

The Collegian

Jan. 29, 2026

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

Issue 1, Vol. CXLII

Willamette and Pacific University presidents discuss next steps following planned merger announcement

Amelia Hare • Staff Writer



The merging of Bearcat and Qilin.
Art by ADDIE MARTIN

On Dec. 11, 2025, Willamette President Steve Thorsett sent an email to students, announcing the news of the university's intent to merge with Pacific University. The same day, Thorsett and Pacific University President Jenny Coyle spoke in a joint interview to *The Collegian* in order to provide further clarification on the merger.

Initial discussions between the two schools began in the late spring of 2025, Coyle noted. The talks over merging with Pacific, a university in Forest Grove, Oregon, come nearly five years after Willamette's acquisition of the Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA) in June 2021.

Thorsett explained that the merger is somewhat unusual for the fact that one university is not neces-

sarily absorbing the other. "It's being considered a merger of equals," and the two universities are "forming something new," he said.

Despite the news, the merger remains in its infancy. "It is a very long process, with lots of stages," Thorsett said. "And it takes at best one year, and in the case of PNCA, it took two years."

Specifics of the merger remain undetermined as the two universities organize and plan. "These conversations take a long time to think through," Coyle explained, as the universities need to consider leadership positions, potential program locations and more. The next step for both universities is to work out a more detailed agreement.

In order to officially merge,

the universities first must seek the approval of the detailed legal agreement by the board of trustees. Following this, an accreditor review will begin with the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), a non-profit organization recognized by the United States Department of Education. Then, the university must have the proposal reviewed by stakeholders, start the corporate merger, and then get federal review and approval before the official university merger, Thorsett said.

For now, the proposed merger remains in the early stages as the Willamette board of trustees meets in February to discuss further details, according to the Willamette website.

Coyle and Thorsett assured that as Willamette and Pacific currently stand, no layoffs have been planned. "We're in the due-diligence phase, right now we don't even know what that structure of the two institutions looks like," Coyle said. Thorsett elaborated that in regards to the PNCA merger, "There were some duplicated things that both schools did. Eliminating the duplicated work allowed in many cases a reallocation of people into other things that were important. ... We're not going into this motivated by a desire to cut staff," he said.

Pacific and Willamette must also take into consideration their two athletic programs. Thorsett and Coyle described a potential plan for their athletics program. "We chatted with the NCAA, and we can have two separate programs," Thorsett said, meaning that the Pacific Boxers and Willamette Bearcats can continue to compete as normal. "The project would have died early on if we had not been able to find a way to protect Bearcat and Boxer athletics."

Thorsett stressed to students that under the current plan, "Willamette remains Willamette."

The interview with Coyle and Thorsett took place on Dec. 11. The *Collegian* will continue to report on this story as more details emerge.

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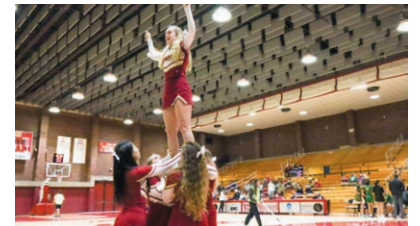
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Letter From the Editor

Dear reader,

Like many ASWU-affiliated clubs, and every ASWU-affiliated organization, *The Collegian* is facing significant reductions in its budget. An initial plan from the finance board forecasted a roughly 30% decrease in our funding for spring.

A major reduction in funding would harm our ability to hire incoming staff in the fall, develop other forms of income and ensure the overall sustainability of our 136-year-old news source.

The Willamette Events

Board, the Outdoor Program and others are facing similar challenges.

Our unique position as both advocates of *The Collegian* and journalists has made it difficult for us to report on this issue thus far. On the one hand, should we over-report our position, we run the risk of abusing our power as the press. On the other hand, we can't tell this story without reporting *The Collegian's* place in it.

We are still developing strategies to cover this issue with the care it deserves.

Tonight — Thursday, Jan. 29 — from 7-8 p.m. in the Montag

Den, the senate will convene and likely determine what funding organizations will receive through the spring semester. There will be a period designated for public comment.

