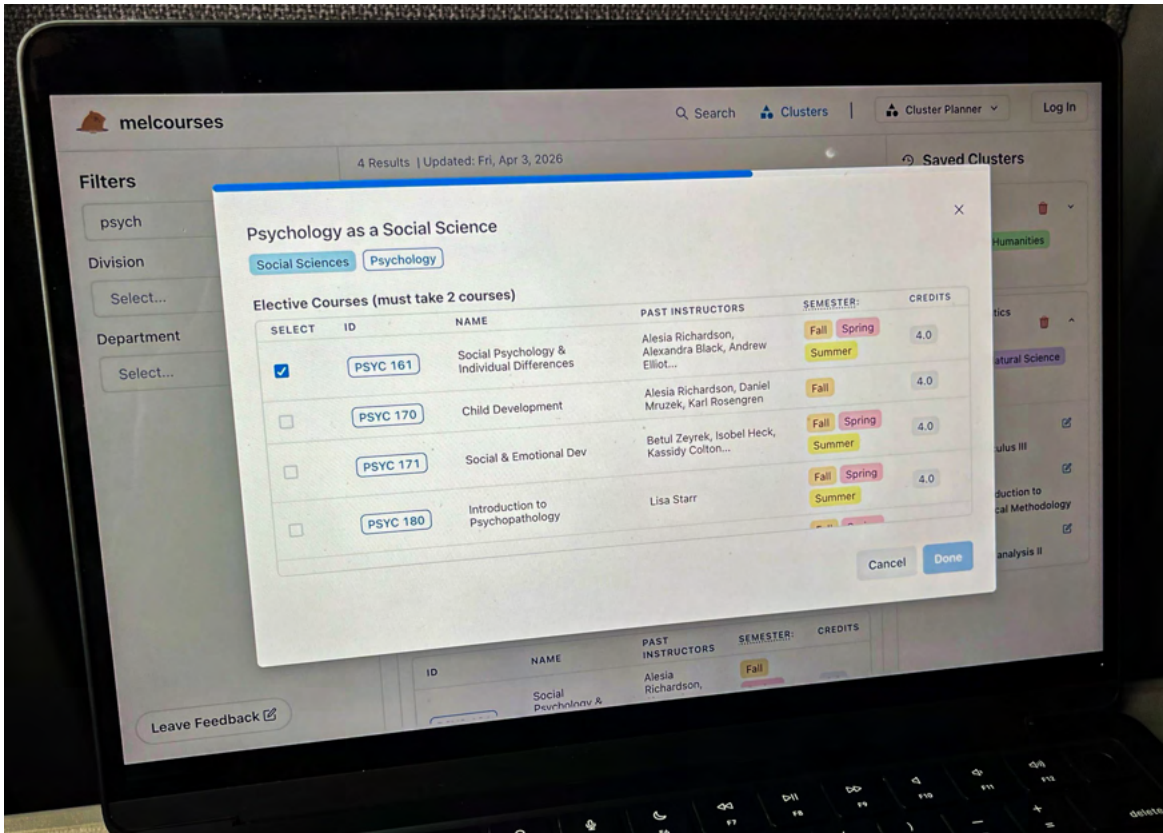


Campus Times



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RocLab to Introduce New Cluster Search Engine



WILL RECORD / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

RocLab's cluster search engine in use.

BY MAYA BROSNICK
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Coming to you from the makers of MelCourses, a new cluster search engine will be unveiled next semester. RocLab, the student-led team behind the search engine, is a campus organization that focuses on building tech solutions. For the past year and a half, RocLab has been working on creating a cluster search engine to replace the University's current system, according to sophomore Will Record, a director and development team lead with RocLab.

"One of the new features we had started planning on — actually right around when I joined RocLab a year and a half ago — was a cluster search engine integrated with our general concept of helping people plan their courses," Record said.

Designed to integrate with MelCourses as a new tab, the new cluster search engine is meant to aid students in choosing their courses. The new system will allow students to search for offered clusters in all three divisions (humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences).

Once a cluster has been selected, it will open a drop-down menu allowing students to see required courses and elective options. After making a selection, the cluster will be added to a sidebar for future

reference.

Recently, the University removed their cluster search engine and replaced it with a PDF listing all active cluster options. Using this new interface, students mostly have to use their browser's webpage search to find what they are looking for, which is significantly more unwieldy than being able to search using keywords. Unlike the old search engine, this PDF does not offer significantly outdated cluster options.

"[The old engine] talked about courses that hadn't been offered for many, many years. It had a search functionality, at least. So that's good, better than the PDF, but still not really usable," Record said. "We wanted to build a more streamlined, easy way for students to search through that. And we thought it would integrate very nicely with the existing features we have with MelCourses."

Although the switch to PDF gave students a more accurate view of the clusters available to them, the changed interface made it more difficult for RocLab to parse information from a PDF.

"It's good they updated it, but it made it a little harder for us," Record shared. "But I think that's even a better way that we can [help]. Our product should hopefully be much better than scrolling through a PDF."

Once the new search engi-

ne is unveiled, RocLab plans to continue in its goal of helping students in all aspects of planning their courseload at URochester.

"We'll be adding this separate cluster page, which will integrate eventually with our broader goals of covering really all planning aspects. So we have some more things in the works for planning out all four years and viewing your requirements and everything like that," Record shared. "I don't want to make any promises to anything we aren't going to do. But it looks like a four-year planner [will be next]. We've had kind of a beta version on the site for a while now, but it's not the most fully-fledged thing."

Another potential move for RocLab include relocating MelCourses to a rochester.edu domain.

"It looks like the University is going to be able to provide hosting services for us. And that would include having MelCourses be potentially relocated to a University of Rochester domain name," Record said. "And then they would be able to provide financial support because currently that has been funded out of pocket."

The new search engine is not ready quite yet, but is on track to be available to students next semester.

Brosnick is a member of the Class of 2027.

Student Researchers Share Projects for Celebrating Research Week

BY MANGO NOREBERG
STAFF WRITER

As the academic year winds down, undergraduate researchers at the University are presenting the results of months of work during Celebrating Research Week (CRW). Kicking off with the Research Poster Expo on April 10, the week featured events including Lightning Talks and the Research Symposium, where students shared projects across disciplines with peers, faculty, and the broader community.

'Undergraduate researchers at the University are presenting the results of months of work during Celebrating Research Week (CRW).'

Among them was senior psychology major Naima Petersen, whose honors project examines how romantic relationships shape — and are shaped by — the way couples interact with their pets.

Petersen described how she became interested in this research project after encountering a student who opted to adopt a dog with his partner.

"He was a grad student who was getting married, and his wife wanted a dog and he has an avoidant/anxious attachment style," Petersen remarked. "He thought the dog would make it worse for their relationship. He was proven wrong."

She examined how people with avoidant attachment styles, who tend to feel uncomfortable with emotional intimacy, and anxious attachment styles, who often fear losing their relationships, experienced different levels of satisfaction with both their partners and their dogs. She found that insecure attachment styles were linked to lower satisfaction with both. Ad-

ditionally, those who reported higher satisfaction with their partners reported greater satisfaction with their dogs. She plans to continue this research later this year.

While it is unknown whether adopting a pet can lead to romantic relationships, Peterson suggested that those who are satisfied spending time with their pets can develop a similar dynamic with their partners. "It helps you be more palpable talking about things that are more personal," she said.

Senior Maya Glasman, a Psychology and Brain and Cognitive Science major, took on a project that explored human behavior. This undertaking was a capstone project for her Research Methods in Psychology course with Professors Karl Rosengren and Daniel Mruzek, where she learned how to design her own research project. Students, including Glasman, were assigned different organizations to work on the project with, and hers centered on the impacts of a nature-based learning curriculum for elementary school-aged children in Rochester.

Glasman worked with groups of fourth and fifth grade students at Anna Murray-Douglass Academy No. 12, a local Rochester public school. Due to this school's large population of students whose first language is Spanish, she worked with bilingual students. She observed the students taking part in the activities that were centered on nature in 90-minute sessions; the first 20 minutes were spent inside a nature center, with nature-themed activities and live animal exhibits, while the remaining 70 minutes were spent outdoors. To measure the students' levels of engagement in these nature-based activities, the students filled out short

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CAMPUS



Junior and Geoscience major Miriam Herron presents her astrobiology research project on testing carbon samples from different sources for signs of life at the Research Symposium.

RESEARCH FROM PAGE 1 questionnaires with questions that asked them how much they learned from the activities, plus general math or science-related questions. Teachers were given their own surveys, on which they recorded their own observations on the students' engagement with the activities.

Shifting from psychology to public health, Senior Hana Zhang, a Health Policy major, explored the effects of and preventative care for lead poisoning in Rochester, which has been a prevalent public health issue. Despite the improvements in housing infrastructure to prevent this illness, Zhang notes that lead poisoning still occurs today.

"Rochester has done a better job of preventing [lead] exposure, but we want to learn more about how we can help these caregivers once [their dependents] are diagnosed and how to provide that support," she said.

Zhang interviewed families in Rochester with members who have confirmed high blood lead levels, specifically asking caregivers how well the healthcare system supported them and if they had access to care. It was then determined that caregivers felt respected when their needs were valued by healthcare providers and organizations and that they were willing to support caregivers in treating their children's illness.

"Caregivers felt more empowered when they had shared decision-making. It's not just about policies or protocols, it's about people. And we need better care for not only [patients, but also] the parents, so they can provide better care for the kids," Zhang illustrated.

For Zhang, taking on this

research project enabled her to empathize with and fully understand the lives of underprivileged citizens as a healthcare worker. "I never had to worry about what was in my pipes of water. I never had to worry about what water I was drinking or what was in my home," she said. "It really does make you think of privilege and it helps you empathize with people who aren't as privileged."

Junior Miriam Herron, a Geoscience major, undertook a project based on astrobiology, a subject she has not explored before. As part of an internship with Carnegie Science in Washington, D.C., this research project seeks to determine the sources from outside Earth, such as from meteorites and meteorite impacts. The interns examined samples of a meteorite that formed a crater in Sudbury, Canada, and determined whether the type of carbon was able to support life forms outside Earth. They performed Raman spectroscopy, which is when the structure and properties of the material are determined by emitting beams of blue light onto the sample; the data is visualized as peaks on a chart and the material of the substance can be determined based on the size of the peak.

Herron and her colleagues then determined that the type of carbon which this sample was made from could potentially support life forms, but the origin of these life forms are yet to be concluded. "Temperature and pressure conditions surrounding impact can lead to carbon formation... and that could produce a habitable environment," Herron remarked. "There was probably more than one origin for the carbon.

