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Opinion: The Willamette community must focus more on gun violence prevention

Alan Cohen
Staff Writer

As gun violence rises in the Salem community and across the country, Willamette students are left without a space to raise awareness, form community or take action to end gun deaths in the community.

Gun violence is not a uniquely American problem, but the country ranks among the highest in gun-related incidents. According to NPR, the U.S. rate of gun deaths per capita is more than eight times higher than the rate in Canada and nearly 100 times higher than in the United Kingdom. Gun violence is also not an issue of the past, as the number of active shooter incidents in 2021 rose 52.5% relative to 2020 according to Pew Research Center, which also reported a record-high number of suicides involving firearms.

The problem of gun violence has affected most cities in the United States, and Salem is not an exception. On March 7, 2024, a shooting at Bush's Pasture Park ended the life of a 16-year-old high school student and wounded two other minors less than a mile away from the Willamette campus. Shortly thereafter, all Willamette students received emergency alerts to avoid the area. On April 6, another shooting took place at a different Salem park and ended with one person dead and another injured.

There has been a 100% increase in shootings in Salem since 2018, and the city now has a higher violent crime rate than Eugene, Gresham, Bend, Hillsboro and Beaverton, according to the Statesman Journal.

However pressing and visible the issue is in the Salem community, very few spaces at Willamette are ever dedicated to talking about gun violence, largely due to privilege and lack of exposure. Willamette students are disproportionately white and middle- or up-



Art by Lucy Devlaeminck

per-class and therefore do not face the burdens that those most susceptible to crime face every day, such as homelessness, food scarcity or discrimination. These factors, along with socioeconomic status and substance abuse, have been linked to higher rates of gun deaths and injuries.

Likewise, the Willamette community enjoys many university resources—like free counseling and medical check-ups, a highly trained campus safety team, and accessible services—which most members of vulnerable populations do not have access to. This privilege and lack of exposure render many individuals unaware of the issue of gun violence and make any student-led efforts to advocate against gun violence virtually nonexistent.

Just because most Willamette students are not personally affected by the issue does not mean they should not

talk about it, raise awareness and take action to address it. Many academic programs and student organizations at Willamette focus on important issues like criminal justice reform, the rights of individuals in custody, the rights of undocumented immigrants and systemic racism, among others. But Willamette has yet to provide a space for students and faculty to talk freely about gun violence, share perspectives and experiences, engage with the broader community and enact political change to address the issue.

The university has the agency and resources to conduct research on gun violence and incorporate it into academic programs, which is an effort that other institutions are starting to undertake. For instance, after the shooting that killed 17 and injured another 17 students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018, the University of Virginia created a

research initiative for gun violence prevention and a call to action for “a change in mindset and policy from reaction to prevention.” Such initiatives are nonexistent at Willamette even after the rise in shootings in Salem and several mass-casualty incidents in other Oregon towns and schools.

Likewise, the student body has the power to raise awareness, foster community with those personally affected and advocate for reform. Student-led initiatives and movements like Team ENOUGH, March for Our Lives and Students Demand Action attract thousands of student activists around the country but lack any significant presence at Willamette.

Although most shootings take place on the street or in other public spaces, universities are by no means shielded from gun violence. On Feb. 13, 2023, a gunman entered

the Michigan State University campus and killed three students and wounded five. On Aug. 28, a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill opened fire on campus and killed a professor. On Oct. 3, five people, four of whom were undergraduate students, were shot at a homecoming event at Morgan State University in Maryland. On Dec. 6, three people were killed and one injured in a shooting on the University of Nevada, Las Vegas campus. On Feb. 16, 2024, two students were shot dead in a residence hall at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs.

Willamette students, faculty and staff must not observe silently as other communities face these preventable tragedies. They can happen anytime, anywhere, and action starts with awareness.

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Willamette bookstore to implement per-credit model for 2024-25 year

Nardin Ishak
Staff Writer

In an attempt to prevent the removal of Willamette University's bookstore, a new per-credit model has been confirmed to take place for the 2024-25 academic year with the hopes of increasing utilization of the bookstore.

The new per-credit model is a course material delivery program offered as a solution by Barnes and Noble, the university bookstore's partner for the past three years, to increase bookstore sales. The model has been successful after implementation on over 200 other college campuses across the country. It offers an expanded choice for students on their textbook purchases by charging \$20 per credit hour, allowing students to have access to however many textbooks needed as assigned by the instructor for each course. About a month before classes begin, emails will be sent out notifying students of the textbook materials assigned by each of their instructors. Students can choose to opt out at that time and until the add/drop period deadline, which provides a 30-day window. After opting out, students can still purchase all needed materials from the bookstore a la carte as normal.

If a student chooses to stay opted in as per the default of the model, they will then choose the option of physi-

cal or digital textbooks unless specified by the instructor, as well as the delivery method. Digital textbooks will be made available through Canvas, while physical textbooks can be delivered to the university bookstore located in Putnam University Center or to the student's chosen home address. It is notable that all physical textbooks are rentals, including lab manuals, and must be returned at the end of each semester to be reused by other students. Students can choose to purchase any chosen textbooks at the end of the semester at a reduced but additional price.

As for payment, it is required to pay for the total of all credits signed up for each semester if a student chooses to opt in, regardless of whether or not they require textbooks. Registered credits exclude courses ending in "x." An example model of this payment system could look like \$240 for 12 credits and \$360 for 18 credits. Additionally, the model will exclude non-textbook items such as lab goggles, art supplies, calculators, etc., but all will still be available for purchase at the bookstore. The model adds the textbook fees to the student's calculated tuition and fees package, allowing for financial aid to be applied to cover the costs if applicable.

Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences Ruth Feingold explained that the current bookstore model is being discontinued by Barnes and Noble at universities of similar size to

Willamette and said that the company required implementation of a different model to continue the partnership.

"It may not have been my choice to [implement the per-credit model], but it just adds an additional option," said Feingold. "It's not a big annoyance to opt out," she added.

Feingold noted that only 30% of current students utilize the bookstore, causing a loss of money for both the university as well as Barnes and Noble. The new model is expected to increase student purchases from the bookstore to 80%, which will be profitable for both parties involved. Using the new model, students are expected to save 35-50% on average over purchasing books. Feingold invited faculty members as well as Associated Students of Willamette University (ASWU) to discuss the new model when the idea first arose back in the fall of 2022.

"Generally speaking, [faculty and students] asked a lot of the right questions that helped us and informed us on how to work better with Barnes and Noble," said Associate Vice President of Budget and Facilities Anne Gallagher.

Dean Feingold added that there were initial suspicions from faculty and students regarding the new model, but assured that the Frequently Asked Questions web page released on April 22 evolved from the concerns that had been brought up to the table during departmental chair meetings

where the College Council student representatives were also present.

"I was worried it was a capitalist trap that would force students to spend more money than needed," said history professor William Smaldone.

After his initial concerns were answered including the fact that students can just opt out, Smaldone is optimistic that the new model will be effective in keeping the bookstore open and increasing sales, as well as be cheaper for some students who take courses such as his. He recalls having to reassign a core textbook in one of his history courses after the

price doubled to over one hundred dollars with consideration that it was only one of five other assigned texts.

"I think it is a positive option," said Gallagher. "There were several rounds of communication, Dan Valles (Chief Operating Officer) is ready with a comprehensive communication package so there will be opportunity for students to educate themselves." Feingold encourages students to be informed consumers and opt in or out as they see fit depending on their courses and needs.

Image by Alma Snortum-Phelps



ASWU in positive financial situation ahead of 2024-25 school year

Alan Cohen
Staff Writer

Due to a rise in students enrolled at Willamette and unused funds from past years, the Associated Students of Willamette University (ASWU) is now in a positive financial position to fund student-led initiatives and affiliated organizations in future years.

Milo Greenberg ('24) is the treasurer of ASWU for the 2023-2024 school year. He said that the current financial situation of ASWU this school year is positive largely due to the significant increase in the number of students enrolled in recent years, as ASWU's funding comes from student activity fees.

The student activity fee applies to all full-time students and is currently set at \$134 per semester. As approved by a 2022 resolution, it increases by \$4 each academic year and can vary based on the number of enrolled students. Nonetheless, most liberal arts universities in Oregon have higher student

fees, such as the University of Portland's at \$150 per semester or Reed's and Linfield's at \$155.

Another reason for the positive financial situation of ASWU is a surplus of unused funds. "Because of COVID, ASWU has not spent as much money as it might otherwise have, and there has been a lot of money accumulating," Greenberg said.

In years where there is a significant surplus of funds, a percentage of those funds are saved and invested in an endowment fund so they can grow in value, but ASWU has yet to decide how much money will be invested at the end of this school year. Greenberg added that an important factor to consider for that decision is the number of students enrolled in the upcoming class of 2028, which is currently unknown.

A visible effect of ASWU's positive financial situation this year has come in the form of campus improvement projects and other initiatives. For instance, with the increased popularity of or-

ganizations dedicated to dance and performative art, ASWU recently funded the costs of installing a large mirror in the former Greek life building 880 Mill for these clubs to perform. ASWU also recently funded the installation of an accessible automatic door button in Smullin Hall. In addition, several new clubs and organizations like the Financial Literacy Club and the Delta Alpha Pi honor society have been affiliated this year and are now eligible to receive ASWU funding.

Although this year's financial situation is a good sign for the student body and ASWU-affiliated clubs, Greenberg said that ASWU hopes to avoid the precedent of being overly generous to student organizations in years when there is a surplus of funds, as this may have the potential to create an unrealistic standard that will be hard to meet in future years.

Treasurer Greenberg's term ends this semester, and Sophia "Stevie" Bergstrom ('26), who currently serves

the role of press secretary, will serve as next year's treasurer. In an email, she said that she appreciates Greenberg's hard work this year and will continue to "collaborate on ways to make things as accessible and easily understandable as we can."

"I'm also excited to continue the work we've been trying to do this year in getting awareness around what ASWU is and what we can do for the students," Bergstrom concluded in the email.

Art by Lucy Devlaeminck



Did you know that nutria are edible?

Monte Remer
Lifestyles Editor

As a new generation of nutria graces Willamette's Salem campus, perhaps it is time for a reminder that they are an infestation. The nutria is an invasive and destructive species in this area. In Louisiana, where the large, buck-toothed rodents are even more pervasive, environmentalists have taken a drastic approach. This strategy is put most succinctly by one of the organizations advocating it, called Can't Beat 'Em, Eat 'Em.

A PBS article on this push to mitigate the rodent population by eating them describes a process of trial and error. For one reason or another, nutria as a dietary staple has failed to catch on. A featured video from the PBS

show Independent Lens talks about how the state of Louisiana has attempted to showcase celebrity chefs cooking nutria, about which celebrity chef Susan Spicer said, "I just try and support those efforts the best way I can because I think it's important and just to freak the staff out."

