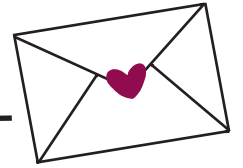


# The Collegian



Feb. 12, 2026

*Your College, Your Paper, Your Stories, Since 1889.*

Issue 2, Vol. CXLII

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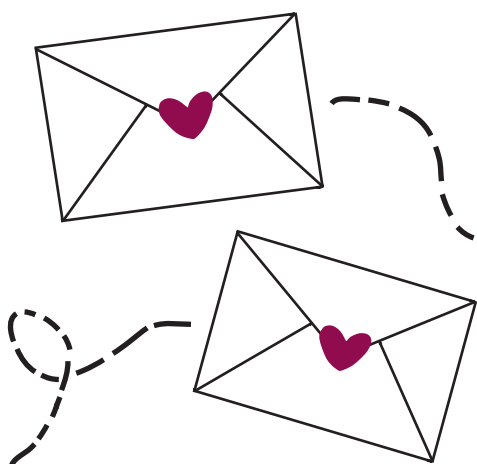
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**Happy Valentine's Day! Can you find all 10 love letters hidden throughout this print?**



## Black History Month celebrates its 100th year as BSU expands campus programming

Alexander Berry • Staff Writer

February 2026 marks the 100th anniversary of Black History Month, and Willamette University is recognizing the milestone with events organized by the Black Student Union (BSU), Office of Student Engagement and Leadership (SEAL) and the Office of Intercultural Engagement & Inclusion.

BSU president Kayla Davis ('26) and assistant director of SEAL Jodi Santillie each described Black History Month as an opportunity for

campus programming that highlights Black history and student experiences. The observances also align with the 30th anniversary of Willamette's Black Student Union, which was founded in 1996 as the Black Student Organization according to university archives.

Black History Month began in 1926 as Negro History Week, established by historian Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of African American Life and

History (ASALH). It expanded into a month-long observance in 1976 and continues to be recognized nationally.

Willamette University's Black History Month theme is "Black Passion" this year to expand on cultural expression and diasporic identity through food, music, film and educational programming, stated through the Black History Month planning committee.

Read more on page 2.

## Men's rugby considers merger with other PNW schools, cites funding struggles

Leslie Gomez • Staff Writer

A decade ago, Willamette University Men's Rugby Club was ranked among the 50 best small-school teams in the country.

But in recent years, the team has struggled with ongoing funding challenges that threaten their ability to compete, recruit and exist as a standalone program, said club President Jack Godsil ('28).

Now, the team is preparing for a potential merger with Lewis & Clark College, the University of Puget Sound and Reed College, Godsil said. Beginning in fall 2026, Willamette would continue practicing independently but compete as part of a combined developmental team. While players are largely in support of the idea, concerns remain about losing recognition as a Willamette program.

Godsil, who joined the team during the second semester of his first year and has entered his third semester with the club, described rugby as a uniquely bonding experience. Unlike more well-known sports, many new players join without knowing the rules, creating an environment where teammates rely on one another to learn the game together.

"There's a lot of chaos on the field," Godsil said, "so you really get to know each other when you're starting out." That shared learning, he explained, often leads to lifelong connections.

Compared to other sports Godsil has played — such as baseball, swimming and water polo — rugby stands out for its intensity and dependency on teammates.

"Rugby is a brutal game," he said. "You see guys at their lowest. You're constantly getting hit, exhausted and out of breath." For Godsil, that physical toll forces players to become more aware of one another, building a level of trust and care that is difficult to replicate elsewhere.

Despite this strong sense of community, the program faces serious obstacles. While recruitment can be challenging, players emphasized that funding is the team's greatest struggle. Limited funds restrict everything from equipment purchases



Men's Rugby Club member Braden Gutierrez ('27) tosses the ball to a teammate while drilling on the Quad on Jan. 27, 2026.

Photo by PATRICIA KREPEL

to travel for matches.

"In terms of funding, we really are up against the ropes here. We have a very limited amount of money. And ASWU gives — to no fault of their own — a selected budget of money that they can give away," said Godsil.

In rugby union, teams must field players numbered one through 15, with each jersey number corresponding to a specific position. Willamette currently lacks a complete, matching set of jerseys, which prevents the team from officially registering for tournaments under its own name, Godsil said. As a result, players are often forced to join other teams at tournaments, making Willamette unrecognizable as a standalone program in the league.

Travel funding poses another major barrier. Some league opponents are located in Washington and California, and without funding for gas, lodging and transportation, players are often asked to pay out of pocket. For some, that cost is simply not feasible. "I hate having to bow out of games because guys can't afford it," Godsil said. "But that's the

reality."

These limitations have also impacted the team's competitiveness. Without sufficient resources, Willamette is often restricted to playing in developmental "B" tournaments rather than championship-level competitions, Godsil said. While some players are content simply getting time on the field, others hope to take the program further and bring greater recognition to the university.

In response to these challenges, the team has leaned heavily on community support. They have built relationships with Salem's men's semi-professional Rugby Club — whose president, Aaron Ricci, also serves as Willamette's coach — as well as their partner team Willamette Rugby Football Club. Having relied on alumni donations for some time, they are planning to organize more fundraisers in the near future, Godsil said.

Despite the uncertainty, the message to potential players is clear: the door is still open. "Absolutely, 100% — please join," Godsil said. "My guys do not bite. We need everybody."

(Black History Month continued)

Events began Feb. 4 with a screening of *Cosmic Africa*, hosted by the Physics Club. The documentary follows astronomer Thebe Medupe through the examination of African astronomical traditions and their influence on early scientific knowledge. From Feb. 2-13, the Bistro has been offering commemorative menu items created in collaboration with the BSU, including an iced tea lemonade called *Lovely Day* and four other specialty drinks. The space also hosted the Feb. 5 Black History Month Kick-Off, which included an open mic poetry night.