And so, it could have been life and meteorite transport or abiotic [originating from non-living things] formation. There's a lot going on at Sudbury and multiple origins for carbon and just a lot of interesting things to dig into."

For Herron, the main highlight of taking on this project was being able to apply her knowledge of the different sciences to explore this new topic.

"It was cool being able to connect to the geology of the rocks that I was looking at with life or chemistry," she said. "The reason I like geoscience is because it combines all of these other sciences like physics, chemistry, biology, and just, like, everything."

'These projects gave students the opportunity to immerse themselves in fields and ideas that interest them, and to share those discoveries with an audience of their peers.'

Through projects spanning psychology, public health, and the natural sciences, students participating in Celebrating Research Week demonstrated how undergraduate research can inform their academic development and future career goals. These projects gave students the opportunity to immerse themselves in fields and ideas that interest them, and to share those discoveries with an audience of their peers.

Norenberg is a member of the Class of 2028.

Reducing Opioid Prescriptions in Rochester

BY SHLOKA KARIA
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

As recently as the early 2010s, it was standard practice for surgeons to provide 30 to 40 or more opioid pills for common, minimally invasive procedures. Most of these pills, however, would remain untouched, left over in the patient's medical cabinet or kitchen pantries for potential misuse. A team of researchers led by URM's Dr. Jacob Moalem set out to reduce these opioid overprescriptions.

This project began when Moalem allowed his patients to decide whether or not to go home with an opioid prescription. The results were jarring: Of the first 216 patients, 96% chose to go home with nothing.

"So much of the apprehension about sending patients home with less or with nothing was actually my own apprehension," Moalem expressed. "It wasn't the patients. It was me."

His concern wasn't unique, as medical specialists' views on opioid prescriptions have been shaped, in part, by decades of misinformation from the pharmaceutical industry. "A big part of how and why the opioid crisis developed was misinformation from the pharmaceutical industry," explained Moalem, "which was spending hundreds of millions of dollars to educate the entire medical community about how non-harmful these medications were. It was very damaging."

'Medical specialists' views on opioid prescriptions have been shaped, in part, by decades of misinformation from the pharmaceutical industry.'

When Moalem and his team began analyzing their own prescribing patterns at URM in 2020, what they found was striking. A large proportion of discharged patients reported no pain in the 48 hours prior to discharge and did not take any pain medication during that time. And yet, more than half of those patients were still being sent

home with opioid prescriptions.

Their question formed intuitively: "Why would you send somebody home with pain medication if they told you for two straight days that they never had any pain and never needed any pain medication?" Moalem said.

Their goal was to achieve a 20% reduction in opioid prescriptions at discharge which they more than tripled with a 67% reduction across 6,619 patients and 15 different surgical procedures. Of the patients discharged, 70% took home no opioids at all.

These numbers were real URM patients: Rochester residents who went home with thousands fewer opioid prescriptions than they would have without this intervention. "You multiply that out by the thousands of pills that are not just sitting around in the Rochester area," Moalem said. "That's a massive, massive number of people who have been impacted."

'Now, five years after the study, the reductions are still holding.'

And the impact has been consistent. Now, five years after the study, the reductions are still holding.

It's important to note that opioids aren't inherently bad, and that if a patient requires pain medication, then they should have access to it. "Opioids are really, really important after surgery," Moalem said. "If a patient has pain that keeps them from being able to function, that needs to be treated." The goal is the right amount of medication for the right patient, based on what they actually need.

Moalem emphasizes that work remains to be done regarding opiate reduction and that many, many more patients will be affected. "These are not trivial decisions. We all have a responsibility to reduce the amount of these medications that are just sitting around in medication cabinets."

Karia is a member of the Class of 2029.

Catching *FIRE!!* in a Rare Books Exhibition

BY FRANKIE BRERETON
OPINIONS EDITOR

As a result of a collaboration between classes in the English and the History departments, as well as the Rare Books Library at URochester, a new exhibition centering on the one-time magazine *FIRE!!* will be on display starting May 4, 2026.

This year is the centennial anniversary of the magazine *FIRE!!*, and in celebration of this, two cases that will be displayed in Lam Square and the Rare Books Library of Rush Rhees will boast various, mostly first-edition, works by the writers and editors of the 1926 magazine come opening day. These texts include everything from Countee Cullen's first book of poetry to Arthur Huff Fauset's "Folklore from Nova Scotia," which explores folklore, tales, and vernacular speech from the rural black communities in Nova Scotia in the 1920s, to a first edition copy of Alain Locke's "The New Negro," which appeared in last year's pop-up exhibition that celebrated its 100th anniversary.

'The exhibit centers around the one-time publication FIRE!!, formed by famous writers, essayists, and artists, which rose to prominence during the 1920s in the Harlem Renaissance.'

The exhibit centers around the one-time publication *FIRE!!*, formed by famous writers, essayists, and artists, which rose to prominence during the 1920s in the Harlem Renaissance. These figures include the poet Langston Hughes whose extensive body of work influenced writers all through the 20th century, including Lorraine Hansberry, the

writer of one of America's most produced and studied plays: "A Raisin in the Sun."

'Many of the themes explored in the attached essays appear in cultural and academic conversations today, making both the writers and their texts relevant in more ways than simply who they inspired.'

Alongside the texts found in the cases, there will be QR codes that will take readers to student-written essays that explore chosen aspects of the text and how they pertain to *FIRE!!*. These have been written by students in Professor Matthew Omelsky's Intro to African American Literature class. The students each chose a text and spent time in Rare Books and Special Collections reading and working on forming connections between their piece and *FIRE!!*, as well as drawing in secondary material to educate both themselves and those that will view the exhibit.

As Omelsky said over email, the public will have the opportunity to learn important context and history attached "to the different forms of Black cultural expression we encounter in the world today" through the exhibit. Many of the themes explored in the attached essays appear in cultural and academic conversations today, making both the writers and their texts relevant in more ways than simply whom they inspired. Professor Chambliss, instructor of Gateway to History: The Harlem and Black Chicago Renaissances, pointed out that "the combination of literary and historical analysis [will] help to illuminate this period."

The contents of each



COURTESY OF RARE BOOKS, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, AND PRESERVATION, RIVER CAMPUS LIBRARIES, UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER
FIRE!!, the central text of the exhibit, published in 1926.

case were selected by the students themselves, as was the layout of the texts within the case. Chambliss' class "researched related primary source documents to reconstruct the movement's social context," she said in an email exchange. Her class also wrote essays about primary sources that they researched from the same period attached via QR codes that appear in the cases. The labels that give a very brief overview of each piece were composed by Omelsky's students.

More than just a research opportunity, this exhibit allows students to write for

more than just their professor. In order to make the works accessible to all kinds of readers, students needed to reframe their writing and argument skills. In doing so, the exhibits help to push Rare Books and Special Collections onto center stage.

'The exhibits help to push Rare Books and Special Collections onto center stage.'

Kabron Tadios, a student of Chambliss' class, reflected on what she gained from the class: "With every

source I read, I learned something that shaped and reshaped how I saw the movement. I've also found a new appreciation for archives and the work it takes to piece together a cohesive history from fragments left behind from the specific era."

Brereton is an exchange student from the University of Southampton.

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COMMUNITY

SigEp's Annual Spelling Bee Helps Kids Stay Ambitious

BY SUBAAH SYED
MANAGING EDITOR

URochester's Sigma Phi Epsilon (SigEp) chapter hosted their 16th annual Spelling Bee April 11. The event was hosted in Sloan Auditorium, for students from grades three to six, from various schools in the 19th Ward. with Dr. Charles T. Lunsford School No. 19 sending the most competitors. There was one winner from each grade and each was awarded \$500 toward their future college tuition upon admission.

According to their website, on Saturday mornings leading up to the spelling bee, frat brothers helped tutor young students at the 19th Ward's Arnett Library, a branch of the Rochester Public Library system.

SigEp's Vice President of programming and junior Owen Masters was at the library every week. He talked about the mindset he used when tutoring kids in spelling. "It's like teaching them intuition, to think about how a word is spelled — how can I guess at how a word is spelled? What can I apply from words I [do] know to take a good educated guess on how to spell this word?"

All SigEp brothers were required to go to at least one tutoring session. "It gives them a good opportunity for [brothers] to explore philanthropy, which is really what SigEp is about to us," President of the fraternity and sophomore Jaden Kolenski said in the interview.

In a 2022 local study from the Rochester City

'Reading proficiency was considerably lower among historically underserved and low-income students, making tutoring from the brothers especially helpful.'

School District, it was found that only 8% of students from kindergarten to eighth grade read at their grade level. Reading proficiency was considerably lower among historically underserved and low-income students, making tutoring from the brothers especially helpful.

Masters also mentioned how a main drive of hosting the Spelling Bee was encouraging education among younger students. "It's definitely a good op-



TEDDY ALMOND / NEWS EDITOR

From left to right, the third-, sixth-, fifth-, and fourth-grade winners of SigEp's annual spelling bee stand with their prizes.

portunity for them to get outside of school," he recalled, "and have younger guys like us who ... show them that learning isn't always something that's boring ... but more so something that they want to do and want to pursue."

During the event at Sloan Auditorium, brothers are assigned to different roles, one of which is being a campus tour guide for competitors before the spelling bee starts. Other brothers, including Masters, were judges for the competition, and were responsible for introducing each word.

Giving back to the community is a goal that SigEp deeply cares about; philanthropy was one of the major reasons why Kolenski joined the fraternity. While the administration of the event was stressful, it was rewarding for the brothers to see everything come together. Kolenski and Masters wanted to commend Doug and Charlotte Giebel, chairs of the 19th Ward Spelling Bee and active members of the 19th Ward Community Association.

"I want to shout out Doug and Charlotte, just for how

"They're just very enthusiastic and caring about what they're doing, and, you know, that kind of rubs off on you, too."

passionate they are," Kolenski said. "I think that passion kind of wears off ... it wore off on me. They're just very enthusiastic and caring about what they're doing, and, you know, that kind of rubs off on you,

too." The SigEp spelling bee also landed on the 40th Anniversary Celebration for URochester's SigEp chapter. At the event, alumni and current brothers of the fraternity met and took part in networking and community-based activities.

President Kolenski recalled that "a lot of the

brothers, immediately from the spelling bee, came over and ran around a mile and a half, ate a garbage plate, and then ran another mile and a half."