The appearance of the nutria has consistently come up in Louisiana as a roadblock to many people eating the animals. Spicer said, however, "With rabbit, the stigma is that they're too cute. That's not a problem with nutria."

The Louisiana government has worked closely with organizations like Can't Beat 'Em, Eat 'Em as well as Eat the Invaders to promote the cooking and consumption of these invasive species. In the aforementioned video, Edmond Mouton with the Loui-

siana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries said, "In a pilot study to try and promote nutria for human consumption, we made sausage with it, we made Slim Jims, we made nutria hot tamales, we had nutria gumbo, things that people were used to eating in south Louisiana."

Here the past finds itself repeating. A 1963 study from Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College attempted something very similar. The study doubles as a cooking handbook because it was designed to explore the viability of nutria as food in popular culture. In the document, recipes coexist with a section of the research procedure reading simply "All animals were shot at dusk in canals with a .22 rifle." As the study details for context, nutria has been consumed across its native South

America but has since spread to a minor degree throughout Europe and the United States. As of 1963, some areas of Louisiana cooked nutria and it was also viewed as a delicacy in larger cities, canned and labeled "ragondin" which is the French word for nutria.

Among the recipes, there are plenty of highlights. There is chicken-fried nutria which is just another way of making chicken-fried steak as well as nutria meatloaf made with sausage and a bacon topper. There is also the bold stroke of a nutria oyster casserole. This particular dish is made by dipping pieces of nutria hind in egg and coating them in cracker crumbs, browning the nutria in fat and then laying it with oysters in a casserole dish. The meat is then covered with milk, cream, and any remaining fat from the browning. Sprinkle

crumbs on top of the casserole, dot the surface with butter, then bake until browned and you have yourself the mostly failed culinary activism of the Louisiana state government.

While the movement to eat nutria has seen middling success in Louisiana, perhaps it can find new ground at Willamette. According to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife, nutria is fairly healthy. It is very lean, with more protein and less fat than turkey, chicken or beef. Nutria also have the lowest cholesterol of these meats.

As an invasive species encroaches upon our beautiful campus, chewing our flora between massive yellow buckteeth, a question is raised: what are you willing to do to stop it?

Opinion: What are Bearcats listening to right now?

Mari Kauffman
Staff Writer

From reggae to indie rock, pop to jazz, music is embedded into the student life at Willamette, playing in ears as students head to classes. Whether they're blasting their music from Spotify, Apple Music or Pandora, students find themselves listening to everything from "Praise Jah In The Moonlight" by Jg Marley to Benson Boone's "Beautiful Things" as they work on homework, prepare for their finals, work out and eat. But how do Bearcats find new songs? How many hours per day are they streaming music and what else are they listening to?

To a lot of Bearcats,

music is comforting. Whether it's soothing and provokes some inner calmness or brings a rush into their blood and hypes them up, music is a resource that is utilized as a way to inspire or awaken students' minds as they finish or start their assignments. However, not everyone can listen to music while completing homework. Vanessa Wallace ('27), who's currently listening to Hozier's new album "Unheard," spends between two and three hours a day listening to music. She doesn't listen to music when she studies as it prevents her from focusing on homework. Unlike Wallace, however, Julianna Tang ('25), whose favorite artist is MisterWives, enjoys listening to clas-

Art by Eli Fukuji

sical music while she studies.

Daily habits also mean that Bearcats have a chance to broaden their music affinity to something that challenges their go-to playlists. It gets repetitive listening to the same artist and their songs over and over, regardless of how exceptional their songs are. On TikTok, a social media platform where a lot of students are active, students find themselves singing to current hits such as Beyoncé's "Texas Hold 'Em" or Michael Marcagi's "Scared To Start" while watching strangers dance or gossip through their screens. However, it's not just TikTok, YouTube shorts and Instagram reels that are a source of their new favorite songs, it's also the radio and soundtracks of movies and TV shows that provide music that pleases students. Bearcats know what they like, so when they hear a song that amuses them, they quickly add it to their playlists. While rhythm and a good beat can determine the greatness of a song, being able to feel the tone of the song is what pulls students in and prompts them to add it to their playlist.

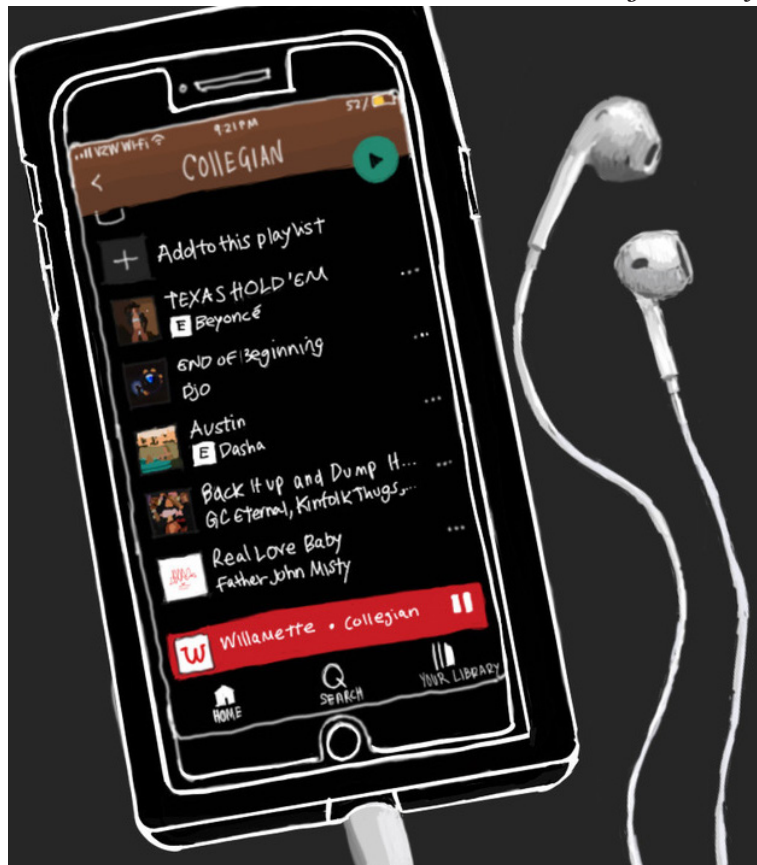
Students spend hours listening to music, but there is a limit. Ciandra Choun ('27) can't listen to music while she studies because she "gets overstimulated and distracted" by the lyrics and the rhythm of one of her favorite artists, Laufey. There's a point where listening to music gets to be too much, especially when studying.