If you have been positively affected by *The Collegian* and would like to share what positive impacts you have seen *The Collegian* have on the Willamette community, we ask, and would be grateful, if you respectfully shared your thoughts in public comment or by emailing a senator. After all, it's us or Yik Yak.

Skeet Starr, Editor-in-Chief, and Bjorn Domst, Managing Editor

It's hard to summarize, especially in this current moment, when journalism is under attack from the most elite halls of power, the importance of developing young press professionals. But more than that, we feel *The Collegian* plays a crucial role on campus, serving as an amplifier of voices and a reliable reporter on the issues that matter to Bearcats.

Thanks for your attention. More reporting to come, as always.

Best,
Skeet Starr
Editor-in-Chief

Salem mayoral debate outlines key issues ahead of 2026 election

Alexander Berry • Staff Writer

The Salem Chamber of Commerce hosted a mayoral debate on Jan. 12 featuring incumbent Mayor Julie Hoy and City Councilor Vanessa Nordyke. The debate came ahead of the May 19 primary election, when Salem voters will select their preferred candidate in the city's nonpartisan 2026 mayoral race. Salem's nonpartisan primary functions as a first round; a candidate who earns more than 50% wins immediately, while the top two advance to a November election if no one reaches a majority.

Homelessness, public safety, economic pressures and the city's long-term financial outlook were the main focuses of the debate. Although neither candidate referenced Willamette University directly, several issues raised during the debate have implications for students due to the university's proximity to downtown and reliance on city services, such as a mentioned payroll tax and downtown organization.

The debate opened with two-minute statements from each candidate. Hoy highlighted the city's recent financial turnaround, stating that Salem moved from a projected \$23.4 million deficit to a \$3.9 million positive fund balance for 2026. Hoy credited city staff and community partners for the shift. She also emphasized public safety as her primary focus, referencing the city's participation in the Bloomberg Harvard collaboration on safety initiatives.

Nordyke centered her opening remarks on affordability, housing and long-term service expansion. She described the city's new crisis response team, composed of medical and mental health professionals, and noted that the program has the sup-

port of both the police and fire chiefs. Nordyke also highlighted the need for additional shelter capacity and long-term pathways for individuals experiencing homelessness.