Staff at Goudy Commons are contributing two food-centered programs. Chef Hopeton J. Sharpe led a jerk chicken demonstration on Feb. 10, and on Feb. 17 Goudy will serve a lunch menu featuring traditional dishes connected to Black culinary history.

Music programming includes a Feb. 12 recital in Rogers Rehearsal Hall featuring works by Pan-African composers, with the Bistro hosting a listening hour featuring music by Black artists later that same day. The next day, Friday, Feb. 13, there will be a Valentine's Day event in Ford 102 at 4 p.m.

The month's keynote event will take place Feb. 17 in Cat Cavern, featuring Dr. Jean-Philippe Gouridine of Lewis & Clark College and hairstylist Juneka Sevier. The program will focus on the cultural and scien-

tific history of Black hair, followed by a hair-braiding workshop.

Davis expressed that in regards to Black History Month, she hopes people outside of BSU gain new information, reflect and build solidarity with the Black community on campus. She is currently working on archiving BSU's history, including social media posts, funding requests and event collaborations, to make resources more accessible for future members and to preserve the organization's legacy.

Santillie, in addition to working with the SEAL office, chairs the committee for Black History Month. Santillie believes students should be encouraged to research their own events outside of Willamette and learn about Black culture. "We're [SEAL office] creating a list of events happening in the Salem area. Yes, we're putting on events here, but there's also groups doing great events off-campus."

The Cascade Festival of African Films, hosted annually by Portland Community College, is also taking place in the region from Feb. 6 to March 7. In its 36th year, the festival features more than 20 films by African filmmakers and is free and open to the public. The festival offers additional opportunities for Willamette students interested in Black History Month programming beyond campus.

When asked what Black History Month means to her, Davis explained, "To me, it's recognizing that



BSU's table at the Activities Expo on Jan. 26, 2026 at Willamette University.

Photo by SOFIE SZIGETI

Black History is American History. What we have done for this country and for communities outside of ourselves needs to be recognized because it continues to be a taboo topic."

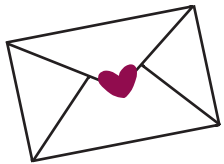
This December, the National Park Service removed MLK Day and Juneteenth from this year's fee-free national park days, instead offering free fares on Donald Trump's birthday, which coincides with Flag Day.

Davis emphasized the importance of supporting the Black community outside of planned celebrations. "We are in an interesting time right now where MLK Day, Juneteenth, and Black History Month are

being attacked. I think it's super important to think that even if changes happen and it's no longer in your calendar, [it] doesn't mean you cannot celebrate."

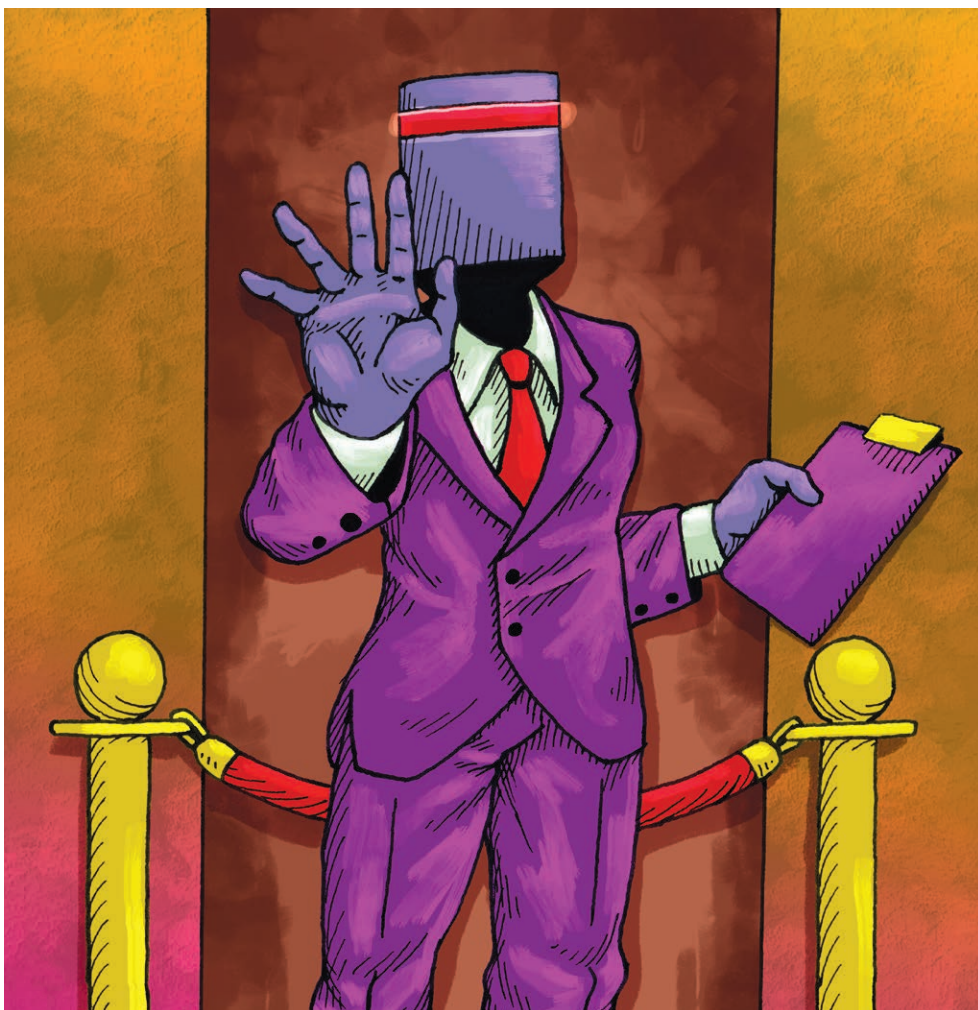
To uplift the voices of the Black community, Davis recommended a listen to "Black Like Me" by Mickey Guyton. "She's describing a very real modern day experience of how we have dreams, and maybe some of them we don't achieve, but we have hope."