Some students listen to music for more than three hours a day. They spend their time blasting music in their dorm rooms or through headphones, all while trying to get from place to place and preparing for their classes. Whether they're in Hatfield Library

studying or in Goudy eating, Bearcats are usually seen with bulky headphones sitting on their heads or AirPods in their ears.

Whether students are capable of listening to music while studying or not, they are vigilant about when their favorite artists come out with a new album or when they discover a song that's circulating either through TikTok or

through their friends' playlists. Music is a valuable tool that Bearcats utilize as they finish their papers or walk to their classes. The screams of Benson Boone's "Beautiful Things" or Jg. Marley's "Praise Jah In The Moonlight," popular background music on TikTok, come to an abrupt end as students find their class and settle down.



Senior Week 2024

Salem Campus

*: RSVP REQUIRED

MONDAY MAY 13TH Lavender Celebration* Time: 11am-12:30pm Place: Cat Cavern Last Night at the Bistro: Grad Cap Decorating Time: 6-8pm Place: The Bistro	TUESDAY MAY 14TH First in Family Reception* Time: 4-5:30pm Place: UC 2nd Floor Balcony Celebration at Best Goose Time: 7-9pm Place: Best Goose 440 State St
WEDNESDAY MAY 15TH Values Sort II Time: 3:30pm Place: UC 2nd Floor Senior Wine and Cheese* Time: 6-7:30pm Place: Montag Den Movie Night: Toy Story Time: 8-10pm Place: Ford 122	THURSDAY MAY 16TH Tie Dye & Snow Cones Time: 11am-1pm Place: UC 2nd Floor Balcony Black & Brown Joy Celebration* Time: 4-5:30pm Place: Cat Cavern



