falling into the pit of toxic culture in modern America, one where militant imperialism is once again openly discussed and critical viewpoints on complex issues seem to face increasing headwinds from a polarized sociopolitical climate.

Reassuringly, the more recently published books I read, the more I see these themes dealt with responsibly. With concerted effort, this could become an opportunity to ensure fiction fulfills its ultimate purpose: to create stories and share experiences that make the world a better place.

McCortney is a member of the Class of 2028.

EMILY ENGLISH / MANAGING EDITOR

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Venezuelan Thoughts on the Venezuelan Roundtable: We Don't Need To Explain Our Country's History to Everyone

BY ANONYMOUS

The Latin American, Caribbean, and Latinx Studies (LACX) major hosted "What Now? Venezuela in the Wake of US Intervention" Feb. 20, a roundtable on the implications of the Jan. 3 U.S. military actions in Venezuela that resulted in Nicolás Maduro's capture. Professors Hein Goemans (URochester), Gabriel Hetland (SUNY Albany), and Steven Schwartz (Boston University) panelled at the event.

I, a born-and-raised Venezuelan, was in the audience and left disappointed by the essence of the discussion.

'I, a born-and-raised Venezuelan, was in the audience and left disappointed by the essence of the discussion.'

Goemans and Hetland were quick to point out that the Jan. 3 operation in Venezuela "violated international law," using their opening remarks to let the audience know how "contradictory" and "harmful" this move was, setting "a dangerous precedent for world order" as Goemans called it. They didn't bother explaining how exactly this violated international law, but it's likely that they refer to Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter that "prohibits the threat or use of force and calls on all Members to respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of other States." Alternatively, they could be referring to the less-institutionalized convention that grants active heads-of-state immunity from international courts.

I agree that both principles are essential for the protection of regular, functioning states. Venezuela, however, requires more nuance than the panelists allowed.

'Venezuela, however, requires more nuance than the panelists allowed.'

Venezuela is a hijacked country. We lost our sovereignty when Cuba, Russia, and Iran started dictating our politics. We lost our territory and resources to groups like the Colombian National Liberation Army (ELN) when the regime handed them our mining rights. Our political independence was violated when the dictatorship clung to power through falsified electoral results despite losing the 2024 election in a 70-30 landslide. These are only examples of how the "sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence" Article 2 (4) tries to protect no longer exists in Venezuela. Entire books explore the Venezuelan state's politically-motivated abuses of its people.

As a side note: I was shocked that the panel ignored the 2024 election. The experts were so caught up with international law, sovereignty, precedent, Trump and Marco Rubio, ideological battles, the Essequibo and Guyana, Iraq, oil, Cuba, and Chavez, that they forgot to mention the most egregious violation of our sovereignty and popular will to date. Wow. Just as triggering was Goemans' vulgar suggestion: Instead of breaking international law, "the only way the masses can overcome a repressive elite is if they successfully organize." As if the election wasn't enough. As if hundreds of thousands didn't take the streets in 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2024 only to be systematically killed, imprisoned, or tortured. As if we didn't exhaust every legal channel and beg for international cooperation. But no, I see, we just haven't successfully organized enough.

Goemans and Hetland's interpretation of Jan. 3 is oversimplistic and reinforces a rhetoric that protects the interests of Maduro. It uses our own violated sovereignty against Venezuelans, providing an excuse to keep an illegitimate elite in office. As the facade for a criminal organization, Venezuela shouldn't be treated as a regular state protected by Article 2 (4). Removing the head of this organization isn't a dangerous precedent, and our sovereignty wasn't attacked (in effect, we were already not a sovereign state), and no legitimate head-of-state was removed (Maduro, having blatantly faked his victory in the 2024 election, was not our legitimate president). I don't buy the argument that this operation opens the gate for countries to take over legitimate governments — that's not what happened in Venezuela.

KATIE JARVIS / SENIOR STAFF

The complacency toward tyranny shown by international law toward the dictatorship over the past decade is a far more dangerous precedent.

Goemans and Hetland were also very concerned with the management of our country, smugly noting that Trump doesn't really care about democracy in Venezuela, that his motivations remain unclear, and the regime is still in place. Again, I'm stunned that only now are they worried about who runs our country, failing to recall an eternity of patronage, corruption, and abundant oil subsidies to Cuba and friends — all while sinking up to 90% of the population into poverty. Hetland also framed Cuba's potential fall — due to the termination of these subsidies following Jan. 3 — as a tragedy. Our views are radically different: I will not mourn the fall of a seven decade long dictatorship that helped bulldoze my country.

I'm confident their concern with Trump's motivations does not resonate with most Venezuelans because we know the truth. We're well aware that the pretext for this operation wasn't purely democratic. We know Trump's motivations remain unclear, and we know Maduro's regime is still in place, even with him gone.

'But we also rejoice in the undeniable significance of Jan. 3.'

But we also rejoice in the undeniable significance of Jan. 3.

Venezuela had become a forgotten cause, a failed country, and Jan. 3 marked a possible new beginning — the first real consequence this regime has faced. The first time it was genuinely shaken.

'What's stopping other countries from attacking one another? But what about the new dilemma that now exists for the Venezuelan regime?'

Goemans kept describing a prisoner's dilemma at the international level: What's stopping other countries from attacking one another? But what about the new dilemma that now exists for the Venezuelan regime? Jan. 3 marked the regime's first credible threat in decades and may now create incentives for cooperation. For the opposition — the overwhelming majority of the country — this represents a critical window to continue building momentum internally. In fact, the effects of Jan. 3 are already evident: the release of key political prisoners, the return of previously shuttered news channels, the reignition of protest movements, and the reopening of the U.S. embassy and international flights. Goemans and Hetland cleverly called this a "regime change without a change of regime." They're right: There are plenty of battles still to be fought. But they missed that none of these battles would even exist without Jan. 3.

We made a historic mistake in 1998 by voting Hugo Chavez into office. A former coup leader, he dismantled Venezuela's democratic foundations over 15 years and appointed Maduro to lead the encore to that disaster. I believe most Venezuelans are optimistic about having an opportunity to amend this mistake — no matter the price. If tight American tutelage is what it takes to steer the country back into normalcy — if oil brings the potential of democracy — we will take it. Even amid uncertainty and unclear motivations. We'd much rather gamble with the prospect of a new chapter than remain crushed by the regime. We've lived oppressed for way too long.

'We'd much rather gamble with the prospect of a new chapter than remain crushed by the regime. We've lived oppressed for way too long.'

So, no, we're not getting tricked by Trump. Don't worry so much about our oil. We've been giving it away to authoritarian regimes for a while, and we're glad it might now be useful to spark some change.

'It was just disappointing to see the complex Venezuelan cause reduced to a convenient backdrop for domestic political critique.'

Goemans and Hetland approached Jan. 3 through a rigid ideological lens: They overlooked the textures of the Venezuelan context and used this historic moment to take a swing at Trump. Don't get me wrong: Swinging against him is justified. I, too, am concerned about the president and his authoritarian tendencies. It was just disappointing to see the complex Venezuelan cause

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reduced to a convenient backdrop for domestic political critique.

Another side note: An ideological approach to Venezuela is obsolete. Our party system was destroyed by the regime, and politicians have a clear distinction — either they're with the dictatorship or they're against it. Hetland insisted on an ideological discourse: Maduro "wasn't a leftist leader," "Machado has a problematic far-right history," "that true leftist parties are oppressed in Venezuela," all ideas which I refuse to entertain. We'll have to wait for democracy to discuss ideologies. Hetland also participated on a podcast episode of "The Dig" where the terms left/right wing, anti-communism, imperialism, neoliberalism, and Trumpism were mentioned before the regime's crimes against humanity and election fraud. Hetland's priorities are remarkably distant from mine.

'It's clear that Venezuelans should spare ourselves from explaining our history, our lived experience, to everyone — especially to lecturers only interested in using us for political discourse.'