Note: Alexander Berry is a member of the Willamette University Black Student Union.



## Willamette enacts new locked building policy for spring semester

Aubrey Lee • Staff Writer



Are you on the list?  
Art by ADRIAN AXTELL

At the beginning of this spring semester, Willamette University changed its building access protocols for the Salem campus, meaning that all academic buildings on campus are now only accessible with an ID card.

In the past, most academic buildings had been unlocked during business hours, with the exception of some of the doors facing the street.

The ASWU senate had previously discussed a resolution to ask the university to require key card access to all academic buildings following student safety concerns over the Hatfield Library on weekends.

However, the Putnam University Center (UC), the University Services Building, the Wish Building, Goudy Commons, and the Hatfield Library will remain unlocked. This

is because buildings like the Hatfield Library are supposed to be "open to the public," said Executive Director of Campus Safety and Emergency Management AJ Christensen. By requiring a key card for entry, they would no longer be accessible.

According to Christensen, the main reason for this change is to reach the "industry standard for buildings that are not open to the public." He further clarified saying "building access is a recognized standard in higher education to monitor campus activity." The change is in part to allow Campus Safety to respond to emergency situations "a little better than in the past."

Later, in a written statement, Provost Dr. Jennifer Jacobs Henderson clarified that "while 'open' campuses used to be the norm in higher education, best practices today call for controlled access."

In recognition of the larger political climate and concerns about potential Immigration and Customs Enforcement activity on campus, Christensen said that while "we are aware of those [concerns]," this change is more of a "broader safety thing for the university." Christensen concluded, "Our main concern is the safety and security of everyone on campus," and as such, "we welcome [students] to bring safety concerns to us."

According to Associated Students of Willamette University (ASWU) President Stevie Bergstrom ('26), safety concerns regarding the unlocked buildings on campus were first brought up at a Community Convocation event back in October by Hannah Bordofsky ('27), a student manager from the library. Bordofsky was worried about the safety of student workers in the library because sometimes the highest authority in

the library is only a student worker.

Bordofsky later said in a statement to *The Collegian* that while this policy change is "a small step within a much larger conversation about campus safety," she hopes "that senior leadership [will] show their genuine concern for the safety of our students and the broader Willamette community by continued action and policy changes to ensure our campus is safe for all students and Willamette community members, especially those who are most vulnerable."

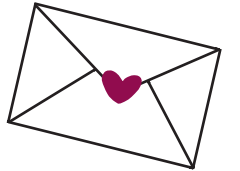
After the convocation, at a November ASWU meeting, the senate discussed a resolution that would ask Willamette University to limit all academic buildings to key card access only. The proposal, put forth by Senator Ernest Jones ('28), included that the library should move to a system of reservations, similar to that of the Law Library or the Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA) library. He suggested this change citing concerns similar to those of Bordofsky.

However, this proposal was never formally voted on by the senate, as ASWU does not have any jurisdiction over Campus Safety.

Before the end of the fall semester, Bergstrom had discussed the idea of locking the doors with Henderson, who informed her that the policy change was "already something [that] had been discussed in depth," but that "it just wasn't something they wanted to implement in the very last couple of weeks in the semester."

Bergstrom said that the concerns brought up over the library were "something [she] wanted to follow up on, especially since that student that brought this forth works in the library." Even though the library is open to the public, Bergstrom said, "I think there are ways we can figure out."

# Cascadia dorm to be converted to upperclass housing, no meal plan required



Avneet Dhaliwal • Staff Writer • Feb. 10



Cascadia dorm's kitchen area during the afternoon of Jan. 22, 2026.  
Photo by PATRICIA KREPEL

**H**ousing applications are currently open for the 2026-27 academic year for returning students, including a new housing option for incoming third- and fourth-years: the Cascadia Project.

Cascadia, currently a first-year dorm, will be transformed into a residential space for the 2026-27 academic year for upper-division

students who wish to live in a traditional residence hall with the ability to opt out of the Bon Appétit meal plan, according to an email from the Residence Life and Housing department sent to third- and fourth-years in November.

Cascadia was specifically chosen as the residential hall to pilot this program due to its ideal ratio of

student occupants to kitchen accessibility, said Aaron Hukari, director of Residence Life and Housing. As part of the transition, Cascadia's basement kitchen will undergo remodeling.

"[The Residential Life and Housing department] is really hoping that 18 to 22 students are really interested in preparing their own food for the upcoming year," said Hukari. "Hopefully, [we'll get] feedback on questions like [whether that ratio of students to a kitchen] is a sustainable number."

With the addition of third- and fourth-years to this space, incoming first-years who would have historically been placed in this dorm will instead live in other first-year dorms on campus. Since Cascadia only has the capacity to house around 26 students, the Residence Life and Housing department foresees no complications in assigning incoming first-years to other dorm spaces, Hukari said.

Depending on the success of the Cascadia Project, administrators may consider a similar program in a larger residential space to give more students the ability to live on campus without the enforcement of the meal plan in the future, according to Hukari.

"For example, Kaneko would probably never be an option just because it is such a massive building with such few kitchens," Hukari said, "whereas some of the smaller buildings might be a better option. So, Shepard, Lee and York may be a good middle space for a reasonable amount

of people utilizing the kitchen at one time."

Despite the possibility of converting other smaller residential buildings into places for students who are interested in living on campus without a meal plan, Hukari is mindful of preserving amenities for juniors and seniors who don't want to use the kitchen space regularly.

As part of the Cascadia Project, the kitchen, located in the basement, will undergo remodeling to ease the pressure on kitchen demand.