RSVP Here for Affinity Events

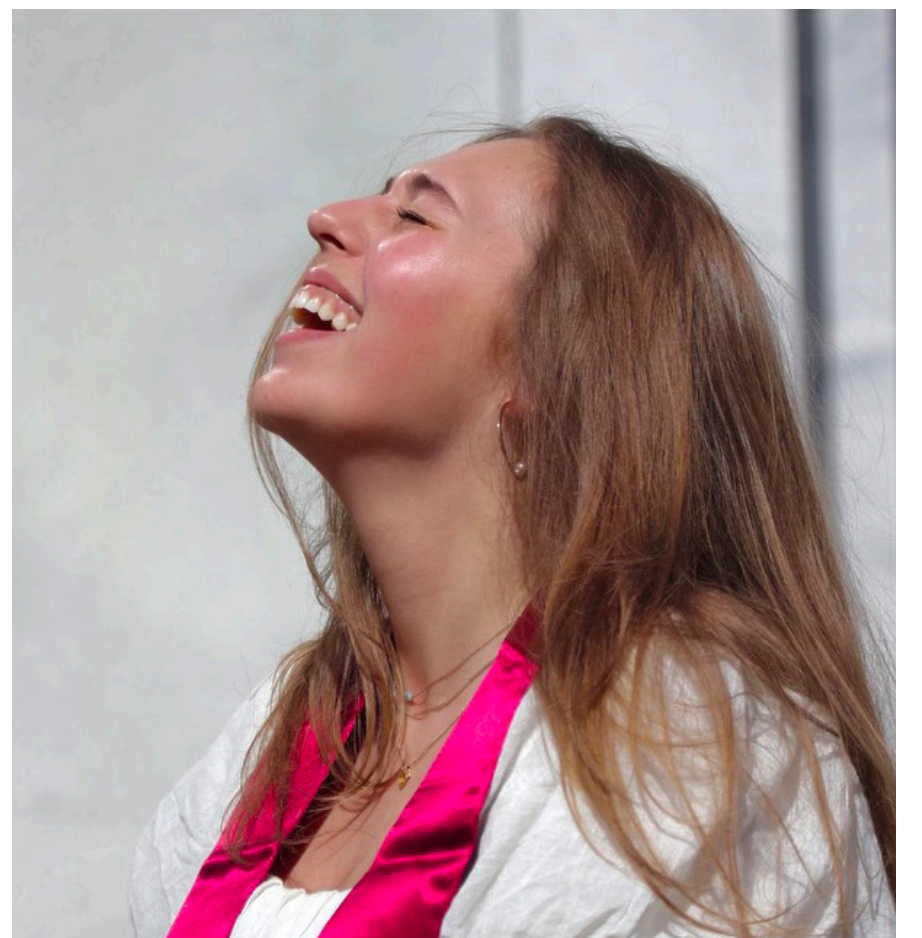
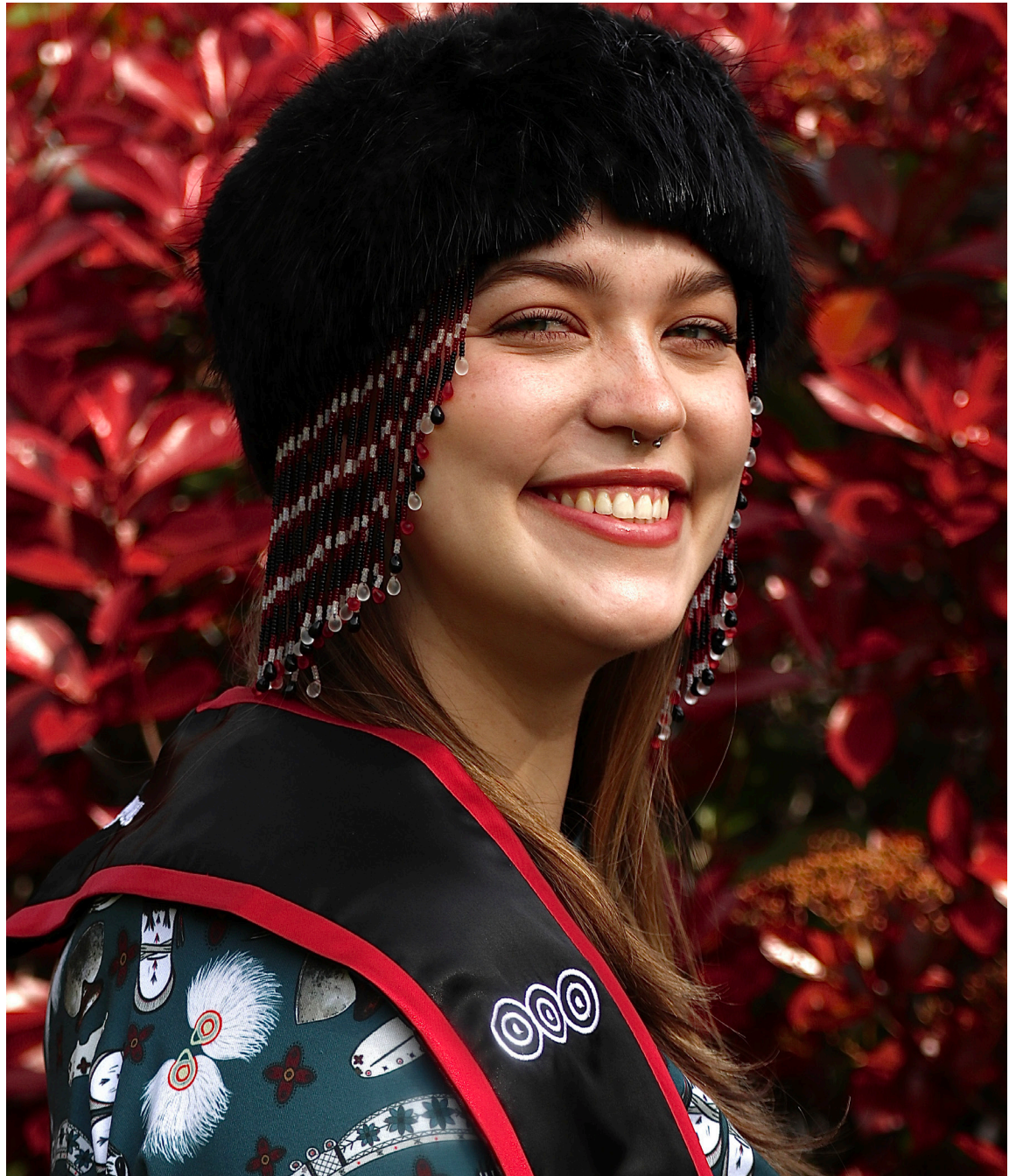