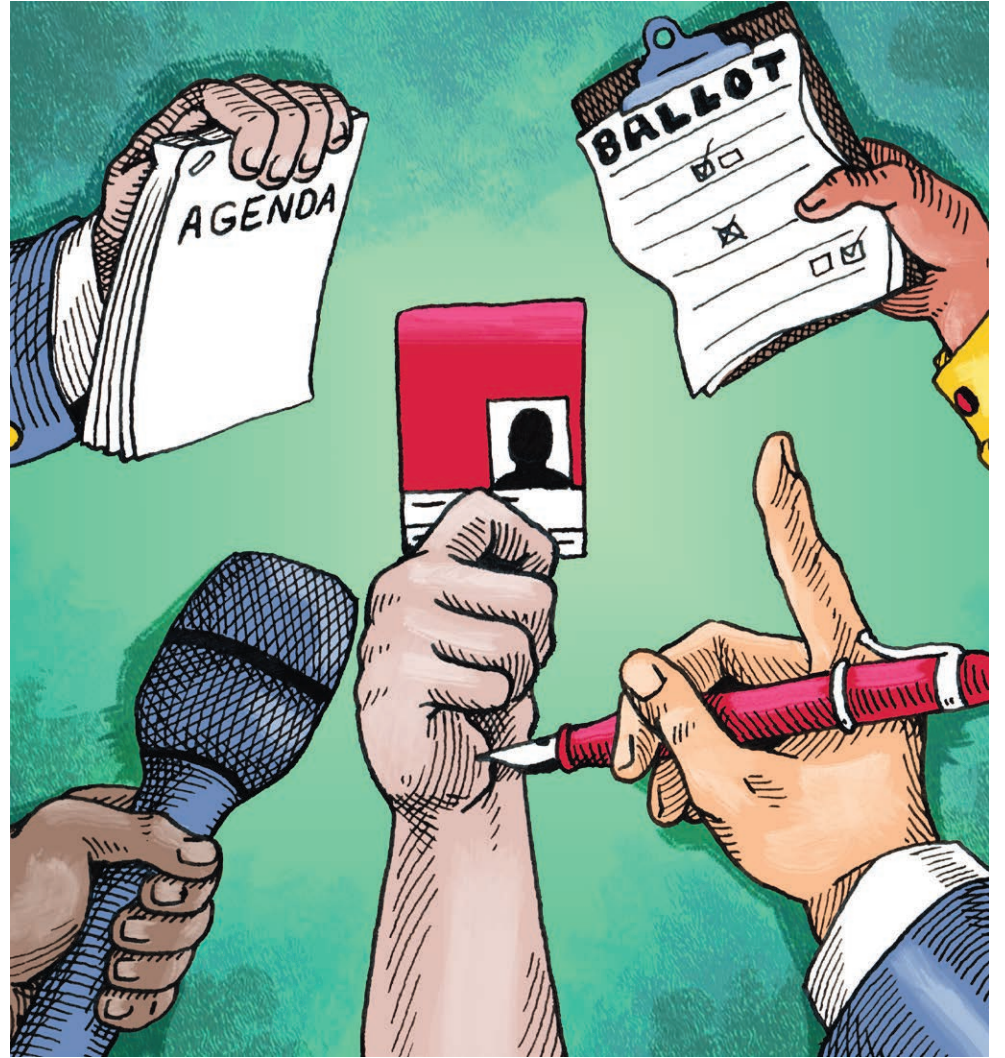
Both candidates were asked how they would address homelessness, drug use and mental illness. Hoy referenced recent personal observations of disorder downtown, including feces found outside a local bank and discarded items in residential entryways. However, no specific police cases or city-reported incidents were mentioned. Hoy stated, "We have to stop this behavior. We have to help those who need our mental health assistance and addiction services."

Nordyke agreed that enforcement is necessary but placed greater emphasis on service expansion. She mentioned the city's crisis response team and stressed the need for additional shelter capacity. "Nobody should be living on our streets. ... We need to enforce our camping ban and clean up the garbage," she said.

The candidates were also asked about the Salem-Keizer Transit District's proposed 7% employer payroll tax. Both opposed the measure. Hoy stated that the tax would place additional strain on local businesses and argued that the city has other priorities that require attention. Nordyke attested that she opposes payroll taxes that do not go to a public vote, a reference to her previous vote against the city's payroll tax in 2023.

The candidates differed in their approaches to business development. Nordyke encouraged a "buying local" initiative whilst Hoy emphasized continuity in the city's existing partnerships.

Although the debate did not include direct references to Willa-



Various hands holding civic tools, a Willamette ID card among them.

Art by ADRIAN AXTELL

mette University, several of the discussed topics affect students who live, work or commute through downtown Salem.

Staff from Willamette's Office of Civic Engagement emphasized that city decisions shape the conditions students experience off campus. "We are not a city unto ourselves," said Tommy Van Cleave, the assistant dean for civic engagement. "The policies that the mayor and the city council pass [will] impact us for sure."

Van Cleave noted that while relatively few students are registered to vote in Salem, local budget decisions still influence university programs. He pointed to the city's recent budget shortfall as an example, explaining that reductions to services such as the library, parks or City of Salem's senior center, Center 50+, would have affected ongoing partnerships between Willamette and the community. "Just because you don't vote here doesn't mean you're not consuming resources of the city or that you're not a part of it," he said.

Brooke Proctor (26), a lead catalyst for the Office of Civic Engagement, echoed that most Willamette students are not originally from Salem but highlighted the importance of Center 50+ to student learning. Center 50+ was noted as

one of the few city-run organizations students regularly work with from campus. "It's really good to connect students and seniors," Proctor said. "It strengthens students' awareness of the city as a whole."

The Office of Civic Engagement also collaborates with the League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan voter engagement organization. While the office does not register students directly, it provides guidance on absentee ballots, out-of-state registration and state-specific voting requirements. Van Cleave noted that some states require absentee ballots to be notarized, and that Willamette maintains a network of campus notaries so students can complete this step at no cost.