I didn't intervene in the panel. The format doesn't favor debate (only Q&A), and I didn't feel much curiosity for Goemans and Hetland. There were several Venezuelans in the audience and they didn't care to explore their sentiment. It's clear that Venezuelans should spare ourselves from explaining our history, our lived experience, to everyone — especially to lecturers only interested in using us for political discourse. Maduro's capture has sparked a momentum we've craved for years, and I refuse to accept a vision of international law that preserves "order" by sacrificing Venezuelans.

'"Your contempt for your oppressors should not lead you to defend mine."'

"El desprecio a tus opresores no debería llevarte a defender a los míos."

(Your contempt for your oppressors should not lead you to defend mine.)

—Famasloop (Jan. 6 on X)

In the Defense of Non-Violent Hazing

BY ISAAC RIZZO
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The argument I will make in this article is in defense of non-violent hazing. That is: hazing that does not lead to the death or injury of students. I find it absolutely shameful that people die from hazing-related incidents, and I would never condone such behavior. But since the majority of hazing deaths since 1975 have been alcohol-related, I believe the root cause of deadly hazing is America's high drinking age and excessive drinking culture, rather than malicious Greek life members.

Imagine now that you have to check a fraternity house at a university for a reported fire alarm. You go to the house on a normal Saturday night and expect nothing of note to happen other than flipping the alarm back to normal. You show up to the house and go downstairs to the basement to see where the alarm is, and as you turn into a room, you find a horrifying scene: a group of 56 first-years tied up and blindfolded, covered in condiments. This would certainly make any sane person immediately suspicious of the fraternity, and it's exactly what happened in a recently publicized November 2024 incident at the University of Iowa. The real crux of the situation is that none of the students who were being hazed were willing to speak out about who was leading the hazing. Eventually, a 21-year-old man who is not associated with the university was booked on obstruction of justice charges. These charges were later dropped, and no one was punished directly in the end.

This hazing event is only one of many that we have seen in the last 10 years; it's nothing out of the ordinary. But what, to me, makes it really interesting is the secrecy that the students who were hazed kept, even after being questioned by the authorities. Why would they stay quiet on something that, in theory, would lead to their "torturers" being punished for committing a federal crime after the passing of 2024 legislation criminalizing hazing at the federal level? I think that the general confusion at their silence makes clear that almost anyone that speaks of hazing doesn't understand its structure. Legislators regulate surface-level consequences instead of considering the deeper motivations behind hazing.

Many governmental figures and activists who try to regulate hazing misunderstand it as occurring as a symptom of established members of a group of students wanting to bully and oppress newer ones. They believe that any and all hazing should be banned. I believe that rather than hazing being a bug of the system, it is the result of a system that selects for those that are willing to be hazed.

'Rather than hazing being a bug of the system, it is the result of a system that selects for those who are willing to be hazed.'

Hazing is a method to filter students for what Greek life represents. This is a far different mechanism than the one that government and activists believe hazing to be. Hazing is a system that is built upon the same idea and methods that college admissions are built on — one just selects for academic excellence and the other selects for those that want to be part of a culture and organization with deep connections.

Greek life is, by design, exclusive, and has instituted practices that we would consider draconian in any other organization in order to stay that way. The bid, pledging, and the induction processes are designed to be discriminatory in nature, since the goal of a fraternity is to be exclusionary. While the party line of fraternities is one of inclusivity, the pledging process clearly indicates that they are exclusionary institutions. And the reason for that exclusion is justified; the creation of a dedicated community is hard to cultivate if the cost of entry is zero, thus drawing in potentially undedicated members. The main thing that Greek organizations have to deal with is balancing the exclusivity of the organization with their mission of being a community and social space. This is achieved by having a high entrance fee and going through the hazing process. By going through that process, the community is tied together in shared suffering that makes bonds last for a lifetime after graduation. This process is good at reducing the cost of admitting uninvested members, as well as being able to filter out members that would not want to be hazed before the hazing begins. This previous point is crucial to the University of Iowa story I introduced at the beginning of the article. I'd be willing to bet that students pledging a fraternity at Iowa are well aware of the fact that they will be hazed and are willing to suffer that cost to join a fraternity.

Pledges are students that are actively signing up for Greek life: They choose to start the pledging process, and they can choose to back out whenever they want. When regulators try to police Greek life, they paternalistically assume students can't make decisions for themselves. This idea of paternalism — lawmakers knowing better than students — has been the main argument against hazing for decades now. But students who want to join Greek life organizations are adults who are capable of weighing the benefits and drawbacks for themselves. They want to join an organization that gives exclusive connections, gives membership into a strong community, and establishes a reputation for them. Those positives are all factored into students' decision to pledge. Also, at least in my experience at URochester, there is enough gossip about Greek life organizations for students to determine which ones haze at what levels. Pledges can be logical and rational in their actions, and they have the opportunity in choosing to weigh the benefits and costs before they decide.

This is just a subsection of a larger argument against the paternalism college students have to live with. I believe that non-violent hazing is a totally consistent mechanism to be able to filter membership, and that students go into the pledging process with their eyes open.

Rizzo is a member of the Class of 2029.

DORA WU / STAFF ILLUSTRATOR
LENLAN / HUMOR EDITOR

Renewable Energy and the Right-Wing, as Observed by a Recent Rochester Immigrant

BY FRANKIE BRERETON
OPINIONS EDITOR

The United Nations website tells us that fossil fuels are "by far the largest contributor to global climate change." Promoting and enacting pro-renewable energy policy is undoubtedly one of the primary ways we can deal with the increasingly urgent problems of climate change.

'Promoting and enacting pro-renewable energy policy is undoubtedly one of the primary ways we can deal with the increasingly urgent problems of climate change.'

The majority of the populations of both the U.S. and the U.K. evidently understand the need to move towards a renewable energy model for their countries. According to the DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker, 80% of British adults support the use of renewable energy as of the summer of 2025. The Pew Research Center has reported that 86% of American adults support expanding wind and solar power as of May 2025.

'According to the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago, it is primarily Republicans that back the expansion of oil and gas production, with 64% saying that they would support the federal government in this endeavor.'

However, in a time of rising international far-right sentiment, that support is falling. According to the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago, it is primarily Republicans that back the expansion of oil and gas production, with 64% saying that they would support the federal government in this endeavor. The institute refines this by further showing that it is actually 80% of Republicans older than 60 that would support this, and only 39% of those ages 18-29. We can reference the Pew Research Center again to see that this Republican support for fossil fuels comes amid a significant dip in their support for renewables; there was a 20% decline in GOP support for building more solar panel farms between 2020 and 2024, after a sharp dip at the beginning of Biden's term.

ELIANA THOMPSON / ILLUSTRATIONS EDITOR

'The Pew Research Center has reported that 86% of American adults support expanding wind and solar power as of May 2025.'

In a similar vein, according to a study from King's College London, Ipsos, and the Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations, support for the U.K.'s promise to have net zero carbon emissions by 2050 has fallen from 54% in 2021 to 29% last month. Over the course of a year, "support for low-traffic neighbourhoods, taxes on those who fly more, subsidies for electric vehicle purchases, and a tax on environmentally damaging foods all declined, with opposition to some of these measures now greater than support for them." The same article reflects a conclusion shared with the University of Chicago, that anti-environmental sentiment seems to be more common among older people than younger people. Again, in a worryingly similar comparison, supporters of Britain's far-right Reform UK party were the least likely to support pro-climate policy. They are the only political group without a majority wishing to achieve net zero by 2050 or earlier. Their manifesto says that they intend to "scrap Net Zero and Related Subsidies," though this is based on a false money-saving statistic.