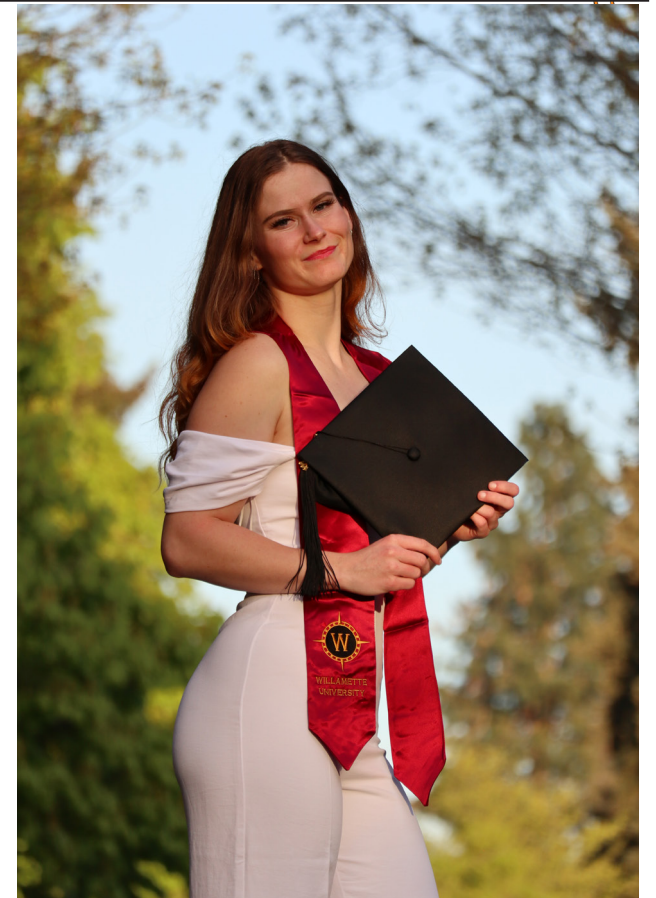
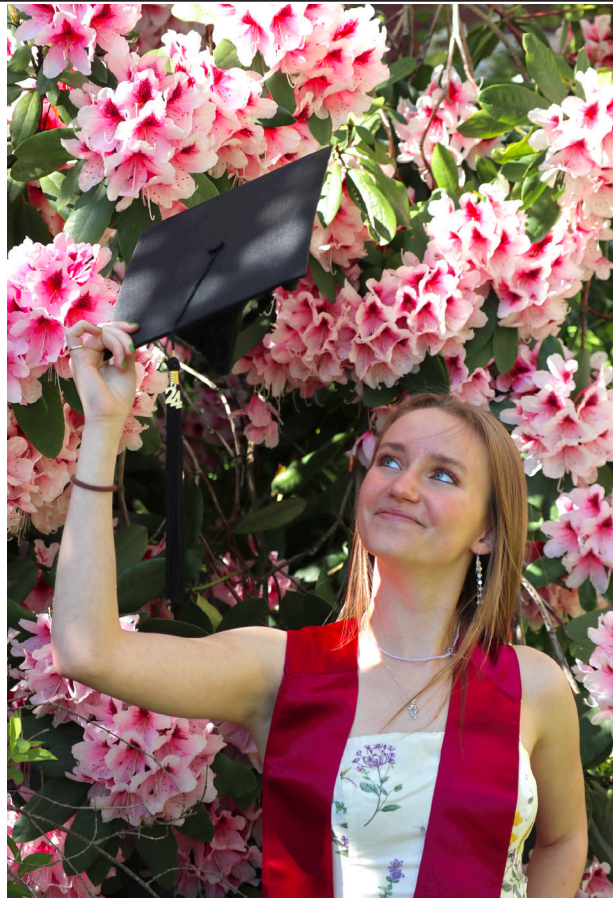



Photojournalism: Senior Portraits

Anushka Srivastav
Media Editor

Featuring Pardeep Kaur, Mala Neuman, Katherina Cory, Keelin Rice, and Emma Honberger





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Sparks used to have a Dolly Parton plaque; where is it now?

Ernie Samora
Staff Writer

Parton me! Have you seen this plaque? Perceptive Bearcat readers may recall a story last year detailing Dolly Parton's history with Willamette University. Her generous donation made possible the purchase of fitness equipment for the Sparks facility upon its first reconstruction in 1995. A plaque was displayed within the facility to commemorate Parton's contribution. However, upon the center's second reconstruction in 2014, the plaque vanished, seemingly without a trace. This year, I have made it my personal mission to track down the plaque. Follow me on a journey that spans campus, across departments and across Salem.

Beginning the search I tumbled out of bed, stumbled to the kitchen, poured myself a cup of ambition and emailed Athletics Director Rob Passage. Passage and I had spoken last fall and I hoped he had been taking the issue as seriously as me in the interim. "Ernie," he began, "I have not been able to track [the plaque] down. I think the best place to start would be the University archives if you are starting to search." I had already discovered last year that the archivists have no record of receiving the plaque. The archive did, however, have some photos I had not seen previously.

Photos from Willamette Archives



New photos of Parton having a seemingly wonderful time at the Willamette alumni football game on Sept. 15, 1989. Parton is all smiles, hanging with some football players and taking photos with sports fans. Ernie also discovered a photo of Sparks during the reconstruction that brought us new fitness equipment and the plaque itself.

While I was ecstatic to get new DP content, I remained fixated on my goal. I reached out to the architect responsible for the 1995 redesign, one Jon McGrew of Hennebery Eddy Architects. While McGrew did not know anything about the plaque, he connected me with others from his office who worked on the same project. None responded to my emails.

I stopped at the Heritage Center, yearning to procure even a whisper of the elusive artifact. Curator and Collections Manager of the Heritage Center Kylie Pine and I looked through local newspaper archives and other Willamette University archives. However, there was no sign of Parton.

As the trails off campus began to run cold, I decided to turn my attention back toward campus. Willamette has a number of professors whose history at the university spans decades, perhaps some of whom could propel my pursuit of the plaque. I reached out to professor Stas Stavrianeas of the exercise and health science department. He has an extended history with Willamette and

his office was located in Sparks prior to the 2014 reconstruction.

I took my time to meticulously craft a succinct, polite email detailing my quest and requesting his help. Within minutes, I got a ping from my computer. "New Message." Wow. He was prompt. Could this be the answer to my prayers? Could this be the break in the case that leads me to the fabled relic? I clicked on his email with bated breath. ...

"Sorry," he wrote. I was too. "I have no idea what this plaque is all about. I am certain those in charge of Sparks would know best." I thought the same. The leads were drying up.

As days turned into weeks, my anxiety grew to desperation. I became less and less convinced this plaque was real. Thoughts circled my brain like a cow in a tornado. Maybe the plaque never existed, I worried. Perhaps it was just a lie peddled by "Big Willamette" to sell more dorm rooms. Perhaps it was a myth told to Bearcats to inspire hope and a belief in magic, much like the Tooth Fairy or new Rihanna music. It was enough to drive me crazy if I let it. The mission was now personal.

I hit the library again and went through each of the Wallulah yearbooks from 1985 when Parton first visited campus to 1995 when her donation helped remodel Sparks. Suspiciously, the 1996 yearbook was nowhere to be found in both the library shelves and the archives. While I did not find any photos of the plaque, the 1989 Wallulah yielded yet another new photograph.