Reflecting on his main takeaway from the Spelling Bee, Masters said, "I think that I am always happy to make an impact through SigEp in the ways that I know how to. And coming

out of the event, I'm happy to have helped, and I'm happy to have had the opportunity [to make] sure that the kids, you know, stay ambitious." In fact, preparing students at Arnett Library for the spelling bee influenced Masters to return to tutoring after taking a break post-high school. "I fell in love with it all over again, and I ended up stepping up to take a role that really allowed me to express that."

As president this year, Kolanski aimed to help the next president preserve this memorable SigEp tradition, and as a Rochester-native, the community is close to home for him. "I think that our future starts from the ground up, which is the kids in these grade levels that we're helping out." Kolanski said. "I think it's less about, you know, being able to spell words and more about making sure that they care about their education and their future."

Syed is a member of the Class of 2027.

Crossword Answers

BY CALEB OSHINSKY
STAFF PUZZLER

S	S	E		S	M	P	R		Y	D	N	A	H	
T	I	F		G	I	C	E		T	U	O	R	A	F
E	V	I	F	E	K	A	T		N	O	G	E	R	O
O	L	L	O	P		A	N	A	L		P	P	O	
P	E	T	S		G	N	I	R	A	C	D	O	O	W
	A	A	C	N		E	D	I	A					
S	O	N		L	A	D	E	M		H	T	A	O	
R	E	I	R	D	D	E	T	A	N	G	I	S	E	D
D	E	W	A		R	U	C	N	I		E	P	A	
			E	N	O	A		U	G	A	R			
Y	E	L	L	A	H	T	A	E	D		I	E	R	A
A	N	U		Y	L	S	R	S		R	E	V	O	D
T	U	O	B	B	E		A	E	D	I	E	L	E	N
S	R	E	L	I	O		L	E	N	O		L	L	I
	P	S	A	L	C		C	R	A	N		C	F	K

This crossword can be found on page 12.

OPINIONS

Why Student Protests Have Lost Their Power

EDITORIAL BOARD

Higher education students in the U.S. have played instrumental roles in protesting war and social injustice since at least the 1950s, planning and participating in marches for causes such as civil rights, Free Speech, and against the Vietnam War. In more recent years, university students have been active in movements like #MeToo, BLM, and No Kings, as well as anti-ICE protests and marches. Many of these earlier movements led to tangible policy change — consider, for example, the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee's role in organizing the Freedom Rides of 1961, which helped in the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the lowering of the voting age to 18 in response to intensifying pressures from Vietnam War protests.

Sixty years ago, when voting rights were still being set and amended, the student protests during the Greensboro sit-ins were effective, acting as the “impetus for the larger sit-in movement that spread across the country.” These protests in North Carolina were poorly received by police, but they raised enough awareness and attention that the Democratic National Convention noticed them. Freedom Summer was not universally successful, but it nevertheless helped push President Lyndon B. Johnson to sign the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

However, recent student protests are considerably less effective than they used to be. According to The American Prospect, there were far fewer young attendees to the most recent round of No Kings marches in proportion to the attendance of older generations. On our own campus, there has been a distinct lack of large-scale, effective protests since the spring 2024 Gaza Solidarity encampment, named “Camp Resilience,” and the infamous “Wanted” poster scandal. These called attention to and moved against URochester's ties to Israel and the genocide in Palestine.

In the past two years, it felt like there was a protest against Israel's actions in Gaza or the University's ties to Israel at least once a month. Students occupied Wallis Hall, camped on Eastman Quad for a month, disrupted the University's annual Boar's Head dinner, and caught national media attention for putting up the “Wanted” posters. And students were concerned about more than just

the war in Gaza, as graduate and undergraduate students alike participated in multiple actions last year to support the attempt to form a graduate student union, including chanting during graduation.

Even before the graduate student strike and the Israel-Palestine protests, this campus was a place for active student protesting. In the spring of 2023, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) organized an encampment to protest inequity in housing on Wilson Quad. SDS also organized “Stop the Build” protests against the construction of the Catholic Newman Center and the Greenbaum Center for Jewish Life, and in 2014, a peaceful protest in response to the grand jury's decision not to indict officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Minnesota. Back in 2009, the organization occupied Goergen Hall in an earlier solidarity movement for Palestine. In fact, in an admissions blog from Natalie Ziegler '18, one of her main reasons for choosing URochester was because “a spirit of activism permeates this campus.” Whether it was to make change or commemorate individuals, activism was a notable aspect of campus life.

But where is that spirit now? World politics are as turbulent as ever, yet we can't think of a URochester student protest on that subject this academic year. Maybe we've missed instances, or student protesting is just less visible nowadays. But maybe our campus has become less politically active.

Though a graduate student union has not been formed, students have stopped demonstrating. The Newman Center opened without protest on Easter despite previous student opposition, and though there have been no significant changes to the housing process in the last three years, encampments are nowhere to be seen.

‘So why have students stopped protesting? Possibly because it doesn't seem to work. Country-wide protests against the war in Gaza achieved what? How much awareness on campus did they bring about? How many conversations about divestment were held, just for University administrators to change nothing? From what we can tell of URochester

at least, all student protests have achieved is a stricter policy against protests and demonstrations.

Students at URochester and throughout the US now stand to face much stricter consequences for protesting. The Demonstrations, Vigils, and Peaceful Protests Policy page was last updated on Aug. 26, 2024, on the heels of Camp Resilience. The page details that student protests are required to “obtain approval for undertaking protests, vigils, and/or demonstration events.” This has allowed the University to deny whichever protests they deem inappropriate and led to strict consequences for protest organizers. The University has charged students who violate these policies, and the requirement to obtain approval has led to many protests never occurring at all.

This pattern has repeated in universities across the nation. Columbia University in New York City has become a cautionary tale for college students and administrators alike. The university's East Butler Lawn was the site of the

first Gaza Solidarity Encampment, and the camp's brief life was marked by persistent heightened NYPD presence and harassment. On the basis of their affiliations with these protests, five Columbia students were detained by ICE. The detainees were all international students who were here on student visas or who were green-card holders. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was quick to initiate deportation proceedings.

These increasingly harsh reactions from university and national leadership might be because they believe the wider public will tolerate them. A Gallup poll in 2023 found only 36% of respondents indicated significant trust in higher education, down from 48% in 2018 and 57% in 2015. Furthermore, while the 2015 poll found trust in education uncontroversial, with a majority in every measured subgroup indicating trust across age, gender, educational attainment, and party identification divides (with the sole exception of political independents), the 2023 poll

found trust had become highly polarized, with only 19% of Republicans indicating trust, and only Democrats out of every subgroup measured maintaining a majority for trust.

A protest's ability to shape public opinion relies on the public's trust. When a large portion of the American public has lost faith in the political neutrality of higher education and no longer associates universities with the truth, it only makes sense that the public would not as readily follow the lead of campus protests, and so those protests would be less effective. It seems likely, then, that URochester is experiencing a symptom of a wider political shift. Why would protesting work if there is no one to take up the call, and why would students keep protesting if it isn't working? But if students, the next generation, are being taught that protesting is ineffective, in twenty years there will be no one left to protest.

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

The Editorial Board is an Opinions article representing the view of the *Campus Times*, co-written by Editor-in-Chief Maya Brosnick; Publisher Elena Bachmann; Managing Editors Emily English and Subaah Syed; Opinions Editors Addison Baker and Frankie Brereton; and Editor-at-Large Maddie Unruh.

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As Observed by a Recent Rochester Immigrant: The Last One

BY FRANKIE BRERETON
COLUMNIST

This is going to be a very different kind of article compared to what I normally write for this column. As the year winds down and we approach finals, so too approaches the date of my plane home and the end of my time at URochester.

Normally, I'd write a political article, critiquing the right wing and commenting on wider current events in the U.S. or across the Atlantic. But this time, I want to take a look at my time here and talk about why I think everyone should grab the opportunity of a year abroad wholeheartedly.

'I want to take a look at my time here and talk about why I think everyone should grab the opportunity of a year abroad wholeheartedly.'

My year abroad has made me more resilient to change and challenges. If I can move half a world away from home with a suitcase and a carry-on and be successful, then I can do anything. If I can navigate the U.S. embassy in London and complete all of the paperwork necessary to get

my visa, even in the face of Trump's suspension of student visa applications last summer, then I can deal with any amount of admin and obtuse paperwork. If I can sit on a 13-hour FlixBus from Washington, D.C. all the way back to Rochester because we didn't know that you had to be 21 to rent a car in D.C. and the company didn't tell us when we booked the damned thing, then I can sit in a car for six hours whilst my parents drive us to Liverpool to see my grandad.

Similarly, the challenges of attending university here are very different from my experiences at my home institution, the University of Southampton (UoS). There, I had two essays to hand in per class, per semester, so eight essays per semester. That's it. Attendance and participation have no effect on your grade. The shift to having many assignments to hand in posed a challenge at first, and has kept me on my toes for the duration of my exchange year. This is a good thing though; the classes that I've taken here have widened my knowledge on my subject and on world history and culture. I feel like I can hold my own in conversations with real adults in an academic setting instead of playing catch-up. It feels

like the professors actually care about your work, especially as work isn't anonymous like at home, and I don't have to wait 20 business days to receive feedback. The opportunity to study creative writing with competent professors has opened up my world and my future.

Studying abroad has meant that my horizons have widened. Before, I wouldn't have ever considered going anywhere except universities in the U.K. for grad school, and I would have ended up doing something in literature or journalism. Now, I'm going to be applying for a Masters of Fine Arts in creative writing at schools across the U.S. and Europe. Everything feels possible because of this step. Working abroad, living and studying abroad, has helped me chase the best opportunities available to me, even if it takes me out of my home country. The borders of home are now something I can navigate around, rather than walls I will remain content inside of.

This in turn has made me a more relaxed person. Everything is less of a big deal. Problems aren't disasters. Making friends came easy and in doing so, I learned new ways to deal with things. I learned

As Observed By A Recent Rochester Immigrant



ELIANA THOMPSON / ILLUSTRATIONS EDITOR

about hiking and cold weather preparation when I went to the Adirondacks with (mostly) experienced, outdoorsy people with a pair of trainers, and no snow boots. I learnt to pack light when I realised that I only had a 45 minute layover in Detroit airport and would not be able to take a checked suitcase. I learnt that you can shout back at scary TSA agents if they're rude to you in JFK airport and shit won't hit the fan. And whilst this absolutely wouldn't fly at UoS, if you don't know how to make a podcast for a final assignment, a meeting and a conversation will allow you to turn that into a lovely 3,000-word essay to hand in instead. Some things are not set in stone; you can change the board if you don't like the game, whether that's needing an

extended deadline (as long as you're not a STEM student with evil professors), or changing the country you live in.