The motivation for this shift in attitude in the U.S. and U.K. seems to originate in a perception that there will be some unforeseen consequences should the two countries move away from reliance on fossil fuels and an attitude of climate skepticism. Reform counselors in the cities of Nottinghamshire and Kent, England have moved to outright climate change denial, as reported by The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, bringing this uneducated and damaging rhetoric back into the mainstream. Neara also reports a rise in the "Not-in-my-backyard" (NIMBY) mentality: the idea that people want green solutions without the consequence of having a potential eyesore in the countryside or on the coastline near residences. While this is understandable, one cannot both have their cake and eat it. One cannot want a healthy ecological environment while also pushing the solution off to be someone else's problem. One of the largest windfarms in the U.K. (located on the coast that I'm from) was built between 2015 and 2018 and increased tourism, according to the BBC, due to the unusual view. People are also concerned about the immediate cost of the net zero plan to their energy bill. The Guardian reports that this is not necessarily true, and that the cost of avoiding net zero by 2050 could be significantly higher in the long run, meaning we would have to pay, literally, for the cost of worsening climate change. According to Energy UK, the trade association for the energy industry, "the Climate Change Committee suggests reaching Net Zero by 2050 would cost less than 1 per cent of GDP each year through to 2050."

'Some of thinking appears to come from anxiety around, and desire for, energy independence.'

As of 2023, 72% of American adults thought that, "a major shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources in the U.S. would come with some difficulties for the country," according to the Pew Research Center. Some of this thinking appears to come from anxiety, around and desire for, energy independence. They do, however, think that an increase in renewable energy infrastructure would increase air and water quality and create jobs. Again, it is prices that bring concern: 42% of Americans think that the move would increase their energy bills, and 44% think that it would increase the prices of everyday goods. In general, the perception of climate change as a major national issue in the U.S. seems to be declining. In a separate study, the Center found that climate change came 11th out of 16 options, ranking behind illegal immigration and the state of moral values, when respondents were asked to name the top issues facing the country. In 2024, only 36% of people said it was a big problem, 11 points lower than in 2021. After even more time spent under a Trump administration, this figure may well be even lower.

'Supporters of Britain's far-right Reform UK party were the least likely to support pro-climate policy.'

There is so much evidence online, on the TV, and at our fingertips 24/7 to aid our understanding of solutions to the climate crisis and to help us understand the solutions that our governments are and aren't implementing. We need to ensure that all of us have at least a basic awareness of what our leaders are doing, and how their political leanings affect the choices that they make for all of us. It doesn't matter what side of the Atlantic we are on: The right wing is not making climate choices that protect us financially or physically. They are simply ignoring science.

Editor's Note: The digital version of this article (on campustimes.org) includes hyperlinked sources.

Brereton is an exchange student from the University of Southampton.

Novels, Novels, Everywhere, but None are Fun, I Think

SRIMATHISUNDARRAJAN / CONTRIBUTING ILLUSTRATOR

BY KATIE JARVIS
SENIOR STAFF

The phrase, "Water, water, everywhere, but not a drop to drink" comes from a section of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," in which the titular character describes the fate of his fellow sailors as they die of thirst surrounded by water.

When I wander the library stacks, I feel a kinship with Coleridge's mariner. Rush Rhees alone holds more than 3 million books, but I have never once checked out a title from a University library with the intention of reading it for fun. This is not for lack of time or motivation, but rather lack of access — River Campus Libraries (RCL) doesn't carry books intended for student recreation. You can find two distinct editions of "Lyrical Ballads," the sourcebook for Coleridge's famous poem, in the level B basement of stacks, along with half a dozen books criticizing and interpreting the text, but if you want to read Sarah J. Maas' bestselling romantasy novel "A Court of Thorns and Roses," you'd be out of luck.

'Rush Rhees alone holds more than 3 million books, but I have never once checked out a title from a University library with the intention of reading it for fun.'

Even when a promising new bestseller is in our collection, such as Suzanne Collins' "A Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes," it is shelved not alongside other YA novels, but instead between critiques and discussions of Collins' work. This is vastly different to the genre-based organization of a traditional library, which allows readers to discover new books while searching for familiar ones.

'But a university library is more than just an archive. Often, it is a social hub for students.'

Of course, this is not to say that RCL is doing something wrong. The chief role of a university library is to provide materials necessary for the academic pursuits of students and faculty. A student who checks out "The Hunger Games" to read before bed might be taking academic resources out of the hands of a scholar studying insurrection in literature. But a university library is more than just an archive. Often, it is a social hub for students — a space to study, to hold events, to promote student emotional health and wellbeing.

'What role should campus libraries play in leisure reading?'

It's no secret that reading for pleasure has been linked to a host of emotional and mental health benefits. With national readership plummeting across the past decade, a question arises: What role should campus libraries play in leisure reading?

Students have a lot to gain from access to recreational books. For short-term advantages — factors that will benefit students while we're still enrolled — there's overwhelming evidence that those who read for pleasure are stronger students. A 2024 educational research review found multiple studies supporting the idea that students who read for fun have broader vocabularies and stronger reading comprehension skills than those who don't enjoy reading. The same survey also concluded that frequent readers often have improved social, emotional, and psychological well-being.

Reading for pleasure has also been linked to stress relief and decreased psychological distress, both benefits that are particularly relevant on our campus. In the 2024 National College Health Assessment, 78% of URochester students reported moderate to severe stress levels and 48% of our students reported that stress has negatively impacted their academic performance.

'Reading for pleasure has also been linked to stress relief and decreased psychological distress, both benefits that are particularly relevant on our campus.'

There's also the emotional benefits: Today's college students are lonelier than ever, so the benefits of reading are all the more valuable. Studies have shown that reading can increase empathy and decrease subjects' (often harmful) need for closure.

'It's clear that a campus that reads more is a happier, healthier community.'

Taking these factors into account, it's clear that a campus that reads more is a happier, healthier community.

The benefits of reading for pleasure also extend far past graduation and, in fact, become even more important. According to a Pew Research Survey from 2021, 11% of college-educated respondents had not read a single book in the past year — for work or pleasure. While this figure is lower than the national average of 23%, it's still worrying. Reading has been shown to reduce cognitive decline in older adults and a demographically-controlled study has even found that reading can increase life expectancy by up to four months.

Given that children and young adults who read frequently are more likely to read as older adults, access to recreational reading on campus could have benefits that stretch decades into the future.

'It wasn't until I spoke with Kristin Moo, director of collection strategies for RCL, that I learned the University even had a collection of popular reading.'

So what is RCL doing right now for recreational reading? While some universities (like the University of Arizona and the University of Connecticut) have dedicated "leisure" collections or recreational reading spaces, I could find no information online about a similar space on our campus. It wasn't until I spoke with Kristin Moo, director of collection strategies for RCL, that I learned the University even had a collection of popular reading.

The popular reading collection, which is curated by English and Black studies librarian Lindsey Baker, spans about four shelves of adult and young adult fiction. It's located in an alcove of Lam Square to the left of the windows looking out onto Douglass and Wilson Commons. The perimeter of the nook is lined with elegant cabinets, each holding a few dozen books behind a decorative metal grate door.

'Along with the popular reading section in Lam Square, Moo also described a popular science section in Carlson, a wellness collection in the Welles Brown room, and a large children's and young adults' section in the stacks.'

According to Moo, the collection sees a "fair amount of use," despite not being promoted online. Along with the popular reading section in Lam Square, Moo also described a popular science section in Carlson, a wellness collection in the Welles-Brown Room, and a large children's and young adults' section in the stacks.

"It's kind of like a well-kept secret that [the popular reading collections] exist," Moo said. "So I think if more people were aware, [they] might get a lot more use."

'"It's kind of like a well-kept secret that [the popular reading collections] exist," Moo said. "So I think if more people were aware, [they] might get a lot more use."'

Moo also endorsed the Rochester Public Libraries and the Monroe County Library System for their wider selection of books and extensive e- and audiobook collections. One of the easiest city libraries to visit from campus is Central Library, located a block from the Innovation

Square stop on the Orange Line shuttle.

But even if RCL did want to push for more leisure reading awareness or availability on campus, there's still a budget to consider. No library has infinite resources and one of Moo's main responsibilities at RCL is managing the collection materials budget and working with librarians to make decisions on what the library needs most.

"Generally speaking," Moo said, "there are lots of different needs for space on an academic campus, but also specifically within the library environment. And the first priority is always going to be in serving scholarly and academic needs of students and ... the research needs for faculty."