"[Residence Life and Housing] are adding some additional kitchen facilities to update the space in order to make it more feasible for 20 people to feed themselves for an entire academic year," Hukari said. "And then through that, we're also going to add some additional dining space and food storage for students. ... The renovations aren't particularly drastic."

The renovations will include the insertion of an additional fridge and more shelves along the wall. In the kitchen area, the department will add large storage lockers for students to store their more pricey ingredients, utensils and appliances. The department is also altering the purpose of the small storage room adjacent to the kitchen by installing more furniture for dining as well as additional shared pantry space.

The housing application has been open since the beginning of February and closes on Sunday, Feb. 15, at 11:59 p.m.

## WU DIY music scene, band for band

William Weeks • Staff Writer

**O**n many weekends, in the garages or backyards of student-rented houses, Willamette students gather to hear the sounds of their peers.

These "house shows" are entirely student-organized. Student bands work closely together to set up and promote shows, hauling and wiring thousands of dollars of shared equipment to their venues day-of. That's not even mentioning the writing and rehearsing of original songs. This 'do-it-yourself' nature of the house show has led many band members and enthusiasts alike to refer to it as the 'DIY scene.'

A great sonic diversity characterizes WU band culture in the eclectic and energetic rock from Thunderkunt and Spitfire, the folky yet welcoming math-rock of Harness and the more acoustic funk-folk of Bad Press.

There is no monetary compensation in these DIY house shows for musicians. Instead, the shows are fueled by passion. As summarized by Thunderkunt vocalist Annabel Flanagan ('26), "music makes me feel complete." She appreciates the power of voice to express herself, extending directly to the band's punk sound.

For Henry Dobesh ('26) and Velibor Mladenovic ('26), founding members of Harness, compensation comes from the joy of creation. "This is the greatest creative project that I've been a part of," says Dobesh. "It feels really good to make something"

As the DIY culture requires collaboration between and within bands, it builds rich social circles. Besides weekly Thunderkunt practices, "We're also just pals! We hang out!" chipped in Will Grenawalt ('26), guitarist.

Being in the scene does come with struggles, however. Willamette doesn't offer practice spaces to unaffiliated music groups. Harness is thankful to practice at the Kappa Sigma house, where Dobesh lives. He mentioned that the space might not be available after he graduates next semester, should lone junior Cole Thein ('27) continue the band.

Thunderkunt meets nearly every Friday in the crammed basement-bedroom of bass player (and Collegian Editor-in-Chief) Skeet Starr ('26), yet the jam-packed proximity doesn't bother them. Rather, it's the tight schedule.

Guitarist Leo Schoenbrun ('26) juggles three majors and multiple jobs. He isn't the only busy-body, though; many band members are also riddled with difficult schedules. They are simply incapable of putting in as much effort as they'd like.

Bands like Thunderkunt and Harness are made up nearly entirely by seniors, and will leave space for mostly-junior bands Spitfire and Bad Press to fully take the helm in the fall. In efforts to keep the scene breathing, Thunderkunt plans on donating or selling for cheap some of their equipment to future generations of stu-



The band "Harness" plays a live concert on Feb. 6, 2026 at the Kappa Sigma frat house in Salem, Oregon. At the same show, a new band, "Now Watch This Drive," made their debut.

Photo by SOFIE SZIGETI

dents looking to perform. No senior band said they are afraid the scene will fall out next year.

Both senior bands are also releasing music. The weekend before finals, Thunderkunt did a live recording of some of their originals to commemorate their group. Currently in the mixing process, they plan on eventually releasing it into an EP, though dates and platforms remain

pending. They plan on performing at the Bistro late this February.

Meanwhile, over winter break, Harness recorded an EP, which is set to release March 12 at Mladenovic's senior recital. They also have a live album titled "11/2/25."

Harness can be found on Instagram, YouTube and SoundCloud; Thunderkunt on Instagram; Bad Press on Instagram; Spitfire on Instagram.

## Last-minute Valentine's ideas from Craft Club

Caelyn Ochs • Staff Writer



A crafty valentine.  
Art by BASIL ALLEN

Love is in the air, but are you crafty enough to capture it? With Valentine's Day just around the corner, figuring out last-minute gifts can be tricky. Instead of going with the classic flowers and teddy bear, think of doing a quick and easy craft to show your family, friends or partner some love this holiday.

For those who are looking for a heartfelt craft to give this season but don't exactly have the skill to get too creative, Willamette's Craft Club has their back. Here are a few crafts that members of the club came up with that can be made on a budget, time crunch and lack of crafting experience.

### 3D card

The first craft suggestion, a three-dimensional card, was pro-

posed by Kai Otten ('28). Otten has been a member of the club since their first year, and their favorite form of crafting usually involves yarn. They also enjoy origami, specifically creating paper cranes.

Otten's quick Valentine's Day craft of choice takes their favorite media and combines them into one cute personalized card. This creative but easy gift took about 30 minutes for them to make.

A tutorial by "Craft Art" on YouTube demonstrates, in a quick 4-minute video, how to make this craft. It just takes some paper, yarn, tape, glue and scissors.

The Craft will end up looking like a card with a hole in the center of the front page. In this hole there is a paper heart attached by a string. The heart will move on its own as the card is open or it can be spun around by hand.

### Collage

The next suggestion was given by the club's treasurer, Ellie Scott ('27). Scott has been in the craft club since her first year, and her crafts of choice are crochet and scrapbooking.

Scott's Valentine's idea takes a little longer than Otten's. The gift idea is a handmade collage highlighting favorite photos and happy memories, which can allow for much more personalization. Scott recommends drawings, stories or even notes to accompany the pictures.

"I feel it's really special to do handwritten notes and pictures," Scott said. "It shows whoever you're

giving it to on Valentine's Day that you really care."