'Everything feels possible because of this step.'

And lastly, I want to say a big thank you to all my friends that have made me feel at home here, and everyone at the *Campus Times* for bringing me into the fold so quickly and giving me the opportunity to explore a kind of writing that I had yet to try. I've really enjoyed my time at URochester and am going to miss it a lot.

Brereton is an exchange student from the University of Southampton.

Projects and Exams: Collaboration as an Answer

BY BELLA NAVE
COPY CHIEF

As we approach finals for this semester, I have once again begun to hear the age-old debate taking place throughout campus: What's the best method of assessment, projects or exams? I've participated in these debates many times, especially because a lot of my friends struggle with tests and don't see the point in them.

I've found I have a very unique perspective on this issue because I attended a Montessori high school that taught the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. I value both projects and exams at about the same level.

'I value both projects and exams at about the same level.'

For those who don't know, Montessori is a learning style that was invented by Maria Montessori, an Italian physician, in the early 1900's. The Montessori style generally focuses on

hands-on, tactile learning rather than tests, essays, or standard grading systems, and in the U.S. is most common in preschool and early elementary schooling. It lends itself to a more play and interest-based learning approach, which helps kids be more independent, understanding, and knowledge-seeking.

The International Baccalaureate on the other hand, is a very rigorous and structured program similar to the Advanced Placement (AP) program. The difference between AP and the IB, however, is stark. The AP curriculum offers individual classes followed by rigorous end-of-year exams, while IB offers seven subjects that you take simultaneously over two years in order to achieve the full diploma. In addition, students also need to complete volunteer hours and a 4,000-word research paper, followed by final exams. At my high school, you could choose to not do full IB and instead just take IB classes like you would AP classes, dropping the

volunteer hours and the research paper. I chose to do the full IB curriculum.

I ended up attending a Montessori high school that prioritized project-based learning, while also completing and being awarded the full IB diploma, which idealized academic papers and exams. It was an odd contradiction during my junior and senior years, but one I have learned to appreciate.

The problems people tend to find with exams is that there is no holistic view of the student. Students are entirely represented by the grade that they achieve. If you're really good at exams and papers, you will be a "good student." If you're really bad at exams, and your skills lie elsewhere, you will be ranked as a "bad student" regardless of how well you actually know the material.

On the flip side, projects can also have similar flaws. Sometimes, a student may be really bad at presenting something, or not be creative and dread having to make anything

to present their ideas. So even if we sidestep tests, students might still be stuck having to "prove their worth" with skills they struggle with, again reducing them to a "bad student" regardless of their actual understanding of the material.

Truly, I believe that the most important thing in education is for the student to understand the material, and then for them to be able to fully communicate their understanding of the material back to the teacher.

'The most important thing in education is for the student to understand the material.'

This is why I value both tests and projects, and more importantly, the choice between the two in most aspects of life. For some things, tests are necessary. Some things must just be memorized because they need to be immediately acted on and known,

especially in medical fields. Some things can't be tests or papers though; they need to be projects. How else are you supposed to make art and explore physical materials? Most divisions can go either way though, and I think it's important for teachers and students to remember that one method of assessment is not innately superior to the other. Projects and exams are good in equal measure, and allowing students to represent their skills in the way they're best at helps give a holistic view of the student and allows students to effectively communicate their understanding of what's happening. It's important to grade a student's best work and see how they comprehend the material, because at the end of the day what you're trying to improve is their understanding of the material — not how well they can perform on a final exam.

Nave is a member of the Class of 2029.

Not Everyone Can Be an Expert, and That's Okay.

BY JOHNPAUL SLEIMAN
STAFF WRITER

NASA just launched Artemis II. Starting on April 1, four astronauts flew farther from Earth than any human being has ever traveled, looped around the Moon, and splashed down safely in the Pacific 10 days later. It was the first crewed mission beyond low-Earth orbit since 1972. I watched the launch from my phone, NASA live streamed it on their YouTube, and it was hard not to feel some amount of excitement.

'It was the first crewed mission beyond low-Earth orbit since 1972.'

Then I opened social media, and the excitement turned into something else.

My feed filled instantly with influencers explaining the mission. Some of them had millions of followers. Their videos were polished, confident, and loaded with terms like “trans-lunar injection” and “free-return trajectory.” They spoke with the authority of people who had studied astrophysics and literal rocket science their entire lives. The comments under their posts were the same: people casually tossing around technical language, nodding along, adding their own takes. Everyone seemed to already understand everything.

However, I had questions. I wanted to know more about why NASA changed the reentry trajectory for Artemis II after the heat shield problems on Artemis I. I wanted to understand how the Orion spacecraft's life support systems were tested for a 10-day mission. Basic questions. Good questions. But scrolling through my feed, I felt like I was the only person who did not already have the answers.

That quiet pressure not to ask, not to feel stupid, is a problem.

'That quiet pressure not to ask, not to feel stupid, is a problem.'

Imagine you are a college student who knows almost nothing about spaceflight. Your algorithm knows you are interested, so it serves you related content. But the content is not educational. It is performative. Influencers delivering surface-level summaries with the confidence of mission control; no explanation of how they know, no citation of sources. No admission that the knowledge came from anywhere other than absolute personal

expertise. They present borrowed knowledge as native fluency, and their audiences mirror it back.

Now imagine you have a question. Maybe you want to know why it took more than 50 years to send astronauts back toward the Moon. Maybe you want to know what a heat shield actually does. You scroll to the comments and consider typing it. But the comments are already full of people who appear to know. And when someone does ask a basic question, the response is dismissive. “Just Google it.” “How do you not know this?” “Bro, it's literally right there.”

So you do not ask. You close the app. The question stays unanswered.

This is not a new pattern. Last September, NASA announced that the Perseverance rover had found a potential biosignature on Mars. The research team spent more than a year carefully analyzing the data before publishing their findings in *Nature*. The paper used precise, cautious language. “Potential biosignature” means exactly what it says: a substance or structure that might have a biological origin but requires further study. That distinction matters.

'They present borrowed knowledge as native fluency, and their audiences mirror it back.'

On social media, the nuance vanished within hours. Influencers and news aggregators declared that NASA had found life on Mars. Posts with millions of views stated it as fact. People who tried to point out that “potential” does not mean “confirmed” were met with ridicule or indifference. Meanwhile, the scientists who actually did the work, the ones who could explain what the finding meant and what it did not mean, were buried under content from “experts” who had discovered the topic that morning.

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The same thing happened during the total solar eclipse in April 2024. The



RIDA AL-ZAYAD / STAFF ILLUSTRATOR

same thing happened when the James Webb Space Telescope released its first images in 2022. Every time a major science event reaches the public, the cycle repeats. Influencers race to post first. Surface-level content dominates the feed. The tone is authoritative. The audience performs understanding. The space for genuine questions disappears.

Scientists want to talk to you. Researchers spend years, sometimes decades, building knowledge that they are eager to share. Many of them are on social media precisely because they want to make their work accessible. They want to answer your questions. They want to explain what a biosignature is, how a heat shield works, and why we study the Moon. That is the whole point of science communication.

But they cannot compete with the volume. A researcher who posts a careful, accurate explanation of the Artemis II heat shield decision gets a few hundred views. An influencer who posts a 60-second summary with dramatic music and confident delivery gets millions of views. The algorithm does not reward accuracy — it rewards engagement. And engagement favors certainty, speed, and polish over nuance, context, or honesty about what we do not know.

The people least experienced in science and most experienced, instead, in media end up controlling the conversation, while the people who truly understand the topic get pushed to the margins. Students who want to learn are left with a choice: perform understanding they do not have, or stay silent. Neither option leads to actual learning.

And that is where the real damage happens, not

just to individual conversations, but to something deeper: curiosity.

'The people least experienced in science and most experienced, instead, in media end up controlling the conversation, while the people who truly understand the topic get pushed to the margins.'

Science runs on curiosity. It always has. We did not go to the Moon in 1969 because the return on investment was clear. We went because we looked up and wanted to know what was there. Penicillin was discovered by accident. The cosmic microwave background, the echo of the Big Bang itself, was found by two radio astronomers who thought their antenna had a pigeon problem. The best science often starts with a question that has no obvious payoff, asked by someone who simply wanted to understand something they did not.

'Science runs on curiosity. It always has.'

That instinct, the willingness to reveal ignorance, is the most valuable thing a student or a scientist or anyone can have. It is also the thing that social media is quietly destroying. When every feed is full of people showing off their expertise, when asking a basic question invites mockery, and when “I don't know” feels like an admission of failure, people stop being curious. They stop asking. And when people stop asking questions, they stop learning. They stop pushing. They stop discovering.

Every scientist who ever made a breakthrough started by not knowing something and having the

courage to ask about it. Darwin did not understand why finches on different islands had different beaks. He asked. Marie Curie did not know what was causing photographic plates to fog in her lab. She asked. The Artemis II crew just traveled farther from Earth than any humans in history, and they did it because thousands of engineers and scientists spent years asking questions that had no guaranteed answers.

Not everyone can be an expert. That is not a failure. That is the starting point. We need to build a culture where “I don't know” is a normal thing to say. Where asking a basic question is treated as curiosity, not ignorance. Where the response to someone who does not understand is to help them learn, not to make them feel small.

The questions you are afraid to ask are the ones worth asking. So ask them. And if someone makes you feel foolish for not already knowing, remember: They probably looked it up 10 minutes ago. The difference between them and you is not knowledge. It is honesty.

'We need to build a culture where "I don't know" is a normal thing to say. Where asking a basic question is treated as curiosity, not ignorance.'

Never stop being curious. That is how science gets done.

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

Artificial Intelligence in Art Is Not a Zero-Sum Game

BY HELENA FENG
SENIOR STAFF

Over the last year, conversations about artificial intelligence (AI) in art have grown increasingly dualistic in their unresearched vigilance and shallow enthusiasm — becoming, as most controversial topics now do, against compromise in any capacity. Fundamentally predicated on unbudging misunderstanding, these conversations are worse than meaningless, feeding into a discursive culture already defined by a tendency to resist any and all positions it advocates for. That nothing has changed about the cultural stalemate — if anything, a reluctant pro-AI shift gained simply by its growing ubiquitousness — suggests that meaningful advances in legislation or cultural consensus require a reevaluation of the rhetoric applied to conversations about AI in the creative sector, and reconciliation with ongoing systematic problems of the creative industry.

‘One conversation about AI always seems to hold multiple conflicting definitions and a range of base opinions.’