Still, the scope of a student's "academic needs" isn't necessarily limited to their course materials. RCL knows this too, given its sponsorship of programs like Paws for Stress Relief, the "Oasis" in Welles-Brown, and the many de-stress events hosted during finals week. Given so much evidence pointing toward the emotional and stress-relieving benefits of recreational reading, improving student awareness of and access to recreational reading is a worthwhile goal for University libraries moving forward.

'Still, the scope of a student's "academic needs" isn't necessarily limited to their course materials.'

So what might be good first steps towards achieving that goal?

If low readership is the problem, the main question we should be asking is "what are the barriers between students and reading?" According to a 2011 study published in the journal College & Research Libraries, 93% of polled students reported that they enjoyed leisure reading but almost 70% indicated "too much reading for class" as a barrier toward leisure reading.

'If low readership is the problem, the main question we should be asking is "what are the barriers between students and reading?"'

Although librarians may not have the power to reduce students' workloads, there are ways they can make finding books less difficult and time-consuming. The authors of the study would seem to agree: "Students may not find time to do much voluntary reading; but, if what they tell us is true, they do take pleasure in reading and would welcome efforts from libraries to help them discover reading material."

'Many students don't know that academic libraries even have fiction books due to how they're shelved, and others find the stacks confusing or unpleasant.'

The students in the study suggested several good ideas for improving access to books. For one, creating a dedicated space for recreational books. The popular book collection is a start, but it's only a fraction of the fiction in our collection. Many students don't know that academic libraries even have fiction books due to how they're shelved, and others find the stacks confusing or unpleasant. And let's be honest, if I'm already short on free time, I'd like to avoid spending any of it navigating a dimly-lit literary labyrinth.

'And let's be honest, if I'm already short on free time, I'd like to avoid spending any of it navigating a dimly-lit literary labyrinth.'

We can also start by increasing signage and publicity, letting students know where they can go to find non-course books. Then, by bringing some classics and other popular fiction out of the stacks and consolidating with the Carlson nonfiction, students would have a physical space they know they can go to find a good book.

Another suggestion: creating separate sections within the recreation collection. This is a major problem within the popular book section as it stands. After I found out it existed, I went to investigate what it had to offer. When browsing, I quickly realized why bookstores and community libraries tend to shelve books by genre: It makes interesting books easier to find. In the University's collection, I had no idea what any of the books were about. Without genre markers I found myself literally judging each book by its cover (well, spine actually) to see if I might be interested.

'Without genre markers I found myself literally judging each book by its cover (well, spine actually) to see if I might be interested.'

KATIE JARVIS / SENIOR STAFF

Pictured is the popular reading section in Lam Square. Books in the collection can be identified by the green labels on their spines.

Having dedicated (and separated) sections of popular genres like fantasy, sci-fi, romance, and mystery, as well as for memoirs, biographies, and nonfiction could also help with choice paralysis. When choosing between fewer options, humans are more thoughtful in their decisions. Paradoxically, this means a smaller collection of books, sorted by genre, could lead to students being more adventurous when choosing their next read.

'However the libraries might choose to encourage recreational readership, the benefits are clear: better mental health outcomes, reduced stress relief, and stronger students.'

Finally, students in the study wanted guidance. Almost 36% of students polled wanted some sort of book display. More than 60% wanted a list of suggested books. Further cues could be taken from independent bookstores with "shelf talkers" (little notecards, usually under a staff pick, that explain why you should read a book) or grouped displays of similar books. At the very least, consider installing more obvious signage pulling student attention towards the existing popular reading sections.

'I still don't think that, "closed cabinets with metal bars," is the right visual signaling.'

Finally, although I'm not sure whether RCL has control over this, perhaps we should reconsider the fact that the popular reading section is encased behind (admittedly beautiful) cabinetry. Although these doors likely are more for aesthetics than security, I still don't think that, "closed cabinets with metal bars," is the right visual signaling. Currently, the vibes I'm getting are more, "deodorant locked up at CVS," than, "books I can grab and take home."

However the libraries might choose to encourage recreational readership, the benefits are clear: better mental health outcomes, reduced stress relief, and stronger students. For librarians, there's the added benefit of getting students comfortable with using library resources. Students who are already used to checking out "fun" books may find the system easier to navigate when they need to check out books for classes.

As a student, I want to make it clear: I do want to read. And I want to read library books specifically. All I'm asking for is a little more help.

Editor's Note: The digital version of this article (on campustimes.org) includes hyperlinked sources.

Jarvis is a member of the Class of 2026 (T5).

Goldilocks and the Small School

BY BELLA NAVE
COPY CHIEF

I chose the University of Rochester because it is a small– to medium–sized school. It's not too big, it's not too small. I felt like Goldilocks when I toured in the summer after my Junior year of high school. I fit perfectly. I knew what I was walking into and what I wanted in terms of the size of my school. In fact, I attended a very small high school — I graduated with a grand total of 71 other people — so I knew the pros and cons of a smaller school already.

'I felt like Goldilocks when I toured.'

One of the most positive characteristics of being at a smaller to medium school is smaller class sizes. Smaller class sizes allow for more personal attention and connection between the instructor and students. While personalized learning can have cons, it has a plethora of pros as well. Smaller classes translate to more flexibility and tailored learning because professors are able to get to know and understand their students' needs better. However, this may also lead to higher expectations placed on students, especially when it comes to participation. In smaller classes, professors know what their students are capable of, hence they would expect higher quality work or more participation. Though this can be stressful, it can also motivate students to put in the work and know their material in order to avoid being caught unaware in a blind call-out.

DORA WU / STAFF ILLUSTRATOR
LEN LAN / HUMOR EDITOR

Another upside of being at a smaller school is that if you have friends in your major, or adjacent majors, you'll likely see them across campus often. You'll tend to share the same classes with the same people, especially if you're in a smaller major like the niche concentration of Archaeology, Technology, and Historical Structures (ATHS). Even in a larger major, like anything related to Engineering or pre-med-adjacent, you'll start to see the same people in your classes. This can be a pro and a con. It could mean you have a bunch of classes with your friends ... or it could mean you never stop seeing that one situationship from your first year.

This leads into the infamous issue with smaller schools. Everyone. Knows. Everyone. You know that one person you have a class with this semester? They somehow know three of your closest friends, all independently of each other. Last semester, I had a situation where I showed up to a friend's get-together and found the rest of my three-person discussion group from my Anthropology class. We all somehow knew each other through mutual friends but had no idea until that moment.

'We all somehow knew each other through mutual friends but had no idea until that moment.'

I personally think that this phenomena is hilarious, fantastic even, but for some, it can be dizzying. And it means that the rumor mill at URochester works like no other, which can definitely be counted as a con for a small school. News travels fast, and you can never really prepare for who knows whom.

'News travels fast, and you can never really prepare for who knows whom.'

Despite the cons of being at a smaller school, like frequently seeing the people you don't get along with, or the gossip mill churning like it has bills to pay, or being jumpscared by two of your friends already knowing each other, I find that the pros far outweigh them. Small schools make it so much easier to connect with people through mutual acquaintances and can motivate you to really try your best. Most of all, being at a smaller school creates a strong sense of community within the student body.

'Small schools make it so much easier to connect with people.'

Despite all of the surprising conversations about previously unknown connections between friends, the deep sense of community and connection I feel within URochester's "just right" campus size really makes me feel at home. I'm like Goldilocks finally finding my perfect bed.

Nave is a member of the Class of 2029.

What Makes Us American?

BY SHRISHTI PADMANABHAN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The seagulls have started chirping in the morning again, and the sun lingers just a little longer each evening. Winter in Rochester is finally coming to an end, and with it, a journey I began two years ago. Now, as I inch toward graduation, I've increasingly found myself trying to answer a question that's followed me for years: What makes us American?

'I've increasingly found myself trying to answer a question that's followed me for years: What makes us American?'

When I asked my dad this exact question, he recalled growing up in the coastal city of Trivandrum, India in the '70s seeing the Statue of Liberty on television and thinking to himself:

"This. This is the place where a man could truly be free."