A successful collage does involve some care to be put in. It can take as long or as short as one wants. Added effort might be required for it to be received as something other than the last-minute craft it is. The goal here could be to make them cry happy tears as the pleasant past of the relationship floods their mind. It isn't just some photos and notes but a story.

### Honorable mentions

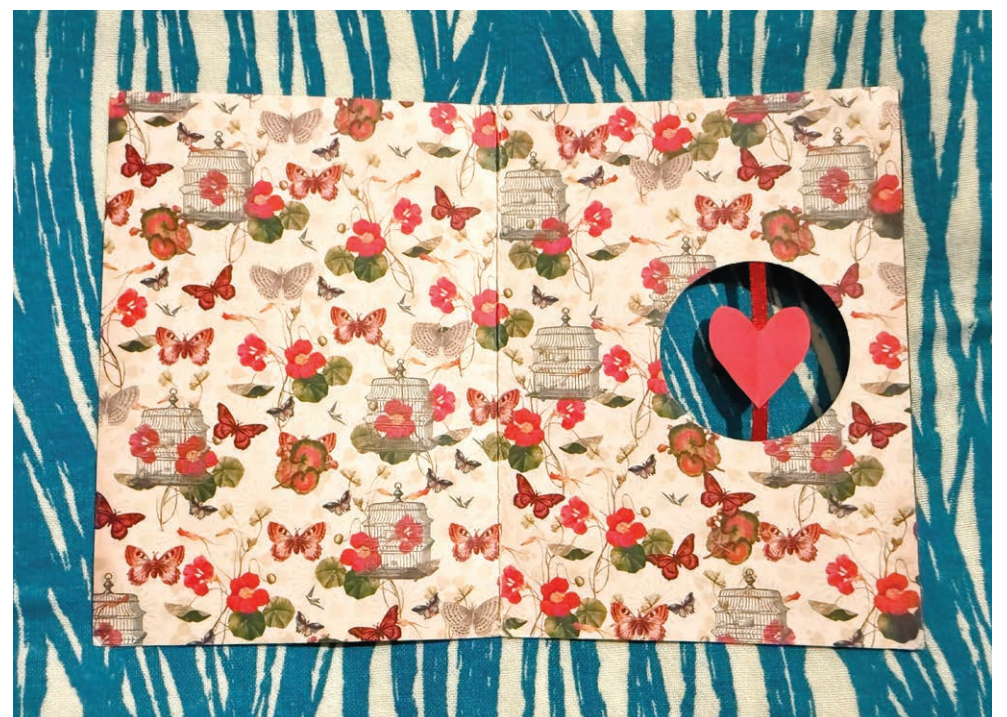
Scott provided two more craft suggestions, each quick and easy to produce: origami hearts and baked goods. Folding an origami heart is an only slightly more involved process than folding a paper airplane.

For those with little faith in

their origami skills, baking some cookies or brownies is easy enough for most people — assuming they have access to a place to bake — and can be given to a decent number of people, depending on how many are baked. There is also the saying to keep in mind: "The quickest way to a person's heart is through their stomach."

The origami hearts can be added to a collage or passed out to loved ones. It might take some trial and error, but it is an option for a night-before type of gift.

The general suggestion is to not plan your gifts at the last moment, but just because it's last-minute doesn't mean it has to be bought and basic. A handmade gift can go a long way, depending on the person it is being given to. Happy crafting, and as Scott said, "Happy Valentine's Day!"



A 3D valentine.  
Photo courtesy of Kai Otten ('28)

## The Devil's Advocate: Edition Six

William Weeks • Staff Writer

**NEED AN ADVOCATE?  
WANT SOME ADVICE?**

call toll free (666)666-666



Art by BASIL ALLEN

Disclaimer: The Devil's Advocate is a satirical column that does not reflect the views or opinions of The Collegian.

**How does one find a date ... I seem to be striking out in the romance department. HELP!**

- Romantically challenged

If you think about it, a date is no different from a job interview. Your Hinge profile should be exactly like your LinkedIn. Is your resumé up to date? If you get a match, be the first to respond with three credible references to back up your personality. Lacking relevant experience, however, means you should look for more "entry-level" positions — ya dig? If you end up getting a first interview, timeliness is essential. Understand the company's values, rehearse answers to commonly asked questions and remember to send a thank you afterwards!

**I have a partner and this will be my first time not being single for Valentine's Day. How do I participate in this holiday while not giving into the consumerism of it all?**

- Lover boy

Luckily, Valentine's Day lands on a Saturday this year. That makes it the perfect time to enjoy a night out with the lads. Forget the date that your partner has been looking forward to for months. Valentine's Day is your opportunity to revel in the bromances you've had for a longer time than your partner. You can avoid consumerism by writing wholesome notes and spending quality time with all your friends! A healthy partner will understand this and happily allow you the time you deserve.

**How do I find housing off campus?**

- A 3rd year in distress

It can certainly be hard to find housing, especially nowadays. But rest assured, the local slumlords will surely have a place for you near campus, if it's not inherited by other students first. Luckily, I have friends that helped connect me with my place, but if that's not an option for you, I recommend sneaking into a basement or attic for next year, "Parasite" (2019) style.

After you find a place, there are two options for getting to school: walking or driving. Biking is unfortunately out of the picture, as the Salem black market thrives on stolen bikes. Good luck, Soldier!

# Opinion: Social media has commodified individuality and put identity up for sale

Teresa Butzerin • Staff Writer

With the beginning of a new year, many have gathered the motivation to reduce their screen time by limiting social media use.

This resolution will certainly be a rewarding but difficult challenge for all who take it on, given that the age of short-form content has brought about new ways of keeping users on the hook. Scrolling through hundreds of videos in one sitting is not just addictive because of the dopamine rush that results from being bombarded with new images and hearing catchy tunes. It hooks us on the search for validation of our own uniqueness in an ocean of relatability and shared experiences. This vain search feeds the algorithms and lines the pockets of content creators, while harming our attention spans and individuality.