The impenetrability of the topic is, no doubt, partly semantic. One conversation about AI always seems to hold multiple conflicting definitions and a range of base opinions, from humanity’s savior to filth deserving only of immediate derision. Obvious from online spats over the usage of AI is a profound sense of disconnection, wherein local consensus — that AI in art is a moral transgression not to be used by anyone save for spiritually bankrupt tech-bros or Donald Trump posing as Jesus — are disrupted with each appearance of AI in a major production or franchise.

Evidently, an argument primarily concerned with assigning AI the same negative qualities as its early adopters is fragile, becoming increasingly compromised by the growing number of AI-supported media releases by massive, multi-billion dollar corporations (e.g. Gucci, Coca-Cola, Nike). What’s become clear is that a meaningful argument against AI in the creative sector cannot be treated as simply a zero-sum game between artists and technologists dependent on the merits of its supporters rather than of itself. It requires a demystification of AI’s capabilities and a foray into what it is we value metaphysically about



EMILY ENGLISH / MANAGING EDITOR

art as a human pursuit.

There’s a quote from Hayao Miyazaki, prolific director and creator of the popular Studio Ghibli franchise, that’s been thrown around to death, where he supposedly condemns the use of AI in art as “an insult to life itself.” Lost in translation is its context: His abrasive words come from a 2016 documentary where he is shown a demonstration of a machine learning-powered modeling of a zombie-like creature, in which the creators, referring to the benefits of the technology, describe it as “enabl[ing] a kind of horror beyond human imagination.” In his response, Miyazaki first states that he feels that the display is crude and disrespectful to people with disabilities, and further that, “If you want to do that kind of disgusting stuff, just do it. But I have no intention of representing this in our work.” Notably, it’s unclear what he is referring to with “this” — if it is a slight to the technology that enables the display, the display itself, or a mixture of the two.

Ignoring the irony of this decontextualization, there’s something important here even without blatantly cherry-picking his words or uncritically believing that he is referring to the current state of generative AI in art. Rendering grotesqueness into art requires intentional subversions of intrinsic notions of what pain is and how tragedy is manufactured, making it intuitively both disrespectful and challenging for machines, devoid of an embodied connection to human emotion, to create an emotionally salient picture of suffering. Any de-abstraction of human emotion is best derived from an intimate connection to deeply entrenched, rarely accessed notions of humanity which undergo a non-mathematical transition from mind to form; not from machine-made composites instilled with contrived, uncanny movements. Embracing purely generative art as an end-to-end means of creation with comparable capabilities sets a transgressive and inaccurate precedent that AI can

create meaningful representations of humanity.

Importantly, though, what this entails is a conceptual, not aesthetic, cap to the capabilities of AI — that because the evocativeness of “good” art is partially owed to a specific interplay of components within an artist’s inner world; the inherent limitlessness of AI as a creative entity is a limit. This, of course, has no bearing on the assumed intrinsic value of all human-made art, which derives from intentionality and, as Ted Chiang put well in the *New Yorker*, a series of choices. In recognizing that this intrinsic value is abstract and inactionable, though, the point is simply to suggest an upper limit to art created wholly with AI.

Even so, it is becoming increasingly difficult for both things to be true: that all uses of AI are to be condemned by all serious artists, and that they continue to be used by legitimate, acclaimed artists operating in top studios. Are the “Spider-Verse” films to be discarded as unserious works of art because they used machine learning models to assist with smoothing and intermediate frames? A relative consensus exists against the sort of budget-slashing, end-to-end use of generative AI by wholly untrained amateurs, but it seems to remain in contention whether its use by professionals — as a scaffold, proof-of-concept, or other — constitutes a similar offense. Those who might then attempt a distinction between “generative” (e.g. distribution-sampling, open-ended models) versus more deterministic models used for specialized tasks must grapple with the question of what constitutes generative, as such models have no single architectural marker. Many core algorithmic components are shared by other AI architectures, while hardware is even less specific. Models are better defined by their predictive objectives — whether a model is trained to simply interpolate between two frames, or if they generate a complete, “novel” picture based on a prompt — but this not a strict delineation.

At this point, one might cite alternative catch-all arguments against AI such as environmental concerns, which begs the question: what separates the use of AI, in any other aspect of our daily lives, from its use in art? Is it just that it is more integrated and invisible, and thus acceptable? Frivolity would seem to be a self-dooming claim. What of any of the environmentally-disastrous practices, far preceding the rise of AI, we’ve come to accept as normal? The material conditions that motivate use of AI in the creative industry — time-constraints, meager pay, taxing workloads — cannot be separated from discussions of morality and appropriateness, yet, they are largely absent; discarded in favor of increasingly vigilant hyperanalysis of what aesthetic features separate human art from AI art and abstractionist evangelism about what constitutes “soul.” The faltering mantra of “we can always tell” is more than just naive and uncurious; it breeds distrust, implicitly propagating an accusatory and divisive culture within artistic communities by demanding evidence of organicity.

A slightly more rigorous analysis of the adoption of AI tools would conclude that sentiments of singular condemnation are not broadly reflective of the professional creative space. The worst outrage, though, stems from the encroachment of AI on what the media typically considers high-brow. But is this suggestive of the total moral corruption of society brought imminently by AI in which online vitriol might lead one to believe, or is this symptomatic of an endemic squeezing of resources in the creative sector that affects even the most well-endowed? Without diminishing the real environmental concerns of the architecture supporting the AI boom, the propagation of several largely inaccurate myths about generative AI is both mystifying and revealing. To characterize the capabilities of AI as uniquely disastrous for the environment or binary in any legitimate sense — to claim that, for example, all outputs comprise some “average” of all of the model’s training data — is only indicative of technological misunderstanding. Yet, such is the impression gleaned from mainstream conversation.

Such characterization also avoids a genuine conversation about how AI, generative or not, will interact with deeply-rooted beliefs of what makes something beautiful. Indeed, many of the same questions raised by

generative AI are reminiscent of those raised by modern art. Namely, how can art be judged when the reliability of aesthetics as a means for determining talent or meaning is threatened? What is the role, if any, of an artist’s intention and subjectivity in determining art’s value, and how much of said value is dependent on a sense of exclusivity; of being unachievable by those without requisite training and dedication? In some ways, AI art brings no real novelty to the sort of questions that have plagued the creative sector, but possibly, only an urgency to their answers.

Troublingly, though predictably, there is no good answer to either the question of how art is to be valued or how the growing usage of AI in our media is to be combatted. However, contemporary popular discussions of AI often reflect a conflict of fundamental humanistic values, not of practicality. Though prescient, they hold negligible weight in a society where legislation requires demonstrable harm or benefit. Culturally, recognition that AI is too vast to independently produce the same sort of idiosyncratic work as an artist — in direction, emotion, or some other abstract metric — may be all we can definitively conclude. Practically, universal protocols for transparency and disclosure, and broadly, improvement to the material conditions that might motivate a studio’s choice to use AI as a creative shortcut, are worth demanding.

‘There is no good answer to either the question of how art is to be valued or how the growing usage of AI in our media is to be combatted.’

But it would not be a stretch to describe the aesthetic potential of AI as theoretically limitless, and to reconceptualize it — in the right hands and with appropriate, policy-enforced restraint — away from an inherent threat and towards a tool for offering fairer working conditions in an artistic industry that has repeatedly proven itself to be resistant to meaningful systematic change. At the very least, building an actionable case for restraining the use of AI in creative endeavors will depend on reevaluating current rhetorical approaches against AI art, and grounding discussions in observable, systemic issues plaguing artistic industries.

Feng is a member of the Class of 2026.

Drag Queen LaWhore Vagistan Explores South Asian Aunties

BY SUBAAH SYED
MANAGING EDITOR

The annual Rainbow Lecture hosted at Dewey Hall by the Susan B. Anthony Institute for Sexuality, Gender, and Women's studies featured Kareem Khubchandani, an Associate Professor of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies at Tufts University and a Visiting Professor at Harvard University. Alongside his educational background, Khubchandani is also a drag queen, who goes by LaWhore Vagistan.

The scenery was already set for the lecture upon entry. Remixes of upbeat Bollywood songs were playing from the speaker. There were desks near the audience that had coloring pages of South Asian Aunties with different patterned sarees and kurtas which we were given markers and color pencils to fill in. There were also sets of bindis, decorative dots worn on the forehead in South Asian cultures, and glittery hand tattoos as well. Another table had books by Khubchandani such as "Ishtyle" and "Lessons in Drag" that were available for sale at the end of the talk.

'Khubchandani invited us to examine the South Asian Auntie.'

The lecturer was introduced by Jeffrey McCune, Associate Professor of English and Black Studies at URochester. In his Rainbow Lecture, Khubchandani invited us to examine the South Asian Auntie and who she was in terms of the nuclear family and in fashion. Far from being a mere trope in "backwardness" and an embarrassing relative that "barges in and out," the Auntie, in Khubchandani's analysis, are "nodes of structural repair."

South Asian Aunties are stereotypically gossipers who are very judgmental and proj-

ect their judgments especially on the youth. These women, who are seemingly along the margins of the nuclear family, are expressive about their traditional values and act as a network where gossip is shared. TikToks were shown throughout the lecture that helped facilitate these points.

They are also known for their extravagant outfits. Central to the lecture was the work of Meera Sethi, a Canadian-Indian artist whose paintings reflect the "Aunty-core" aesthetic. This is defined by color-on-color, pattern-on-pattern, a body enveloped in pattern and every surface embellished. When we shift our attention from the clothes to their faces, we see a weathered body but a confident ease in which the Auntie looks out at the viewer. Khubchandani pointed out that "Aunties floating on the pastel backgrounds don't have a destination but they do have places to be." He noticed how Sethi seems to pause time and space for these women and make their bodies available to interpretation by people like us. Khubchandani remarked, "Work shied into their body but they are not shy to show it."

Why isn't the Auntie embarrassed from the too muchness of her style? "Perhaps she doesn't even realize she is too much," he said. Khubchandani described how the artist Sethi seems to allow these Aunties to enjoy what she's wearing or rather what she has accumulated. Her clothes are a decades-long accumulation of feeling, endurance, and the weathering body. Her outfits also tell stories of other Aunties. Khubchandani phrased it as "not liberal individualism but accumulation of shared resources," and through that, "also sharing of feelings... layering everyday labor [with] spectacles of Auntie generosity."

Khubchandani also included the Auntie's role in politics,

with their first example being NYC mayor Zohran Mamdani (who had a collective audible support from the audience), and his mentioning of the Bangladeshi aunts during his campaign. Khubchandani brought to attention Mamdani's iconic line: "This is the victory of the Bangladeshi auntie who knocked on door after door until her feet throbbed and her knuckles ached." The language draws attention to the body of the Auntie, being tired but ever so determined. Aunties sustain this political economic process, from campaigning to movies, which Khubchandani used Mira Nair, film director and Mamdani's mother as an example for.