In 1993, at the ripe age of 27, he stepped onto American soil for the first time in New York City. He was old enough to understand what he was leaving behind, but young enough to believe in what might lie ahead. What stayed with him beyond the thrill of the skyline and the scale of it all was the feeling that he could exist here free of judgment. There was room to be understood without being analyzed, and that freedom extended beyond just the law. It was in the culture.

'He was old enough to understand what he was leaving behind, but young enough to believe in what might lie ahead.'

"That's the beauty of the U.S. Here, you're free to be whoever you are," my dad reflected.

My own journey in Rochester has mirrored his sentiment. In hindsight, I realize my upbringing was very sheltered. By coming to Simon Business School and meeting classmates from Brazil to Bangladesh, my worldview has expanded in ways I hadn't anticipated. At Simon, I assumed the greatest thing I would walk away with would be a degree. Instead, this May, I'll leave with something far greater: a lifetime of friendships.

'My worldview has expanded in ways I hadn't anticipated.'

Learning alongside my peers from all over the world, whose dreams sounded so similar to mine, I began to understand that we have far more in common than what sets us apart. We have the same conviction to step into uncertainty rather than remain in familiarity and the same desire to build a life that feels meaningful. It is that desire that makes us American.

'We have the same conviction to step into uncertainty rather than remain in familiarity and the same desire to build a life that feels meaningful.'

Being American cannot be reduced to birthplace alone. So many of the people who embody the qualities I associate with this country weren't born here, and those who were, continue to redefine what it means.

'Being American cannot be reduced to birthplace alone.'

America doesn't always fulfill its promises. It wrestles with its own contradictions. There are moments when belonging feels conditional and judgment arrives faster than understanding. Yet, the belief that something better is possible continues to draw people in.

'Maybe that's why we believe America is the land of possibilities.'

Maybe that's why we believe America is the land of possibilities. And perhaps that belief is the truest definition I can offer. That what makes each of us American is not a single trait or story, but the shared conviction that tomorrow can hold more than today, and our confidence to pursue it.

Padmanabhan is a graduate student in the Simon Business School.

We Never Learned From the Dust Bowl

BY JOHNPAUL SLEIMAN
STAFF WRITER

We teach the Dust Bowl as a cautionary tale. In every American history class, we learn how farmers in the 1920s and 1930s tore up millions of acres of native grassland across the Great Plains to plant wheat, how the deep-rooted prairie grasses that held the soil and trapped moisture were replaced by shallow crops and bare fields, and, when drought came in 1930, how the exposed topsoil turned to dust. Black blizzards rolled across the country, darkening skies from Texas to Washington, D.C. Crops failed. Families fled. Congress responded by creating the Soil Conservation Service in 1935, which established effective soil management laws and regulations and we moved on. Lesson learned. Except we did not learn it.

'Crops failed. Families fled.'

The Midwest has lost approximately 57.6 billion metric tons of topsoil since large-scale farming began roughly 160 years ago. That figure comes from a series of studies led by geoscientists at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass), published in the journal *Earth's Future*. They found that Midwestern topsoil is eroding at an average rate of about two millimeters per year, which nearly doubles what the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) considers sustainable. The USDA's own erosion estimates are between three and eight times lower than what the researchers measured. This is happening despite the conservation programs we put in place after the Dust Bowl.

The major driver of erosion would normally be wind or drought, but similar to the Dust Bowl, the main driver of erosion for farmland is tillage (plowing). When farmers drag plows through fields, they move topsoil from high ground into low ground, flattening the landscape and exposing soil to the elements. The USDA does not explicitly include tillage erosion in its models, which means the agency has been drastically underestimating how fast we are losing the ground beneath our food crops. In their most recent work, the UMass team showed that Midwestern soil is eroding between 10 and 1,000 times faster than it did before agriculture began. The rate that the USDA considers the upper limit of sustainability is, on average, 25 times higher than what is actually sustainable.

'Midwestern soil is eroding between 10 and 1,000 times faster than it did before agriculture began.'

Generating just three centimeters of topsoil takes about a thousand years. We are burning through it in decades.

But soil is only half of the problem. Beneath the Great Plains sits the Ogallala Aquifer, one of the largest freshwater reserves in the world, stretching from South Dakota to the Texas Panhandle across eight states. It supports roughly 30% of all U.S. crop and livestock production and provides drinking water to 82% of the people living above it. It is also disappearing. In Kansas, about 30% of the aquifer has already hit what researchers call "Day Zero," the point where wells run dry. The Texas Water Plan projects the Ogallala's water levels will drop by 52% before 2060. Scientists estimate it would, at this point, take natural processes around 6,000 years to refill.

Sadly, and maybe ironically, this is not caused

GABRIEL JIANG / HUMOR EDITOR

solely by climate change. Research published through the American Bar Association shows that federal farm subsidies and the tax code create a cycle of overproduction that intensifies water use. Irrigation accounts for roughly 90% of all Ogallala withdrawals. Farmers are not draining the aquifer because they need to; they are draining it because the system pays them to.

Now add climate. The ongoing megadrought affecting the western United States and Mexico has persisted for more than two decades and is likely the most severe in 1,200 years, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's 2025 Global Drought Outlook. Climate change has intensified it by an estimated 42%. Warmer temperatures increase evaporation, dry out soil faster, and make periods of low rainfall far more destructive. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notes that more severe drought and heat stress threaten crop yields across the country, and that the frequency and severity of these events are expected to grow. The same land that blew away in the 1930s is drying out again, only this time, the water table beneath it is vanishing too.

'The Dust Bowl happened because we stripped the land, ignored the science, and assumed the good years would last.'

The Dust Bowl happened because we stripped the land, ignored the science, and assumed the good years would last. Today, we are depleting topsoil at rates the USDA itself underestimates. We are draining an aquifer that cannot refill on any human timescale and watching drought cycles intensify over the same geography. The ingredients are the same. The scale is larger.

We have solutions. No-till farming, already practiced on about 40% of Midwestern cropland, can dramatically slow erosion. The UMass researchers found that full adoption of no-till methods would extend current soil fertility for centuries, compared to a single century of continued loss under current practices. Cover crops, crop rotation, and smarter water policy can reduce both soil loss and aquifer strain. But none of this happens without pressure. Congress needs to reform agricultural subsidies so they reward conservation instead of overproduction. States need to coordinate groundwater management across the Ogallala region instead of letting each jurisdiction drain independently. The USDA needs to update its erosion models to include tillage.

'If we do not change course, we will not need a textbook to study the next Dust Bowl.'

We cannot keep teaching the Dust Bowl as history while repeating it as policy. The soil is thinner, the water is lower, and the climate is less forgiving than it was a century ago. If we do not change course, we will not need a textbook to study the next Dust Bowl.

Editor's Note: The digital version of this article (on campustimes.org) includes hyperlinked sources.

Sleiman is a graduate student in the School of Arts & Sciences.

CULTURE

'Pillion': 'A Seat or Place Behind the Person Riding a Motorcycle Where a Passenger Can Sit'

BY SKYLER FRAZIER
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Harry Lighton's debut film "Pillion" (2025) was released in U.S. theaters last week. It opened at The Little this past Friday and will be showing for the next two weeks.

Marketed as a "Dom-Com," the plot focuses on the first relationship of Colin, a barbershop-quartet-singing parking lot attendant, after he is approached by brooding biker, Ray. Set around the holidays, this film is by no means a Christmas couch watch with the family, and probably not recommended as a first date (for a fiftieth, however, it may be a perfect conversation starter between you and your long-time partner), but with friends it was a fantastic time. The gasps and grabs of my close friends were a key part of the movie watching experience.

'Happy to fuck, afraid to kiss.'