Both Van Cleave and Proctor emphasized that students can participate in local politics even if they are not registered to vote in Salem. Van Cleave encouraged students to attend city council meetings and follow upcoming decisions, stating, "Go to city council meetings. Know what is on their docket. Know the really important decisions that they're making."

The May 2026 primary election will determine a winner, or which candidates advance to the general election in November.



Keep up with your student government!



For Senate Meeting Minutes:

1. Scan QR Code
2. Click 'Menu' in upper right-hand corner
3. Click 'Documents'

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A closer look at WEMS, Willamette's student first responders

Maya Darski • Staff Writer

On late afternoons in Willamette, you may spot a student carrying a giant red backpack and wearing a dark blue uniform shirt. These students are a part of Willamette Emergency Medical Services (WEMS).

Every day of the week, from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m., volunteers of hard-working student first responders are ready to take on a call from a student in need of medical assistance. For any student who would like to participate in medical service work, here's what it's like to work in WEMS.

WEMS consists of a student body of responders, supervisors and executive members. All WEMS members have the certification to be emergency medical responders. Before they become a part of WEMS, they start off their journey with a week-long training program one week before school starts in either the fall or spring semester. Students are allowed to sign up as early as the spring semester of their first year. During the week, members take an EMS course led by an instructor who is a respiratory therapist and has done volunteer paramedic work, with all members completing five different skill tests and a multiple choice question at the very end. When a student officially joins WEMS, they are certified in CPR and know how to do basic life support, splint certain fractures and stop external bleeding.

Anya Olsson ('28) took the fall 2025 course and is now a responder. Her motivation to join WEMS was because she was "interested in emergency medicine but had never had any formal introduction to it." She saw that Willamette offered an EMS program on campus, which was appealing because to her, "it's accessible, and there's training that is flexible with students' schedules because [WEMS] understands that students have to go to school."

When Olsson first started her time on call, she worked as a shadow to a responder. During the shadowing stage, instead of doing any hands-on medical assistance, they take notes, write vitals and observe while accompanying their responder. Olsson shadowed for around two months until the responder got a call in November. Once a shadow gets an experience being on scene, they graduate from shadow to responder.

After experiencing being a responder, WEMS students may want to become a supervisor or an executive member within the group, like Allie Jakubaukas ('27), who is a co-director, treasurer and supervisor for WEMS. As an executive member, Jakubaukas teaches drills and does administrative tasks to keep the club running in addition to her supervisory role regarding responses.

As a supervisor, Jakubaukas attends an additional hour of training every week and is in charge of calling the responders when they receive a call from Campus Safety that medical assistance is needed. A supervisor assigns roles, such as charting, taking vitals or interacting with the patient, and also assigns equipment to WEMS members when meeting to go on call. Some of the equipment include an oxygen bag and an automated external



Anya Olsson ('24) fully fitted up in her WEMS uniform on Jan. 16, 2026 at Willamette University. Photo by SOFIE SZIGETI

"You can pretty much go about your normal day as long as you're on campus. You can still go to the library, watch a movie in your dorm, go to Goudy or sleep. We have these big black flip phones that Campus Safety calls us on; you just have to have your WEMS bag with you wherever you go." If students live off campus, they stay overnight in a bunk room in Doney when they are on call.

When WEMS students like Olsson and Jakubaukas get a call, the supervisor will call the responders on duty to set up a location to pick them up. After a call is completed, which means that the patient has signed a refusal form stating that they are comfortable with WEMS leaving, all WEMS members will head to Campus Safety where they write charts on the patient, which are stored in Bishop Wellness Center. Once supplies are cleaned and restocked, as Jakubaukas said, "we're back on service for the next call."

The WEMS team values taking care of their members just as much as their patients. Jakubaukas stated that afterward, supervisors ensure that they "debrief with the

nal defibrillator (AED).

When they're on duty, WEMS students spend their day like any other student. Jakubaukas remarked that when a WEMS member is on call,

team on what went well and how people think they did. If it was a hard call or something difficult or abnormal, we remind everyone of resources on campus."