Next, I turned my attention toward The Collegian archives. I first discovered a quiz from Feb. 10, 1999, entitled "Do You Know WU?" by Collegian alum Marion Hunt. Question 14 read, "Who is the famous woman pictured in the weight room of Sparks?" The options were "Rosie O'Donnell, Dolly Parton, Hillary Clinton and Bill Clinton." As the resident expert on Dol-



ly Parton at Willamette, I am fairly certain that the correct answer is Dolly. Could this picture have been related to the fated plaque?

Then I found an article titled "Dolly Parton's charity needed again" by Fred Engell. Published on Sept. 21, 2005, Engell mentions a "small plaque to the left of the 'fitness room' entrance."

Engell provides more details, writing: "This plaque reads something to the order of 'fitness equipment made available by a grant from a Dolly Parton charity group.' Above it is a picture of the said Mrs. Parton holding a football and sporting a female mullet." While I could maintain my sanity now knowing that the plaque was real, I was still no closer to laying my eyes upon this fine piece of Willamette history. Although, I appreciated Engell's vivid description.

As I wracked my brain trying to figure out my next steps, I asked myself: What would a non-copyrighted archaeologist, professor and adventurer do? I decided to take this mystery all the way to the top. I needed to talk to Steve Thorsett.

Thorsett was inaugurated as president in 2011, three years before the reconstruction took place and the plaque vanished. In one last Hail Mary, I sent Thorsett an email. He was rather prompt, responding to

me after just six minutes.

"Hi Ernie," he wrote. "I think Rob Passage might have the Dolly Parton plaque in his office over in Sparks." Passage does not. He continued, "It used to be on the wall right outside the fitness center, commemorating her support of the previous renovation and expansion, but got moved when the center was expanded again."

He then connected me with former Athletic Director Dave Rigsby in the hopes he could provide me with more information. However, my email was lost in Rigsby's inbox and I have yet to hear back from him.

With capstone assignments stacking up and my time at Willamette coming to an end, it was time to call it quits in my pursuit. As I move on to alumnihood, joining Parton in the ranks of former Bearcats, I pass the torch on to you, young Binturong reader. Take the baton. Continue where I left off. Maybe you'll be luckier than I was. Maybe you can find the plaque. I believe in you! And so I'll go, and yet I know, I'll think of you, Dolly, each step of the way.

If you have any information regarding the plaque or its whereabouts, please contact us at collegian-editor-in-chief@willamette.edu.

Fast Break sports report

Skeet Starr
Sports Editor

4/14

Welcome back, Bearcat Hello, Bearcat Fan! A new Collegian executive staff has been hired and soon I myself will face yet another editorial hiring period. Please, loyal reader, to ensure my continued stewardship of the sports section, comment on this article: "Hi, I'm very charming and respectable, but a false step in the case of sports hiring may cause me to lash out

and/or make a scene." Let's go to the news!

Women's Soccer staked their flag in the center of Corban U's field and now owns the rights to all of Salem (2-1). NCAA on top!

In their first game under Matt Corti-Young, Men's Soccer headed south to Corvallis to face Oregon State. The Beavs, who took third in the last DI national tournament, defeated the 'Cats 3-0.

Lacrosse pillaged Puget Sound (20-3).

Baseball shipped off to the Midwest to take on

North Central College and Concordia Chicago. They grabbed two wins of a possible four.

Men's Golf won the NWC Spring Classic, a massive result as they head to the conference tournament.

Women's Golf took seventh at the NWC Spring Classic, then defeated Linfield by a single stroke at the Willamette dual meet. On both accounts, Linfield will again be forced to lay awake at night, dreaming in vain of surpassing our glorious institution.

Scores are making

their way in for Tennis' last match-up of the year. The Bruins will be a nearly insurmountable challenge for them.

Softball stands on the verge of snatching two wins of three from No. 3 George Fox as of Sunday afternoon. Can we expect a late-season surge?

Erica Snyder ('26) snagged 8th at the NWC multi-event track and field championship.

In the world of sport: At UFC 300 Max Holloway knocked out Justin Gaethje with one second on the

board, Alex "Poatan" Pereira TKO'd Jamahal Hill in round one, UEFA Champions League quarters are a dead heat and I got a new Jermaine O'Neal Indiana Pacers jersey. Nice!

Consider in the coming weeks: Whatever happened to the Dolly Parton plaque which used to hang in Sparks, and alternatively, how much more of this are you going to put up with? I mean, seriously, what will it take? At some point, you have to back yourself

Opinion: Inclusivity and community makes Dance Co. stand out on campus

Brooke Austin
Staff Writer

For two days every semester, Willamette's Dance Company puts on a roughly two-hour show for the school to enjoy. Hundreds of Willamette students, faculty and members of the Salem community file into Smith Auditorium to see their classmates, roommates and friends perform in over twenty different dances. These dances range from contemporary and hip hop to Bhangra and tap. The Dance Co. performance is one of the biggest Willamette events and this year won Best Club Event of the Year at Honors and Awards in Bearcat Excellence. The program itself has had its own journey throughout the years that has shaped it into becoming one of Willamette's most popular clubs and most popular performances.

"I love Dance Co. so much. It's literally my life,

my soul, my everything," said Dance Co's Co-president Emma Honberger ('24). "I love Dance Co. in all caps with sparkle emojis around it." Honberger joined Dance Co. her sophomore year of college and immediately got as involved as possible. She finished her last performance this past April as the co-president, a choreographer and a dancer.