"Pillion" speaks to even the most vanilla viewer. Learning to love, and to let yourself be loved, is no church off a paved road. The process is filled with terrifying self-confrontations and abuse. It's something we all go through. The dynamics of submissive-dominant sexual relation is a wonderful metonym for the emotional turmoil that one goes through in vulnerability and intimacy. In Ray, the dom, we find a reflection of our most avoidant self, running away from any modicum of intimacy. Happy to fuck, afraid to kiss. In Colin, the sub, is a portrait of our lack of self-respect, the desire to be loved overpowers any semblance of selfish want. Yearning and pretending to be content with the scraps you are given. This is not the model of a healthy relationship and by no means does the movie present as such. Yet, there is something to be found in the highs and lows of this, a lesson of self. What makes you feel loved? How do you want to love? How do you ask for this?

All these potent questions are clad in leather and hidden behind pasty white ass throughout the film "Pillion." It teaches us as much about what it means to settle as it does the particulars of homosexual motorcycle BDSM in suburban England.

'The dynamics of submissive-dominant sexual relation is a wonderful metonym for the emotional turmoil that one goes through in vulnerability and intimacy.'

There is community and heartache relatable to your most copacetic college student even in the cultural extremes "Pillion" depicts. Sitting behind me in the theater, there was a lineup of gay men dressed for the experience. Wearing subtle collars and choke chains, they gathered in pup-play masks to commemorate the experience with selfies with a bare chested Alexander Skarsgard poster, akin to glitter-clad Elphabas and Glindas at "Wicked" showings. There is drama, there is desire, there is decadence and exaltation found in both.

'It teaches us as much about what it means to settle as it does the particulars of homosexual motorcycle BDSM in suburban England.'

Speaking of Skarsgard, that casting was quite a distraction for a couple of my friends who were unable to mutter anything other than "He's so fine" for the duration of the film despite all the shock and awe of hard sex. So at the very least, go see this movie to look at a shirtless Skarsgard, and if you like it, maybe go watch "Secretary" (2002).

Frazier is a member of the Class of 2027.

A Night at the Stardew Symphony

BY ALEX HOLLY
ENGAGEMENT COORDINATOR

In the drudge of the Rochester winter, there's often nothing I crave more than an escape. While I don't mind the cold, what I do mind is the stress. And the deadlines. And the looming fear of inconceivable change. And to tell you guys the truth, all I've ever wanted is to run away to a small town and start a tiny farm and meet the love of my life: one of the 12 eligible bachelors of the area.

So, imagine how I felt when I opened my desk drawer to find a serendipitously placed letter from my late grandfather: one urging me to pack my bags and make the big break for Stardew Valley. (At least, that's what I wished would happen — as it does when you start up a new save file on the game.) To put it simply, it was an offer I couldn't refuse.

So, I made my way to the Kodak Center on a drizzly Thursday evening to reap the fruits of my luck. While a one-way ticket to Pelican Town wasn't precisely in my cards, an evening of music with the "Stardew Valley: Symphony of Seasons" concert was.

'While a one-way ticket to Pelican Town wasn't precisely in my cards, an evening of music with the "Stardew Valley: Symphony of Seasons" concert was.'

Curated by the game's creator ConcernedApe, the symphony features a 35-piece local orchestra swinging out Stardew's soundtrack as the conceptual player (the audience) makes their way from day-one to game completion. In the backdrop, behind the bowing violins and jangly percussion, a projector screen in the concert hall showcased accompanying scenes from the game and animatic loops created specifically for the concert. In all truth, it was kind of like Cocomelon: a simultaneous soothing agent and glossed-over portal into genuine gameplay. But honestly, it worked.

'While I wasn't on the farm by any means, I was a part of a derived collective experience.'

From the soft plucked strings of the overture, my visions of the game shifted from just a vision on my computer screen to something more tangible. While I wasn't on the farm by any means, I was a part of a derived collective experience. My excitement towards the pixelated cattle, the familiar faces, and the selection of festivals wasn't simply my own, rather something shared across the crowd. And as the opening screen moved across the bright hills of the emblematic Stardew scene, Pelican Valley had never looked so lush.

'Much to my positive surprise, the audience itself was a lot more diverse than I would have expected.'

Admittedly, much to my positive surprise, the audience itself was a lot more diverse than I would have expected. When I think of "Stardew Valley," a cozy and peaceful farming simulation game, I think of our college-age demographic: of cottagecore and strawberry cows (jumpscare) and staying online until 5 a.m. to play computer games during the pandemic. I think of dyed hair and pronouns and naming your in-game chickens after all your best friends.

And while I did see a fair share of dyed hair and strawberry bandanas and chicken bags (the security guard for the concert told me that mine wasn't the first she'd checked that night), there was also a whole lot else. Families, season ticket holders, gray hair and purple hair, and tiny tots settled in on booster seats in the auditorium rows. Even the mayor of Stardew Valley — Lewis — made an appearance in the mezzanine. A cosplayer, sure, but I had to suspend my disbelief for the sake of the experience. Rochester has a lot in common with Pelican Town if you think about it — he could have made his way over.

'Rochester has a lot in common with Pelican Town if you think about it.'

Phoebe Smoker, a 7th grader from the Rochester area, attended the concert with his sister Josie and one of his best friends. The tickets were a gift from his dad Brady Leo.

They've been playing Stardew on the Switch for four years and find it a great way to spend time with each other and their friends — primarily on the game's co-op farm mode.

"I really like the art and

COURTESY OF CHARLES TORRES

the friendships and all the cut scenes. I really like all the effort [ConcernedApe] put into that," Josie Smoker said.

On the other hand, Phoebe Smoker is a big fan of Stardew's resident shadow figure: Krobus. When they announced the entity as Rochester's favorite character (surveyed via an audience vote at the start of the show), I'm convinced that he was the loudest voice cheering.

'Throughout the evening, the audience shared laughs, whispers, and suspense as the orchestra flowed across their selection of songs.'

Throughout the evening, the audience shared laughs, whispers, and suspense as the orchestra flowed across their selection of songs. For a primarily synthesized soundtrack, Stardew's instrumentals translate well to a classically-based ensemble: melodic and memorable with space for its texture to shine. Along with its standard strings, various songs featured banjo and electric guitar work, leaning into the more rustic and intense moments of the game.

'Watching on the screen, it was almost as if I was playing the game myself — and like I had gotten a lot better at it since I last played.'

The "Journey of the Prairie King" suite brought one of the night's highlights: an intense shootoff mini-game fit with Western flair and engaging visuals. Watching on the screen, it was almost as if I was playing the game myself — and like I had gotten a lot better at it since I last played. Likewise, the concert saved the best for last with "The Dance of the Moonlight Jellies" which was played as a jovial encore following

'While admittedly, the trajectory of the gameplay was skewed toward near-impossible success, there's only so much you can pack in two hours if you're looking to give the audience the full bang for their buck.'

the main seasonal selections.

The evening's narrative brought the audience through their first year in Stardew Valley: from the onset of our first spring to reaching the summit at the close of the concert. While, admittedly, the trajectory of the gameplay was skewed toward near-impossible success, there's only so much you can pack in two hours if you're looking to give the audience the full bang for their buck. The current speedrunning record for perfection in "Stardew Valley" clocks in at just around 27 hours ... so maybe it's for the better that they sped things up a notch.

'At the close of the evening, I found myself satisfied and starry-eyed as I fought the urge to open my Stardew save file and spend the next week building my farm to completion.'

At the close of the evening, I found myself satisfied and starry-eyed as I fought the urge to open my Stardew save file and spend the next week building my farm (Juniper Julep) to completion.

'For those looking to take in the Symphony of Seasons for themselves, the tour will continue until the end of April 2026.'

For those looking to take in the Symphony of Seasons for themselves, the tour will continue until the end of April 2026. More information can be found at the "Stardew Valley Concert" website.

As for the Kodak Center, more information on its upcoming lineup can be found at their website or on Instagram.

Holly is a member of the Class of 2027 (T5).

'Scream 7': Slashes Through Its Own Parody

BY BRENNAN PRICE
SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR

BY MADDIE UNRUH
SPORTS EDITOR

As the heavily anticipated release of the seventh installment of the 30-year franchise, "Scream 7" had high expectations to live up to, especially given all the heavy spoilers that the film hinted towards in the trailers.