The Devil's Advocate: Edition Five

Caelyn Ochs • Staff Writer



Art by BASIL ALLEN

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

Hello devil. How much bathroom mold is too much bathroom mold? I (21) have a sweet little bathroom except for the fact that every time I shower, I look up and see some sprays of fungi on the ceiling. Are these molds growing around my bathroom friends or foe? Do I need to worry about them? About me? What if I go to kill it and it won't let me because it's already in my brain????? ... moisture ... - Maybe a hallucination of myself?

I think you should look at this mold not as a foe but as an opportunity. Embrace it, and adopt the mindset that this is no longer your bathroom; it's the mold's. In order to best take care of your new roommate, it is important to keep the room at the ideal moisture and temperature levels for mold growth. To properly grow mold, you need to have a warm enough climate in the room while also keeping the humidity high, easy to do in a bathroom! As the mold continues to develop, you can start collecting its spores and using them to

your advantage. One route that you could take is putting these spores into your enemy's food or friends; the world is your oyster (mushroom). As you continue along this path, the mold will start to make everyone horribly sick. Having spent so much time working with and studying the mold, this is your time to come forward with a cure. You can make people do your bidding for the cure, or you could choose to be adored. The possibilities are limitless: world domination, people to wait on your every need, whatever you wish. The only thing to keep in mind is that you are also around the spores and will never know if the mold is slowly poisoning you as well, so maybe buy some hazmat gear. If you are unwilling to harness this resource for the purpose of world domination, then just summon me, and we can make a little deal.

How do you talk to someone who chronically overshares while trying to seem respectful and interested when in reality you want nothing more than to leave the conversation?- Georgia, the state

Talking to a chronic oversharer can be a tiring experience; that is why drastic methods are necessary. My suggestion is that whenever you find yourself in a conversation with this person and they begin to overshare, you need to find an emergency to whisk you away. My personal go-to immediate emergency is to act like you are getting a phone call from someone really important. First, you give a horrified look, then ask, "Oh god, how bad?" Make sure to glance a worried look in their direction at this point. Finally, ask, "How much is there?" Then go for the kill, look them dead in the eyes and say, "Do you know anyone with a glue gun? Never mind. Sorry, I've got to go," and leave. If you are asked later, "Oh no, what happened?" You have two options: either go on a long-winded, annoying, hard-to-follow story, or go with my personal favorite and say, "Sorry, I have been sworn to secrecy." As long as you stand firm, there is no need to balance a crazy story and get caught in a lie. Continue these "emergencies" whenever the person overshares. You can only use the emergency above once; if more than that, it will get suspicious, or just plain weird. The rest of these crises, you have to conjure up on your own. Consider this one on the house.

Opinion: Stranger Things Five is the series' fifth-best season

Thalia Reddall • Staff Writer



The demogorgon failed to claim enough casualties in "Stranger Things Five."
Art by BASIL ALLEN

Spoilers for *Stranger Things* Season Five below.

First things first: the Duffer Brothers knew we all thought Steve was gonna die. That wasn't slick.

I was one of the people who thought Steve was going to be the sacrificial lamb. Back in September, I wrote an article discussing how the *Stranger Things* writers were refusing to kill any relevant characters, and it was coming at the cost of the tension and the pacing. I worried that Season Five would end up bloated.

Now that it's been released, not only was Season Five bloated, it

was the weakest season by far, failing to deliver on any of the promises that the Duffer Brothers set up for it. The final episode was okay, as it managed to pull on the heartstrings like older seasons used to, but the rest of the season felt uneventful and uninspired for what was supposed to be the big finale to the series.

There are certainly some positives to the season. Most of the actors are still doing their best, and the music is on par as it usually is, both the 80s tracks used and the original score. And it was nice to see the Mind Flayer back for its glorious six minutes before being defeated. Most of the characters got a satisfying enough

ending on their own. But like many shows, and like the helicopter pilot Eleven killed in Season Four, the main plot unfortunately did not stick to the landing.