Shortening attention spans are one of the most measurable and significant side effects of digital overconsumption. In 2022, a study published by King's College London found that nearly half of young adults perceived increased difficulty in their ability to stay focused. This makes sense, given that some TikTok users easily view 260 videos in about 35 minutes, which averages to a meagre eight seconds spent on each video. However, the acclimation of our brains to constant stimulation and instant gratification is not the only cost of feeding social media algorithms.

The commodification of individuality is a powerful tool content creators use to keep their audiences captivated and searching for the next aesthetic that they feel validates their identity. Creators utilize what gives us a sense of individuality — fashion, music, hobbies, wellness and lifestyle choices — and then repackage them into endless combinations of lifestyle aesthetics. Of course, there are physical goods that must be purchased to obtain the lifestyle that speaks to a viewer, but don't worry; content creators will have everything linked in their Amazon Storefront.

As these aesthetics become more popular, they lose their value,



Individuals, online.  
Art by ADDIE MARTIN

and users search for more niche alternatives to chase that feeling of being unique. This cycle is a distortion of self-perception; it is a conflation of the algorithmic output of videos promoting certain lifestyles and aesthetics with one's deeper sense of self.

The irony is that audiences of these micro-aesthetic videos are often hundreds of thousands or even millions strong. Niche trends have a short lifespan and eventually lead to a sense of sameness and homogenization. Audiences will inevitably abandon micro-trends like Gorpcore and the tired Mob Wife aesthetic, moving on to the next best thing. For the profiteers of social media platforms, this is a rewarding cycle that sustains itself on consumerism.

It is because of this cycle that social media has turned individuality into a marketable good. Social media platforms such as Instagram or TikTok offer account holders a product for free — at first glance. They ask for no payment directly except for the attention and time of their users. Yet, the commodification of individualism eventually leads to overconsumption of physical goods as well as of digital media, which results in a net profit for content creators and manufacturers at the cost of users' attention spans.

The commodification of individuality is easy to see in the ever-changing fashion and lifestyle micro-trends, but there are ways content creators prey on the desired

distinction from others that are less overt.

The Barnum effect is widely used in such content, where videos display broad claims that viewers may be more intelligent, more attractive or more likely to succeed in life if they demonstrate a set of largely unmeasurable and vague traits. Content like this feeds into the desire for distinction and validation, while also contributing to the attention span crisis.

A social media user's searches for individuality and relatability are at odds with one another, a conflict which is clearly seen in the popularity of "POV" style content. These videos are often brief and emotionally charged, describing specific moments and feelings which then reach mass audiences and seek to create engagement through relatability. For example, a complementary image will appear with a caption such as, "POV: How your broke boyfriend looks at you when you get paid."

This genre of short-form content is very common and creates a complicated mix of positive and negative emotions. Users feel comforted and validated in a shared experience, but overconsumption of this type of content leads to a contradictory sense that one's experiences in life are widely shared, even unoriginal. All of this occurs in a matter of seconds, leaving viewers looking for further validation of their own individuality in the form of more content.

Coming to the realization that individuality has been commodified is one of the first steps to breaking the cycle of algorithms influencing identity. We may scroll in search of uniqueness or validation, yet social media transforms users into a profitable demographic where individuality becomes a marketable commodity. With the coming of a new year, there is no better time than the present to reflect on the deeper implications of social media overconsumption in our lives and make the changes needed to take back our individuality from those who seek a profit in the attention economy.

## STAFF PICKS

Compiled by Priya Thoren • Opinions Editor

**Topic:** What's your favorite fictional romance from a book, movie or TV show?

**The Pick:** Batman and the joker (the Lego Batman movie)  
**Submitted by:** Lucy Devlaeminck, Photography Editor

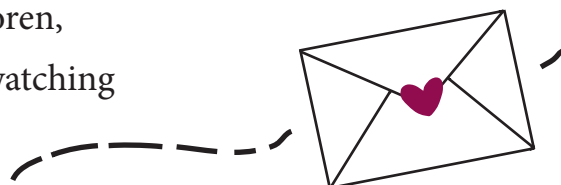
**The Pick:** Ben Wyatt and Leslie Knope from Parks and Rec  
**Submitted by:** Maisy Clunies-Ross, Opinions Writer

**The Pick:** Eleanor and Chidi from The Good Place!  
**Submitted by:** Alma Snortum-PHELPS, Publication Editor  
**Staff Comment:** They will find each other in every lifetime!!

**The Pick:** Andie and Ben from How To Lose a Guy in 10 Days!  
**Submitted by:** Gimena Baez Baez, Opinions Writer

**The Pick:** Westley and Buttercup from "The Princess Bride"  
**Submitted by:** Bjorn Domst, Managing Editor

**The Pick:** Ellie Williams and Dina from The Last of Us  
**Submitted by:** Priya Thoren, Opinions Editor  
**Staff Comment:** I love watching edits of these two.




**Keep up with your student government!**



**For Senate Meeting Minutes:**

1. Scan QR Code
2. Click 'Menu' in upper right-hand corner
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## Opinion: Everyone's hot and bothered for 'Heated Rivalry.' And that's a good thing.

Maisy Clunies-Ross • Staff Writer

Over the past few months, "Heated Rivalry" fever has swept the nation. The HBO show focuses on the sexual, and later romantic, relationship between two professional hockey players, Ilya Rosanov and Shane Hollander. Unfortunately for everyone, the real heated rivalry was not playing out on the ice, it was happening online.