From the return of Sidney Evans to the introduction of her daughter, Tatum, this movie took turns where least expected. The third act started at the end of one of the most gruesome killing sprees in the franchise, when Tatum Evans is running through the town trying to escape Ghostface. This sequence initially lacked Courtney Cox's iconic Gale Weathers character, until she appears abruptly at the very end to support Sidney and Tatum.

In true Kevin Williamson fashion, there were multiple hints towards other OG slashers strewn throughout the film, with the town theater marquee displaying "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre," and the opening scene using both "Friday the 13th" and "The People Under the Stairs" as the horror trivia. This is the first of the franchise to have been both written and directed by Williamson, and to have Neve Campbell as an associate executive producer. The original four movies were written and created by Williamson, but were directed by Wes Craven.

Though this movie was heavily anticipated by fans, there was much controversy surrounding the cast and previous directors. Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett, directors of "Scream 5" and "Scream 6" respectively, decided to not direct due to controversies with the cast and political standpoints with Israel. Jenna Ortega backed out for the same reason, and because co-star Melissa Barrera was fired for her social media comments about the Israeli-Hamas conflicts. These two departures were a main reason that the storyline was changed to focus on Sidney Evans and her family, rather than continuing the focus on the Carpenter sisters in New York.

The film is stacked with the best ensemble casts since "Scream (2022)." The featured players of the film are returners Neve Campbell and Courtney Cox, with Mason Gooding and Jasmin Savoy returning from the more recent "Scream" movies. The film also features a lot of new faces. Popular Gen Z actors McKenna Grace ("Five Nights at Freddy's 2"), Asa German ("Gen V"), and Celeste O'Connor ("Madame Web") as Tatum's friends. Anna Camp ("Pitch Perfect"), Mark Consuelos ("Riverdale"), and Joel McHale ("Animal Control") round out the adults.

Even though its cast is incredibly well-rounded, or perhaps because it is, the film has trouble working its named characters into the narrative. By the end of the film when the twist is revealed, audience members have somewhat forgotten who the characters involved are.

However, the newest addition to the "Scream" franchise has some of the best kills since the original. It delivers the most grotesque gore and will leave some of the more squeamish viewers feeling sick. Between a character getting stabbed through the temple and another having their intestines spill out on stage to another being impaled by a beer tap, there's plenty of blood and guts to delight any horror fan. The new Ghostface killings in this film grew more and more creative, while some of the previous installments were a bit "by the books."

'Unfortunately, in the end, "Scream 7" ends up being a parody of itself.'

Unfortunately, in the end, "Scream 7" ends up being a parody of itself. No more are the days of horror references — Savoy's Mindy has a single scene going over the rules before being shut down — as the film moves on to social commentary. Its target: AI and deepfakes.

Although this provided an interesting opportunity to bring back some past faces through the use of deepfakes; its commentary does not go beyond anything superficial. It ends up being a MacGuffin that harks back to the use of the voice changer in "Scream 3" that mimics several characters' voices.

Regardless, the film is still a fun whodunnit and is enjoyable. The film still echoes the aesthetic of the original and has a creative concept that allows it to stand out from the other installments, with a good amount of horror and gore.

Price is a member of the Class of 2027.

Unruh is a member of the Class of 2029.

RIDA AL-ZAYAD / STAFF ILLUSTRATOR

HUMOR

Dating the Voices in My Head

BY GABRIEL JIANG
HUMOR EDITOR

DORA WU/ STAFF ILLUSTRATOR

Chat, did I make a mistake? I went on a date with the voices in my head and I liked it. It was a bit of an unplanned date, but what else are you supposed to do when none of your friends will have dinner with you?

'I went on a date with the voices in my head and I liked it ... What else are you supposed to do?'

It started out pretty normal: I headed into the Douglass Dining Hall for dinner alone, as you do when all your real life friends ditch you. I went and found a table for two — a bit intimate for just one person, but whatever. I got food and sat down. That's when it happened. That's when Jimmithy, the physical manifestation of the voices in my head, appeared before me, and I mean, he literally spawned in. One moment the seat was empty and the next, he was sitting there. He pulled up in a freshly ironed suit and tie, exactly 6 foot and 2 inches, a perfect athletic build, black hair paired with dark eyes, a jawline sharp enough to cut the pork chop on my plate, and a scar cutting down the right side of his eye.

'That's when Jimmithy, the physical manifestation of the voices in my head, appeared before me.'

Oddly enough, I saw myself in him. We stared at each other for a moment before I spoke.

'Oddly enough, I saw myself in him.'

"Man, why are you here? I was hoping to have my dinner in peace, not have someone getting into my head about how my real life friends actually hate me and that THAT is the reason why they aren't having dinner with me." Jimmithy looked a little hurt by what I said, but I didn't really care at that moment.

"Dang, not even a 'hello'? You know I'm just here to keep your lonely butt company," he retaliated. I looked at him and thought about it. Maybe it wasn't too bad to have him here. He's been there for me every time anyway whether I was crashing out, trying to lock in, trying to lock in after crashing out, or even disposing of a dead body. What makes this time different?

'He's been there for me every time anyway whether I was crashing out, trying to lock in, trying to lock in after crashing out, or even disposing of a dead body.'

"Fine, you can stay, but don't tell me to hide one of your bodies again. That's your problem this time," I said. He reassured me that he wouldn't, so I went back to eating.

'"No, handsome. I'm suggesting eating YOU out," he said playfully.'

After a short couple of minutes, Jimmithy leaned in close and whispered in my head, "You can't seriously be enjoying the food that much ... you know I can give you something much better..."

"Are you suggesting eating out?" I asked suspiciously, "We share the same bank account, so we're the same amount of broke."

'With that, Jimmithy snapped his fingers, and Douglass Dining Hall fell away.'

"No, handsome. I'm suggesting eating YOU out," he said playfully. At that, I spit out my food and stared in shock. Some other students present gave me funny looks, but little did they know what was happening (or about to happen, for that matter). With that, Jimmithy snapped his fingers, and Douglass Dining Hall fell away. A backdrop of falling rose petals subtly appeared and the scent in the air became filled with roses. Soft jazz — Billie Holiday, which he knows is my favorite — was playing in the background and ambient candle lighting filled the space.

'Anyway, the point is, I enjoyed that date with the voices in my head (even if it was more than just a date). It can't be that weird, right?'

Anyway, the point is, I enjoyed that date with the voices in my head (even if it was more than just a date). It can't be that weird, right? I mean people date other people all the time too, so it's not *not* normal. Now, if you'll excuse me, I think I hear him calling for me. I'm coming, Jimmithy!

Jiang is a member of the Class of 2028.

Papercuts: Reflection

BY JOSHUA SCHIAVI
STAFF WRITER

More Than a Good Boy

BY LEN LAN
HUMOR EDITOR

Hello. Detective Max speaking. Recently, I've made a very paw-erful discovery that I will share with the world (I've got to hurry though. I'm writing on my owner's computer before she gets back from CHEM 132 — whatever that means).

Ever since I was brought to the University of Rochester, I've been making careful observations. As a service dog, this is my duty: to protect the students of URochester. Recently, that safety has been threatened by a mystery, so it is my job to solve it.

As a hooman, have you ever wondered where your tuition money goes? There's no way that keeping the lights on, the rooms functioning, and the magical water fountains running would cost THAT much. Sometimes when I go on walks, the sidewalks aren't even salted! My paws are fur-eezing! It's not a secret that URochester costs a ton of money to attend (my owner tells me about it all the time). However, all that goes into the buildings CANNOT cost as much as my owner says (I mean, $90,000?!? That's enough to supply all the dogs on the planet with squeaky toys. Probably. I don't actually know how money works. I'm a dog). So, back to the real question: Where is the money actually going?

It's simple, really. What is there a strange abundance of on campus? Think about it. Are we thinking about the same thing? Okay, let's say it together. 3 ... 2 ... 1 ... SQUIRRELS!

'In fact, I'm actually neutered because I kept trying to fuck the sofa in Susan B. Anthony Hall.'