Sethi's work also depicts Dadis, which are South Asian grandmothers, and Khubchandani pointed out the vast difference between the depiction of Dadis among her artwork. For example, Dadi is home, Auntie is outside. Dadi is swaddled, cared for, soft, and comfortable. Dadi functions as Auntie until she becomes domesticated.

"How do Aunties have consequences for queer life?" Khubchandani asked in his lecture. Queer and trans people, according to him, "twist time against norms." In a similar fashion, Aunties disrupt this linear timeline as well. They resist the post-partum conception of how when you are an Auntie, your work is done, as you have completed your motherly duties to bring children in the world. On the contrary, Aunties still strive to make an impact in their society. They reject the idea that their time is over. Especially in his work as a drag queen and performer, he portrays the Auntie-core and the too-muchness that symbolizes the aesthetic. For Khubchandani, performing Auntie is his way of reconciling with aging and "living with our futures and those who are coming after us."

The future of the Auntie figure was a notable question that was brought up from the audience. Will these stereotypes still apply to the future Aunties which will be us? "Auntie is not just her style but also her skillset, pleasures, and politics," Khubchandani remarked. The talk ended on an optimistic note, encouraging us to spend time with Aunties and force us to think more about our relationship with these figures.

Syed is a member of the Class of 2027.

Timeless Threads: Creative Arts Club Annual Fashion Showcase

BY LEN LAN
HUMOR EDITOR

Dazzling lights. Live music. Eight young fashionistas, each wearing unique and brilliant outfits, were featured on the runway for Creative Arts Club (CAC)'s 2026 Fashion Show. The theme for this year's show was "Timeless Threads: Eras of Design," meant to inspire models and designers to aim for outfits that were historical or designed authentically using historically accurate techniques. With custom jewelry designers and personal hair stylists, each outfit and dress continually impressed.

'The theme for this year's show was "Timeless Threads: Eras of Design," meant to inspire models and designers to aim for outfits that were historical or designed authentically using historically accurate techniques.'

When asked about the inspiration for her custom outfit, first-year Cookie Monster said that it represented "the current state of the world — chaos. It speaks of rebellion against price tags and polished illusions." The intentional crossovers of the various black and white patterns tailored with a locally thrifted Dior button-down had a certain allure as Monster strutted down the runway, followed later by other models with distinctively spectacular outfits.

One such model was first-year Aeryn Wesley-Hunt, who, according to the emcees of the event, Co-Presidents junior August Vaznaugh-Sanchez and junior Odessa Muelbroek, wore a dress she described as inspired by the Burgundian gown popular among the noble women of Europe in the 15th century paired with custom jewelry by first-year Ace Cuciti. While the Burgundian gown was traditionally designed with fitted sleeves, the dress had the flared bell sleeves of the Houppelande dress of the same time period.

In another outfit worn by Wesley-Hunt featur-

ing clothing worn by the Egtved Girl, Wesley-Hunt matched an original crop top with a mini skirt. The outfit was "ceremonial and related to the worship of the sun," mimicking the sun's rays with a long, wavy ribbon and vivid colors. She said she "spent all of spring break in front of her loom creating the top and skirt."

From a managerial point of view, Muelbroek said it was "great to see the models and fashion designers express themselves creatively in an art form everyone else can also view and enjoy. I'm happy with how everyone worked together to make it happen. It was really cool to see all the different outfits, especially the people that made their own clothes."

From garments demanding fashion rebellion to meticulously threaded pieces commenting on traditional designs from the 15th century, I found that the only thing that the CAC fashion show lacked was an audience with the same energy that the models brought. At the end of the show, my hands hurt from clapping to make sure that the models and designers heard and received the appreciation they deserved. Unfortunately, the promotional portion of CAC's fashion show seemed to be lacking (which is usually how it seems to go with many of the club-sponsored events at the University), and while according to Muelbroek, the show came together "sort of last-minute," it was in my opinion spectacular.

"Your body's a temple, built for change, for choice, for color."

With improvements set in place next year for more models and a heavier priority set on promoting the show, I look forward to seeing what models and designers have in mind for the 2027 CAC Fashion Show. In the words of Monster, "Wear what you want. Your body's a temple, built for change, for choice, for color."

Lan is a member of the Class of 2029.



HARRYLI / PHOTO EDITOR

Guest speaker Kareem Khubchandani presents "Auntologies: Queer Aesthetics and South Asian Aunties" for the 2026 Rainbow Lecture.

Is Academia Hell? R.F. Kuang, and Book Club, Think So

BY ERIN KANE
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

BY MERRILL TRAPHAGAN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

BY JAYLA HALL
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

BY CLAIRE WILCOX-BLACK
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

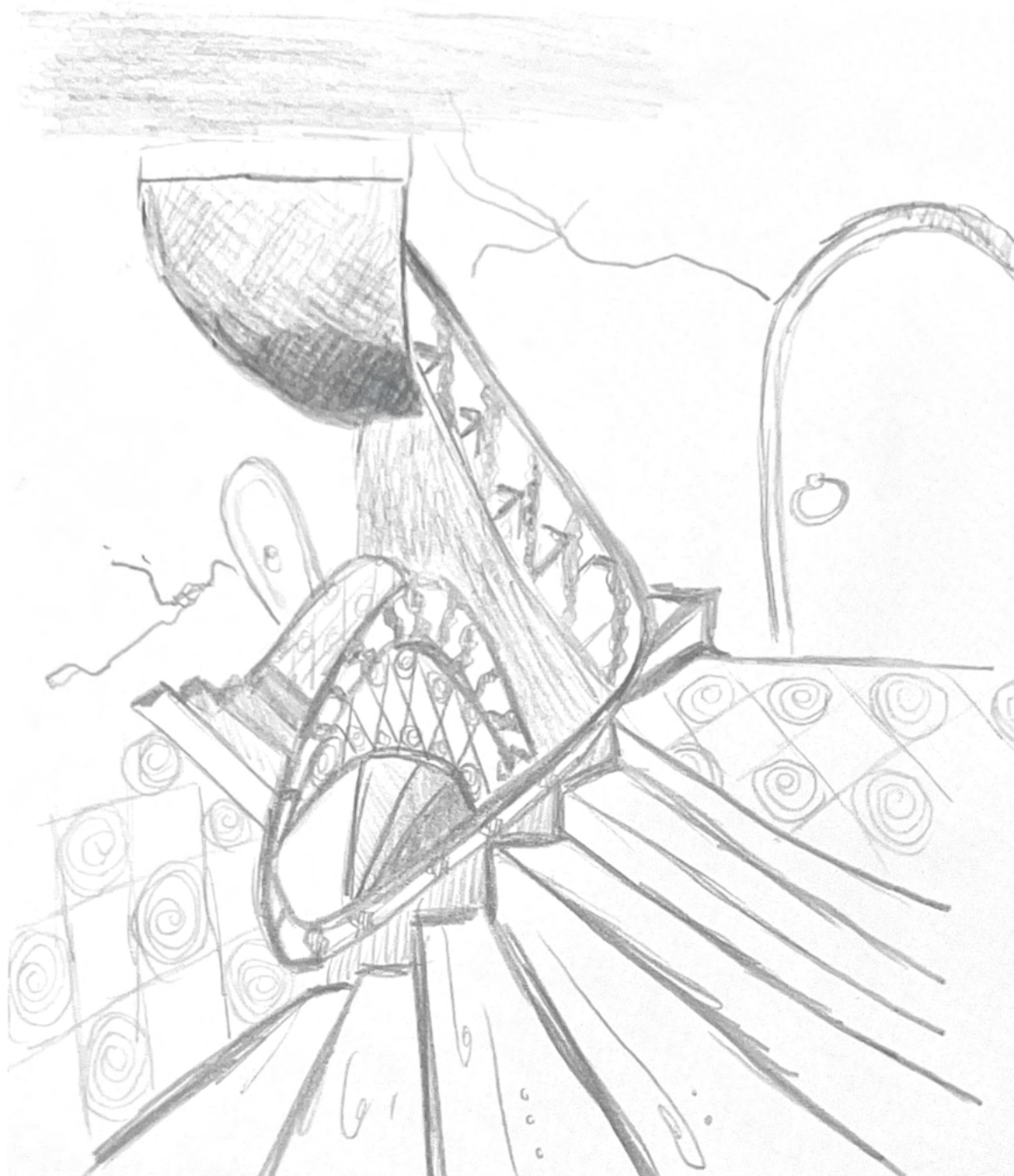
BY ALAYNA LEESTMA
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

“Katabasis” is the newest novel from author R.F. Kuang, better known for her books “Yellowface,” “The Poppy War” trilogy, and “Babel, or the Necessity of Violence.” “Katabasis” follows the journey of two students of the “arcane arts” — a form of magic reliant on chalk circles — Alice and Peter, as they venture into Hell to save their recently deceased thesis advisor, Professor Grimes. In this universe, Hell is envisioned as a synthesis of many real-life conceptions of the afterlife, drawing on Greek and Chinese mythology, as well as Dante’s “Inferno.” As Alice and Peter arrive in Hell, they chase after their advisor through a series of Hell’s courts, which test their magical knowledge — and their relationship.

Magic in “Katabasis” engages heavily in philosophical and logical questions, with magicians finding power in the contradictions, or knowledge gaps, that exist within these topics. This equips Alice and Peter with magical tools like perpetually refilling water bottles, but also puts them at risk of magical traps that require solving riddles to escape.

As the story unravels, we learn more about both Alice and Peter’s academic histories, with Kuang confronting many issues that are deeply rooted in academia. Readers are asked the question of how far someone is willing to go to secure a job in academia, with both Alice and Peter willing to go to literal Hell and back to get a letter of recommendation from their thesis advisor — a renowned but controversial figure in the magical world.

“Katabasis” isn’t the first book of Kuang’s that Book Club has read. Last fall, members had mixed, but mostly positive, thoughts on “Babel, or the Necessity of Violence” — more thoughts can be found in our *Campus Times* review from Fall 2025. “Katabasis” follows similar themes of academic corruption and competition in a backdrop of magical realism, which are undoubtedly motivated by Kuang’s



EMILY ENGLISH / MANAGING EDITOR

personal experience as an academic. She even wrote “Katabasis” while completing her doctoral degree at Yale University. During a November 2023 book promotion tour at the Brattle Theatre near Harvard University, Kuang stated that her book “...started as this cute, silly adventure novel about like, ‘Haha, academia is hell.’ And then I was writing it and I was like, ‘Oh, no, academia is hell.’” — a sentiment that rings true for many of us here at URochester.