This conversation was inevitable, considering the show centered sex, queerness and worst of all, queer sex. This backlash only compounded when the show's creator, Jacob Tierney, revealed that the show's primary audience was women. While many found the show's female fan base to be leering and fetishistic (and admittedly, some fans were), this reaction neglected to recognize the complex reasons many women feel so drawn to queer male stories. Not only did the show provide many people a safe space to indulge in their desire, it proved that queer, complicated and graphic stories deserve a place on-screen.

I thought I'd be able to avoid this discourse, considering the show didn't pique my interest. I don't know about hockey. I don't care about hockey. To me, a Stanley Cup is just a water bottle for TJ Maxx moms, so I didn't think "Heated Rivalry" would have any place in my life. However, after a lot of encouragement from my friends, I acquiesced and ended up in my best friend's basement, watching soft-core gay porn with a group of five other women.

My experience — watching the show with a group of women — is not unique. Women are no strangers to the male/male romance space. Some of the first fanfiction, which imagined a relationship between Captain Kirk and Spock from Star Trek, was written and distributed by female fans. And for as long as women have been fantasizing about gay male relationships, they've been critiqued for it.

Many members of the queer community feel it is fetishistic, analogous to the popularity of lesbian porn with straight male viewers. By placing a marginalized community at the center of a sexual fantasy, it serves to



The scrutiny of Shane and Ilya.  
Art by BASIL ALLEN

further dehumanize and other them. When the content is written by people outside of the community, it can flatten the nuances of queer relationships, reducing one man purely to the feminine role and one to the masculine role in order to recreate a patriarchal, straight dynamic.

While these criticisms are reasonable, this discourse often overlooks the many queer women who enjoy gay male romance. It disregards that the power differential between women and queer men is very different than that of straight men and queer women. Even romance content catered towards women often features their violence and objectification, so it can be refreshing to consume content that avoids these issues entirely.

As Lucy Neville, author of a book about women's relationship with gay male erotica, says, "Erotic stories that focus exclusively on men sidestep the kind of gendered power imbalances that structure intimacy

between men and women, both in fiction and in real life." Many women have stated that they appreciate seeing masculinity without the toxicity, content that shows intensity need not come at the expense of consent, and most simply, when you're attracted to men, two times the men means two times the potential for attraction. Admittedly, even this defense can detract from the challenges of the gay male dating scene, but it makes clear that the desires and intentions of these women are not as sinister as many believe.

In an ideal world, women would not have to forsake heterosexuality to envision romance where their desire is not contextualized by the confines of patriarchy. Yet, even in this world, many women may still gravitate towards media that centers queer men. An attempt to avoid misogyny doesn't have to be the only explanation for their preference. Yearning is often separate from iden-

tity. People's fantasies will always diverge from their reality, and that is not inherently fetishistic. People deserve a space to explore their sexuality without the constant confines of labels and to explore their desires for masculinity and femininity, both in their partners and in themselves. To advocate for a world where exploration is limited by labels and binaries is a very reductive way to conceptualize sexuality.

"Heated Rivalry," in its most essential distillation, is a rejection of these antiquated conceptions of sexuality. The show, from the very beginning, places sex at the center of its romance. Sex is often seen as the culmination of a slow burn, a reward for being chaste and well-behaved. Stories start with emotional closeness, and sex follows. In "Heated Rivalry," the relationship starts with sex; it is the emotional closeness that follows. Not only does this rebuff traditional norms around relationships, it's unique in the current media landscape. According to a 2024 analysis conducted by The Ringer, sex is becoming less common on screen.

"Heated Rivalry" turns this trend on its head, proving over and over just how important sex can be as a component of a larger narrative. Sex is a part of romance; it's a part of how many people connect and communicate. It's a part of life, so of course it deserves to be a part of stories. Especially for something as taboo as queer sex, it's groundbreaking that the show has received such mainstream acclaim and popularity. It undermines the claim that queer stories have to be squeaky clean and wholesome to be accepted.

Both the relationship and the sex depicted in "Heated Rivalry" are complicated and messy, but the show doesn't have to hide that fact to be heartwarming and widely beloved. The show isn't wildly subversive — it still features two conventionally masculine and attractive men who appear to end up in a monogamous relationship — but it provides a glimpse of a sexier, more playful future, one where everyone is a little more free to puck around and find out.

## Photojournalism: A Salem local shares his picks for the best day out downtown

Mac Childers • Staff Photographer

As someone who is from Salem, it took me a long time to see the beauty and wonder in what is here. The more I discover, the more desire I have to share my findings with those around me. I feel better about where I am and what I can do knowing what is here, tucked away in elusive locations around Salem.

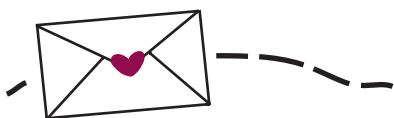
Out of the locations I found most interesting to a Gen Z demographic, only two of them need to be driven to. Everything else is within an approximately 20-minute walk from campus.

Unless noted, all photos were taken by Mac Childers on Feb. 6, 2026.

**The Elsinore Theatre** is a center for events I often forget about but not for a lack of interest. I tend to go to Portland for larger concerts and other events, but this historic building routinely has interesting local acts, artists on tour, comedians and its own events independent of touring schedules. There is always something to see for an often affordable price. I highly recommend a visit to one of its offerings, which can be viewed on its website: <https://elsinoretheatre.com/>.



Location: 170 High St. SE  
Estimated walk time: 10 minutes





**Wild Things Games** (left) is an integral part of Salem's tabletop gaming community. Not only do they carry products for Magic: The Gathering, Dungeons & Dragons, Warhammer 40K, and Pokémon, they also have a wide variety of other board games and card games that customers are invited to check out and play. They have playing spaces and events every day. This is a great way to indulge in your hobbies while also engaging with people who share similar interests.

Photo taken on Jan. 27, 2026.