Maybe it's just the ADHD in me, but I've always noticed the suspicious amount of those small, brown rodents, climbing up the weird vines and chattering amongst themselves. Just last week, I chased one up a tree, and I swear it squeaked, "Come and get me, bitch!!" First of all, kind of rude of them to assume my gender. Second of all, I'm pretty sure I just got catcalled. Dog-called? Anyway, I'm not really looking for anything like a relationship. In fact, I'm actually neutered because I kept trying to fuck the sofa in Susan B. Anthony Hall. I eventually left and tried to tell my owner about the whole squirrel-sitch that just happened, but she just fed me my afternoon kibble and told me to stop barking.

But ... I just know they're planning something. While my owner was busy with their electronic device, I took off on one suspicious looking squirrel, and ran head-first into a bush. And what I saw in that bush blew my stinky breath away. A full-blown underground squirrel operation! I saw elaborate tunnel systems (similar to the tunnel system used by hoomans) as well as a map of the whole city. There were a bunch of labs that smelled of the strange chemicals. There were squirrel mechs being built. There were thousands of squirrels, big and small, scurrying everywhere. One group specifically caught my eye. There were about five of them standing, stacked, on top of each other, cosplaying as a business hooman. The fake hooman had a suit and tie, complete with a name plate that had "Evans Lam" on it. Evans Lam!? The financial advisor on the board of trustees!!??? This is undeniable proof that squirrels were using the money from URochester students to supply their own army! And if they've already infiltrated the board of trustees, then that must mean they're very close to reaching that goal. If it weren't for my owner pulling me away from the bush at the very last moment, I would've had them! Every last one of those dang'ed rodents!

So now, I'm typing this to urge you, dear URochester student, to take a stand (or a sit). The next time you see a squirrel, chase it. And if you lose it, don't worry. You'll probably get a few belly rubs regardless.

Lan is a member of the Class of 2028.

DORA WU / STAFF ILLUSTRATOR
LEN LAN / HUMOR EDITOR

Tax Evasion

BY GABRIEL JIANG
HUMOR EDITOR

25 Winters Later and Still Making History

BY MADDIE UNRUH
SPORTS EDITOR

Over the last 98 years, there have been 25 Winter Olympics, the most recent in the Italian Alps.

Norway came out on top with a total of 41 medals, while the U.S. had a combined 33 to take second place. This gives Norway their fourth consecutive win in the winter games, setting a new record for most golds won (18) and most medals won (41) in a games. For comparison, the U.S. won 12 golds. All information about medals and places for teams is given by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

ELIANA THOMPSON / ILLUSTRATIONS EDITOR

'All information about medals and places for teams is given by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).'

The games started off with curling round-robin sessions on Feb. 4 and finished up Feb. 10, with Sweden taking first over the U.S. Round-robin in curling is where all the teams play each other once before the brackets are made for the rest of the event. We cannot address curling without discussing Canada's cheating scandal. The Swedish team accused the Canadians of cheating, setting up a camera to confirm their suspicions. The accusation was met with a rebuttal full of expletives, as reported by ESPN.

Men's big air snowboard qualification runs happened Feb. 5, with the top 12 scores moving on to the finals. The winner of the event was Japan's Kira Kimura, scoring a total of 179.50 points from his three runs on the halfpipe. Women's parallel giant slalom (PGS) quals and elimination rounds happened back-to-back, with 16 of the 32 competitors being knocked out of the competition after the first round. Men's PGS qualms and columns knocked out 15 of the 31 competitors. Women's small and big PGS finals finished up with Czechia's Zuzana Maderova in first place. Men's PGS also finished up with Austria's Benjamin Karl taking first. To complete the women's big air snowboard final, Kokomo Murase won the event.

In the figure skating team event, where skaters compete in a team with the rest of their country, the U.S. took gold over Japan by one point. U.S. pair Madison Chock and Evan Bates placed first in the rhythm dance, Japanese pair Riku Miura and Ryuichi Kihara took the top spot for Pair Skating, along with Japan's Kaori Sakamoto finishing first for women's individual skating, and American Ilia Malinin taking first for Men's Single skating.

'She returned this year with a focus on her own mental health rather than the chase of medals. She came back on her own terms.'

Women's figure skating individual finals have taken the spotlight with Alysa Liu's recent return to the sport leading to the first U.S. women's gold since 2002. She initially retired at 16 due to severe burnout and a loss of love for the sport, but she returned this year with a focus on her own mental health rather than the chase of medals. She came back on her own terms after separating her family and her management team, specifically removing her father and taking control of her music and costumes. A video posted by NBC Bay Area on TikTok shows the three medalists, Liu, Japanese Kaori Sakamoto and Ami Nakai, jumping as they step up onto the podium. This is a huge moment for all three of these women, but it is also an important moment in women's sports. They all embraced each other and had support from the men's teams as well. This included Estonian skater Niina Petrõkina "shooting" the U.S.'s Ilia Malinin in the beginning of her "Cell Block Tango" routine.

'This is a huge moment for all three of these women, but it is also an important moment in women's sports.'

Italy's Francesca Lollobrigida won the women's 3km speed skating event, and Norway added another medal to their rapidly growing count on the back of Sander Eitrem's 5km speed skating win. Team Italy won the short track mixed relay speed skating event.

Many events started Feb. 7 such as men's downhill alpine skiing, in which Switzerland's Franjo von Allmen took gold and women's cross country skiing where Sweden's Frida Karlsson earned the win. In the women's ski jumping finals, Norway's Anna Odien Stroem went home with the victory. The U.S.'s Breezy Johnson took gold in the women's downhill skiing. Men's 10km + 10km skiathlon finished with Norway's Johannes Hoesflot Kalebo walking away with first as well. Women's freestyle downhill skiing ended with Switzerland's Mathilde Gremaud taking first place. Switzerland also took gold in the men's team slalom in alpine skiing, while Austria won on the women's side of the event. Men's ski jump finals wrapped up with German Philipp Raimund winning gold. To conclude the men's freeski slopestyle event, Norway's Birk Ruud won gold. Sweden swept the podium in the women's ski sprint classic. As the ski events wrapped up, Slovenia took the gold for mixed team ski jumping. Norway's Jens Luraas Oftebro won the Nordic combined event individual Gundersen normal hill/10km.

In the mixed biathlon finals, each member of the relay team competes in 6km of the overall 24km. This resulted in the mixed French team taking home the gold medal.

Luge started up soon after, with Germany's Max Langhen taking first place. This set a new record for the event. Meanwhile, Germany's Julia Taubitz won on the women's side for the singles run.

In a historic turn of events, both the U.S. men's and women's hockey teams beat Team Canada. This was a significant event for the men's hockey team, as this is their first win in 40 years, since the team beat the Soviet Union in 1986.

'This was a Winter Olympics games for the books.'

This was a Winter Olympic games for the books, with outstanding performances in all event groups, including a particularly strong performance from the Norwegian team. From the empowering performances in both men and women's figure skating and men and women's hockey finals, these games lived up to the hype.

Unruh is a member of the Class of 2029.

Meliora Midi

BY CALEB OSHINSKY
STAFF PUZZLER

ACROSS

1 Homer's neighbor
4 Dutch flower that may be tiptoed through, per Tiny Tim
6 Hats often tipped to "m'lady"?
8 Farm unit of 4,840 square yards
9 End-of-the-week letters
11 Some cameras: Abbr.
12 The Abominable Snowmonster of the North, for one
13 Fed. anti-discrimi nation org.
14 "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" essayist Didion
15 San Francisco Bay hardware manufacturing hub city
17 With 18-Across, animal organ depicted by this puzzle's grid
18 See 17-Across

DOWN

1 Raw footage?
2 "Mr. Blue Sky" band, for short
3 Something cracked and gross?
4 Night _____ (sleep disorder symptoms)
5 "Once upon a time" setting
6 Bass staff symbol
7 Occupy, as a table
8 Enzyme suffix
10 Fish feature featured frequently in "Jaws"
16 Mother's Day month

The answers to this crossword can be found on page 3.