Regardless, members of Book Club discussed everything from world-building, themes of chronic illness, political allegories, trauma, and more during our discussion. There are minor spoilers for the book ahead.

The first point of discussion was Kuang’s world-building of Hell and the pacing of Alice and Peter’s story. Some members agreed that Kuang’s depiction of Hell as a college campus (at least at first) could simply represent the main characters’ interpretations, but the “true” landscape of Hell in the alternate universe of “Katabasis” depends on the beholder. One member critiqued the story due to its meandering and

disorganized structure, especially during many of the latter chapters, where much of the action occurs. They stated that the “world-building early on in the book fell away as it went along,” and other members agreed, pointing out the uneven distribution of focus on the early courts of Hell compared to the later, more severe courts such as Violence, Cruelty, and Tyranny, which devolved (like the plot, as some members believed) into shapeless dunes of blowing sand.

Another member expressed their disappointment with the progression — “I hate when [a book] becomes too big to handle itself,” while others believed that Kuang was forced to limit her story to a single book when the story could potentially span an entire series. Eventually, we reached a consensus that, though it may not have been due to authorial intention, the plot of “Katabasis” and Alice and Peter’s progression through Hell works with the metaphor that more evil corresponds to more chaos, in both the courts and the storyline.

A second point of discussion centered around the main characters, Alice and Peter, and their

development throughout the story. Peter’s character, and the exposition of his life with a serious chronic illness, Crohn’s disease, resonated with a few members, sharing that they also deal with invisible illnesses that affect their lives without existing as a clear physical disability. Additionally, many members found Alice to be a misogynistic, selfish, and boring main character whose potential was squandered and one-dimensional. As one member put it, “She’s insanely smart, but it [wasn’t used] for any reason.” However, it was clear to everyone that Alice’s physical journey through Hell existed as a metaphor for her suicidal ideation and depression — she doesn’t actually want to bring Grimes back from Hell, but she needed an achievement-driven purpose to have a reason to keep living her life, which had thus far been a figurative hell. Alice’s journey and reflections throughout the novel eventually culminate in a denouncement of the toxic academic environment that shaped her into the flawed character we were introduced to.

It was also discussed that Alice’s character reflects a very real, prevalent issue of academic competition

and what it takes to break the cycle, including at our university. In her case, constantly striving for perfection and favor over her classmates (or as she sees them, her competitors) led to a downward spiral of burnout and depression, only made worse by a magic pentagram that gave her a perfect memory (every academic’s theoretical dream). Members pointed out that our university motto, “Ever Better,” supports a toxic, competitive academic environment that pits people against each other for grades, achievements, and connections instead of focusing on how these sentiments scaffold academic programs and institutions. One member asked, “Should you be living for a goal, or living for life?” which were seen as the two extremes in the book.

The ending was viewed with skepticism by many members, seen as an underdeveloped *deus ex machina* — a plot device where an unsolvable, hopeless situation is suddenly and conveniently resolved by an unexpected intervention, such as a divine force or a contrived, last-minute plot twist. Members pointed out that Kuang’s other books lack satisfying endings, and some questioned her ability to successfully wrap up her stories.

Ultimately, as with most books, Book Club’s reviews were mixed. Those who finished the book rated the book on a five-star scale, while those who hadn’t finished shared their likelihood of finishing it. These reviews ranged from one to five stars, but averaged to a rating of four out of five stars.

If you are looking for an excuse to get back into reading or are searching for your next read, join us at Book Club on Thursdays at 6 p.m. Check out our CCC and Instagram (@uof-bookclub) for the most recent updates.

Kane is a member of the Class of 2027.

Traphagan is a member of the Class of 2026.

Hall is a member of the Class of 2026.

Wilcox-Black is a member of the Class of 2026.

Leestma is a member of the Class of 2027.

HUMOR

So, You're Looking for a Job (And Other Horror Stories)

BY ZOË MILES
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

So, you have a degree in Biochemistry and English. You served in student government for four years, clustered in Astrophysics, and speak passable German. In other words, you're unemployed.

'In other words, you're unemployed.'

You wake up on Tuesday to four emails from Handshake. The subject lines promise salvation: "Jobs in Your Field Near You!" You open them. Unpaid internship, unpaid internship, entry-level job that wants five years of experience, job making bombs, sketchy gig work, unpaid internship. Defeated, you switch tabs to a list of graduate programs. You look at tuition rates. You look at your wallet. You find a whole, crisp \$3.79 which consists mostly of quarters and a \$1.04 Barnes & Noble gift card. A tiny tumbleweed rolls past, and you stare, disturbed. Did you put that in there? Did the wallet create that itself? You reopen the job boards. You have countless job boards. Every time you complain about the market, you are recommended a new job board. 'Have you tried Indeed?', they ask. ZipRecruiter? Lensa? Jobmaxxer? FleepFlorp? You roll your eyes. Of course you've tried FleepFlorp.

You open an incomplete BladeSmart sales associate application. Your resume and cover letter extol your lifelong passion for mid-range kitchen knives. You have already attached them as PDFs. Now, all that remains are the short answer questions. The first couple are normal, as they always are.

1. What about our company's values most attracts you? (150 words)

2. What is your greatest professional weakness? (100 words)

Then they get more specific, and stranger.

3. How did you hear about our company? (50 words)

a. Was it David? David Castellano? (Y/N)

b. If yes, describe the nature of your relationship. (200 words)

You don't know any Davids; you heard about the company on FleepFlorp.

You type N and advance to the riddles. You hate the riddles.

4. If your father was turned into a ring-tailed lemur (ring-tailed lemurs are classified as an invasive species) (also, in this scenario Madagascar has closed its borders, preventing ecological reintegration) would you have the strength to do what needs to be done? You are equipped with a BladeSmart kitchen knife. The lemur (your father) will be conscious and able to feel pain throughout the entire process. (300 words)

You refer to the company values. Would showing mercy prove proficiency in customer service? Or would granting a swift death be evidence of initiative? Your head hurts. Your father isn't a lemur. You aren't sure what kind of world BladeSmart is preparing for, nor what your role would be in it. Either way, you don't think it'd be selling knives.

You won't kill for \$17.50 an hour, you decide, no matter how environmentally necessary. You return to your inbox. The army wants nuclear engineers. Forklift certification classes are 50 percent off. Teach For America needs you to move to Memphis. You hover over the forklift classes, considering. Your dreams of \$22/hr are interrupted by a phone call. You pick up, hoping it's a callback. It's not. It's your least employed friend with some bullshit.

'You pick up, hoping it's a callback. It's not. It's your least employed friend with some bullshit.'

"Yo, I'm gonna go spy on the geese at the park with these binoculars I found. You free? I'll bring a Costco hotdog."

The offer is nonsensical, but tempting. You think about forklifts, lemurs, and David Castellano. You think about half of a Costco hotdog. One wins out.

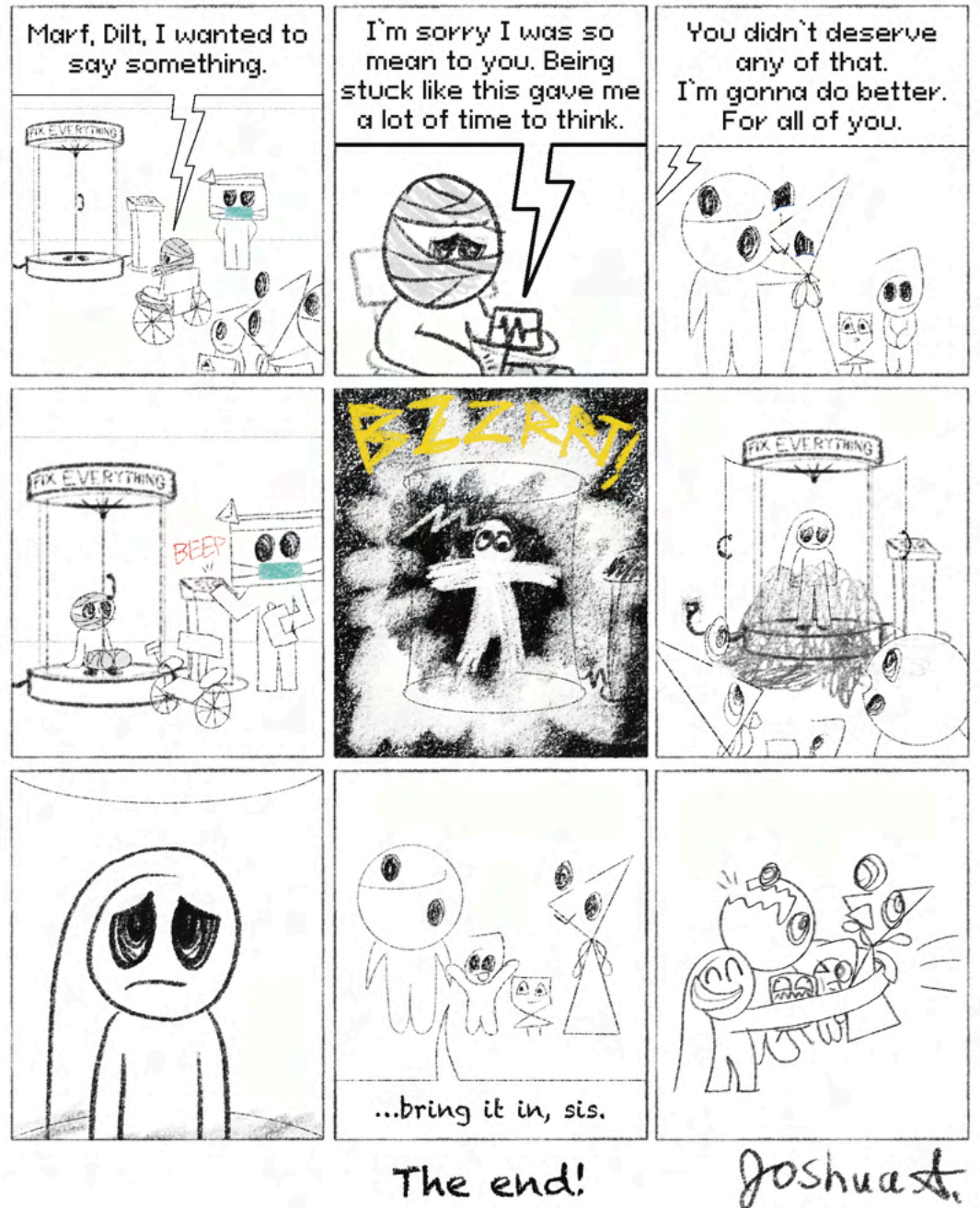
"Yeah, okay. I'll clear my schedule."