Location: 241 Commercial St. NE  
Estimated walk time: 18 minutes



**Drum Bug Music: Records + Drums** is my latest discovery. I have been searching for a record store that is walkable from campus, and this is the perfect option. The staff are friendly, and the selection is vast, ranging from new and used records to a full grading system for used records. There is space to walk, and the records are easy to sort through. And if you do not find what you are looking for, they can order records for you! The prices are comparable to market standard prices for new records and vary for used records.

Location: 345 High St. SE  
Estimated walk time: 12 minutes



**Prismatic Coffee Company** has my favorite mocha in Salem. I will admit, I did not drink coffee until this past summer. Since then, however, I have been on a quest to try as many coffee shops in the area as possible. This is what led me to Prismatic, and it has become a fun place to bring my friends and family. They have a breakfast menu and handcrafted beverages, which are all delicious. And if you want to partake in trivia, they host it every Monday at 6 p.m.

Location: 3996 Cousteau Dr. SE  
Estimated drive time: 11 minutes



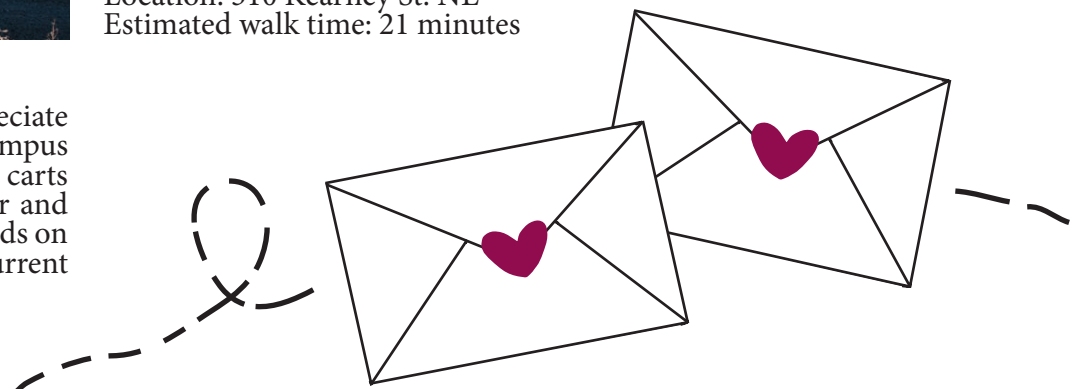
**Gerry Frank's Konditorei** is one of the few bakeries in Salem. They serve food, coffee, brownies, cookies and — most importantly — gourmet cake. They have more than 40 cake, torte and mousse flavors, ensuring that there is something for everyone. They also have vegan and gluten-free options, allowing for an inclusive dessert with friends.

Location: 310 Kearney St. NE  
Estimated walk time: 21 minutes



**Beehive Station** is one of Salem's only food cart locations. While I appreciate the offerings from both The Yard and Beehive, this location is closer to campus and therefore the location I chose to cover. They have a variety of food carts with food from many regions across the globe. There is plenty to offer and plenty to enjoy. If you happen to be indecisive or cannot agree with friends on where to eat, this outdoor establishment may be for you. To see their current options, visit their website at <https://beehivestationfoodcarts.com/>.

Location: 1510 Fabry Rd. SE  
Estimated drive time: Eight minutes



# Early February Crossword



Crossword by EZRA NELSEN

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14						15				16		
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52	53				54	55		56	57			
58					59	60				61	62	63
64				65		66	67					
68				69				70				
71				72				73				

- 6 "Castle" actress Katic
- 7 Offline, for short
- 8 Coffee entrepreneur Alfred
- 9 Smells
- 10 Bite-sized pastry
- 11 Summary version of a book
- 12 Ring-shaped reef
- 13 View again
- 21 Product of 32-across
- 23 Archaic "Tsk!"
- 25 Latvia's neighbor
- 27 PD alerts
- 28 Hoof sound
- 29 IRS forms
- 31 It's between tic and toe
- 34 Love
- 35 TV cable plug
- 37 Medieval ship makers, familiarly
- 39 Software makers,



Comic by ADRIAN AXTELL

Crossword puzzle solutions are posted on our website: [www.willamettecollegian.com](http://www.willamettecollegian.com)

**ACROSS**

- 1 Insurance filings
- 7 \_\_ Touch, which used 19-across
- 11 Train unit
- 14 " \_\_ Fun" (Paramore song)
- 15 Try again
- 16 4G \_\_
- 17 Tomorrow, in Tijuana
- 18 Revolutionary Trotsky
- 19 Apple platform
- 20 New Orleans treat
- 22 French confection named after fungi
- 24 Look
- 26 Smother
- 27 Official proceedings
- 30 Standard setting at 0 degrees long.
- 32 Female chicken

- 33 Trigonal \_\_ (120° between atoms)
- 36 Food truck staple
- 38 School in Norfolk, Va.
- 41 Classic Valentine's day gift which might include 20-across, 22-across, 58-across, and 60-across
- 44 Apr. season
- 45 Mythical goat-man
- 46 Swiss city famous for hosting peace conferences
- 47 Format used by 39-down
- 49 Railroad beam
- 51 2015 law which replaced NCLB
- 52 Study of light
- 55 Storage space in a house

- 58 Group of stars
- 60 Friendly
- 64 2013 Joaquin Phoenix movie
- 65 "I think \_\_!" (The Little Engine That Could)
- 67 John, Paul, \_\_, Ringo
- 68 Campaigned
- 69 Doctor Octavius
- 70 "Well, it's \_\_"
- 71 Sheeran and Sullivan
- 72 Letters on a compass
- 73 Transcription pros

**DOWN**

- 1 Sleep in a tent
- 2 Fibber
- 3 Tolstoy's " \_\_ Karenina"
- 4 Language of Florence
- 5 Roughly one drop of liquid



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