"Everyone's supportive, everyone's loving. I think that's my favorite part of it," Harleen Brar ('26) said. Brar is another choreographer and dancer in Dance Co. "I absolutely loved it," Brooke Busby ('27) agreed, having finished her first Dance Co. show this April. The amount of popularity and love Dance Co. has cultivated can almost be directly attributed to the inclusive and supportive environment.

Brar, who had no formal dance training previous to Dance Co., focuses on cho-

reographing and dancing in cultural dances, namely Bollywood and Bhangra style dances. "Last semester, I choreographed Bollywood, and that was the first time Willamette has done Bollywood," Brar explained. "It was nice to be able to show people what modern Bollywood is." For Brar, Dance Co. is more than just a space for her to dance, it is a space for her to express her culture. She explained, "[The dancers] are actually passionate about it because it's their own culture."

"We want to do more cultural stuff. I want to bring something new," Maggie Ramos ('26) said. Ramos was involved in seven dances as either a dancer or a choreographer, one of which was an Afro-fusion dance. "I try my best to make a welcoming and supportive community."

Both Busby and Honberger also honed in on Dance Co's culture of community



and support. "It's so amazing that they have, like, all different levels. ... [The choreographers] make dances for everyone. So even if you have no dance experience at all, they make sure there's a dance for you," Busby said. "I just feel like we're such a dance family," Honberger said.

Even though there are a multitude of reasons to love Dance Company, it seems that the reason this club is so popular, the reason it has over 150 members and the reason its performance is one of the biggest events of the year can be pinpointed to the incredible environment. "My favorite experiences are honestly just dancing with my friends because a lot of the friends that I have made at Willamette have been through Dance Compa-

ny," Honberger shared. "You learn a lot through it but it's not like it's not a competitive environment. It's just super fun and you get to meet a lot of friends." Ramos agreed.

As for the upcoming semesters, Dance Co. is excited to incorporate more dances and members, continuing fantastic experiences throughout the rehearsals and shows. Dance Co. wants to emphasize that people of any dance experience are encouraged to join and participate in a dance, and, as always, everyone is welcome to scream and cheer as loud as they possibly can at the performances. Thus, the positive and uplifting energy Dance Co. brings to Willamette will continue for many years to come.

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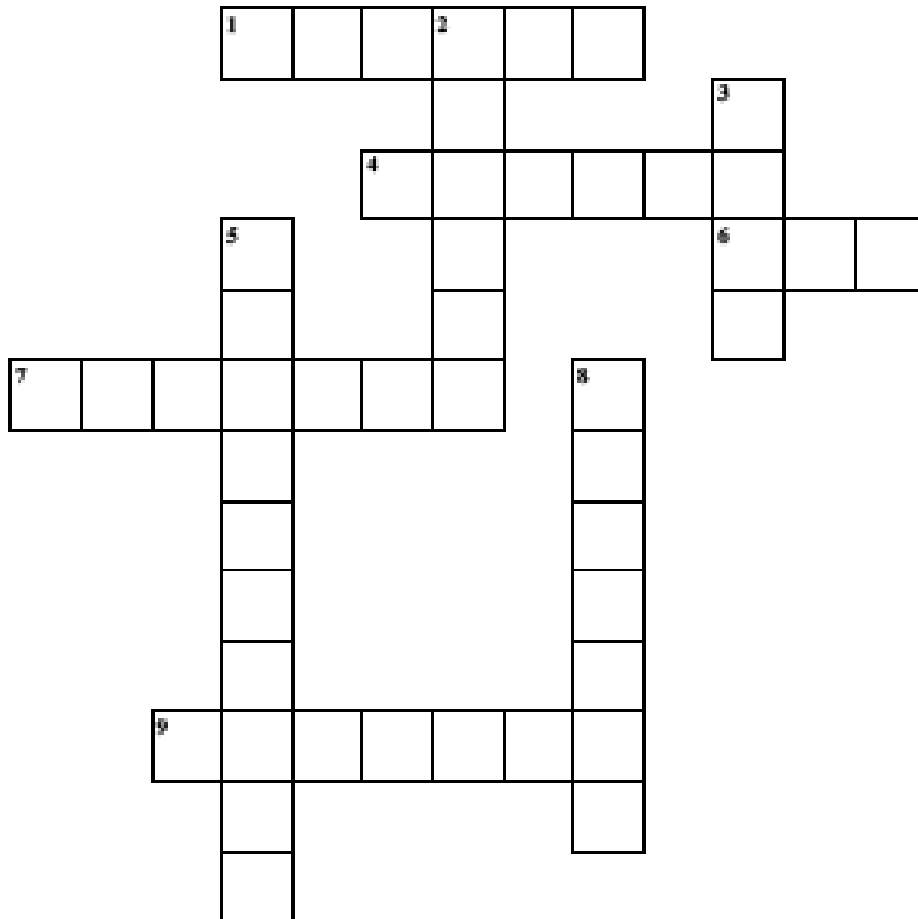
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End-of-year puzzle!



Across

- [1] Cowboy _____
- [4] Possible delicacy eaten in some parts of Louisiana.
- [6] May backwards
- [7] Who are we celebrating this month?
- [8] _____ Sunshine

Down

- [2] This Zodiac season begins at the end of April.
- [3] Can I?
- [5] Popular Netflix adaptation that's third season is dropping in May
- [10] May birthstone

Keep up with Willamette Athletics!



Comic by Isis Coyle



Thank goodness I'm graduating! I'm ready to start making some real money!



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