You reach for your keys and close your laptop. FleepFlorp can wait.

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

Papercuts: Finale

BY JOSHUA SCHIAVI
STAFF WRITER



Sustainable Time Travel

BY BELLA NAVE
COPY CHIEF

With the recent rise in health trends, I have been trying my best to get myself on to more natural methods of doing my favorite things. The first thing to go was my plastic sponge. I switched to a wooden scrubber, and it has honestly changed my life. The decrease of microplastics has not only benefited the environment, but also made my liver livelier. So, I've slowly been going through my daily habits and switching them for more sustainable options, both for the world and for my body.

'The hardest habit to switch though? My time traveling.'

The hardest habit to switch though? My time traveling. Blacking out using certain brain chemistry-altering medications has just been the most sure-fire way I've tried to time travel several hours into the future. So far, I've al-

ready tried a few alternative methods because, according to my doctor, my liver "can't take much more of this," and I think one has finally stuck.

The first alternative I tried was dissociation. This worked pretty well, but I was a little bored since I could still hear all my thoughts. Not ideal. This method was also unable to do medium (several hours at a time) distance time travel. I was either only traveling a couple hours, or I was traveling a couple months. It was quite inconvenient.

The second method I tried was doomscrolling. I don't know if this was more or less healthy than blacking out, but I guess it was better for my liver. This method works really well for a lot of people, and I definitely see the appeal. I didn't have to think at all, and time just flew by. Honestly, I might've stuck with this one if I hadn't found this last method.

This last method is revolutionary. Absolutely blew

my mind when a friend recommended it to me as a way to achieve medium-distance time travel with no health risks (in the present or future) and even health benefits if you can believe it! I tried it, and I was instantly hooked. Even faster than getting hooked on opium. Sleep is absolutely the way to go. I completely switched over from blacking out to sleep once I tried it. It's so calming and leaves me feeling refreshed several hours into the future, and it also doesn't have the side effect of teleportation!

'I completely switched over from blacking out to sleep once I tried it.'

I would absolutely recommend sleep for those trying to embrace more natural and healthy methods of time travel!

Nave is a member of the Class of 2029.

SPORTS

CT Watches: Red Wings

BY CT STAFF

While looking for something to do on a Friday evening, five of us at the *Campus Times* made our way down to ESL Ballpark April 17 to catch a Rochester Red Wings game. Our group boasted a Mets fan, a Yankees fan, a Padres fan, a Twins fan, and one person more familiar with cricket than with baseball.

'Our group boasted a Mets fan, a Yankees fan, a Padres fan, a Twins fan, and one person more familiar with cricket than with baseball.'

By sheer luck, Thursday's game had gotten rained out, so we got to watch a split double header (two seven-inning games) instead of just the one nine-inning standoff. Our very own Red Wings (10-10) were playing against the Buffalo Bisons (10-10), and managed to fight their way to a split on the day, taking the win in the second game after a loss in the first.

We arrived in the fifth inning of the first game, as we weren't able to shift previously established plans enough to get there in time for the entire bonus game. The last two innings of the game weren't particularly inspiring; the Red Wings lost 6-2, scoring one of those two runs while we were in the stands.

'We got to watch a split double header (two seven-inning games) instead of just the one nine-inning standoff.'

Though discouraged by the result of the first game, we rallied to go get food, splitting into a burger/hot dog group and a fries/nachos/pretzel group. The nachos were disappointing (featuring just tortilla chips and melted cheese to dip them in), but the burger and hotdog were delicious, making our Brit feel distinctly American, and the fries and pretzel had the perfect amount of salt and crunch.

After eating, we popped into the team store to look around. While some of the merchandise was ... interesting (red rubber shot glasses were a particularly

fun find), some of it was really cool, and we decided to come back after the game to make some purchases.

'The five of us got to catch up with each other, yell in support, and explore the stadium.'

Heading back to our seats, we settled in for the second game, which seemed like it would follow a similar pattern to the first when the Bisons took a quick 3-0 lead in the first inning. Clearly, though, the Red Wings had taken the 30-minute break between games to regroup, as they came out swinging in the bottom of the first to take a 3-5 lead on the power of a three-run double and two solo home runs.

As exciting as the first inning was, the rest of the game wasn't; that 3-5 score at the end of the first was the final score as well, and though Buffalo briefly threatened in the 6th, second baseman Charles McAdoo hit into a double play to end the inning. The 7th ended quickly as well, earning Rochester a split on the day.

'And that's why baseball is America's pastime. Even if the game isn't great, an evening at the ballpark always is.'

Even though the rest of the game wasn't as exciting as the first inning, we still had a ton of fun. The five of us got to catch up with each other, yell in support, and explore the stadium. Two of us did end up going back to the store to acquire our very own Red Wings paraphernalia.

And that's why baseball is America's pastime. Even if the game isn't great, an evening at the ballpark always is, and we would absolutely recommend everyone to grab a group of friends to go catch a game. Go Red Wings!

Catch 22

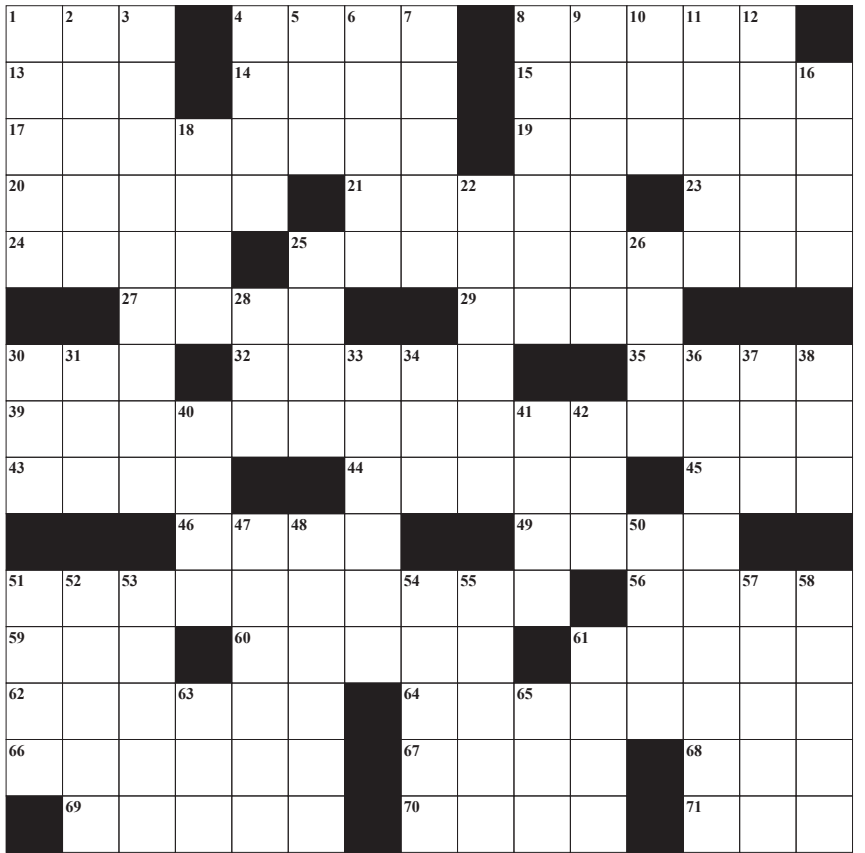
BY CALEB OSHINSKY
STAFF PUZZLER

ACROSS

- 1 Col. Sanders's chain
- 4 Snitch
- 8 Bracelet fastener
- 13 Feeling bugged?
- 14 First-year law student
- 15 Edmonton hockey team who sounds rather slick
- 17 *A pitch for a brand new Christmas carol?
- 19 Recede, like the ocean tide
- 20 White cliffs locale
- 21 "r u 4 real?"
- 23 Argentine article
- 24 "Whose woods these — think I know": Frost
- 25 *Possibly the worst passageway to stroll through at night?
- 27 Big name in pasta sauce
- 29 First-class
- 30 Swinger of the jungle
- 32 Run up, as expenses
- 35 Thunderstruck
- 39 *The single-purpose appliance that handles the wet clothes?
- 43 Swear words?
- 44 Olympics prize
- 45 Denials
- 46 Sanders' little helper?
- 49 March Madness org.
- 51 *Tree hugging, in a way?
- 56 Bit of choreography
- 59 Antonym: Abbr.
- 60 Tropical climbing vine
- 61 Taqueria meat
- 62 Portland's state
- 64 Dave Brubeck signature... or a hint to what went missing in 17-, 25-, 39-, and 51-Across
- 66 "Like, groovy, dude!"
- 67 Vaping device, for short
- 68 Working out well?
- 69 Good with tools
- 70 33 1/3, 45 and 78, e.g.
- 71 Slalom segment

DOWN

- 1 Sorta
- 2 What contacts the butter-side of a fallen piece of toast
- 3 The brightest bulb in the box
- 4 Movie genre that's as dark as its lighting
- 5 Common conjunction
- 6 Witherspoon of "Legally Blonde"
- 7 Composer Schumann
- 8 "The Alchemist" author Paolo
- 9 Tripoli native
- 10 White priestly garb
- 11 South Korea's capital
- 12 Wrinkly fruit
- 16 Dog's pause?
- 18 "Star Wars" princess
- 22 Looked too long
- 25 "Boot Scootin' Boogie"-covering duo Brooks & ___
- 26 Shakespeare's mad king
- 28 Musician's piece of work?
- 30 Tumult
- 31 Princess' royal pain?
- 33 Shot taker
- 34 Colorado native
- 36 Succeed unequivocally in every way
- 37 Fair-hiring letters
- 38 Hosp. workers
- 40 "___ no idea!"
- 41 "Fudge!"
- 42 Gamer's add-ons, for short
- 47 Apple store?
- 48 Delicately small
- 50 ___ yet (until now)
- 51 Husky's "Hello"
- 52 Big name in TV and book clubs
- 53 Strauss's "Die Fledermaus," for one
- 54 Prefix with pose or personal
- 55 Org. co-founded by W. E. B. Du Bois
- 57 King of rock 'n' roll
- 58 Pound, Poe, Keats, and Yeats
- 61 Viola tuning parts
- 63 Poly- ending
- 65 Middle Kardashian sister



The answers to this crossword can be found on page 4.

WANT TO SEE YOUR NAME ON THIS PAGE??

WRITE FOR CT SPORTS!

QUESTIONS? CONTACT
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