Season Four, for all its flaws, ended on an interesting promise. The Upside Down was actively leaking into Earth, setting up the expectation of a truly terrifying and perhaps even apocalyptic final season.

In the first episode of Season Five, however, it's revealed that outside of a military quarantine, Hawkins has returned to a status quo. The kids are still dealing with bullies in high school, and Steve and Jonathan are still competing for Nancy's love. And for the first episode, it isn't even really clear what the stakes are anymore, with even the protagonists not knowing whether the Upside Down poses any real threat. Danger is made clear by the end of the episode, but in a way which further crippled the season. The kidnapping of Holly Wheeler, while hinted at since the first season, resulted in an already convoluted storyline, adding a new subplot to weigh itself down.

In my first article, I critiqued the overabundance of characters. *Stranger Things* Five took this problem to a whole other level. At one point, there were roughly 20 plot-relevant characters, not counting antagonists. Not only did nobody die until the finale, but random side characters and even some entirely new faces were being thrust into the limelight and given screentime.

Between Holly, Kali, Mr. Clarke, Vickie, Karen Wheeler and

the fan favorite Derek Turnbow, a lot of valuable screentime was taken away from the characters viewers had been following for the last four seasons. Even Ted Wheeler, one of the least important characters, survived a direct confrontation with a Demogorgon.

The worldbuilding for the Upside Down was also quite messy. What was once an extremely dangerous place, with skies blotted out by flying bat-like creatures, somehow started to feel safer than the real world. The twist reveal of the Upside Down's true nature as a wormhole was genuinely interesting, but this secondary dimension did not have enough time to be fleshed out. A similar issue held back the reveal of the Mind Flayer's new form, since the monster hadn't been heard from at all for two seasons, and viewers had been led to believe that Vecna was pulling the strings the whole time.

Overall, *Stranger Things* Season Five was a disappointment. Perhaps not as much of an atrocity as Season Eight of *Game of Thrones*, though it is getting compared to that infamous season by the most outraged of fans.

I don't think it's that bad, though, if only because viewers already had three seasons with pretty satisfying endings beforehand. We didn't need Season Five, but we got it, and got to see Karen Wheeler go hand-to-hand with a Demogorgon, and a 10-year-old make a "your mom" joke to Henry Creel in the process.

Hey, maybe there's still hope for the spinoffs.

Opinion: Why are we 'bringing back 2016?'

Gimena Baez Baez • Staff Writer

Imagine the following: "Lush Life" by Zara Larsson is blasting through the car's speakers as you stick your head out of the sunroof to greet the pink and orange sunrise, the warm breeze brushing against your skin as the car rushes past rows of palm trees on an afternoon in Los Angeles. That is what the new internet trend "bring back 2016" is all about.

But what is it specifically about the year 2016 that has so many in a chokehold?

Part of it is that a majority of younger millennials and Gen Z grew up listening to music from the 2016 era and remember it as a marker of a happier time. According to the National Library of Medicine, music can trigger nostalgic feelings in the brain, which then provoke memories of listening to that song previously. Due to this, many may be misremembering what 2016 was really like and associate it with more positive emotions based on the upbeat tone of the music released at the time.

Most of today's young adults were either children or teenagers at the time and, in all likelihood, did not experience what countless TikToks are listing as the "2016 aesthetic" of exploring downtown Los Angeles as the sun sets with one's friends. Despite that lack of experience, many people still wish to "live 2026 like it's 2016" because of its positive connotations.

More likely, though, this desired switch back to 2016 has less to do with the past and more to do with the present. As the country heads into a new year, when tensions are

rising between the United States and foreign powers, the economy is worsening and hope is at an all-time low, people are flocking to the comforting nostalgia of 2016. Mostly, Gen Z teenagers and young adults are yearning for a time when responsibilities were negligible and happiness was the primary concern.

Tech advancements could be exacerbating the issue. After the rollout of ChatGPT and other LLM chatbots, the unemployment rate for college graduates has risen to 5.8%, with the most affected being those attempting to work in computer science and architecture-related occupations.

CNBC states that "a college degree is often considered the best pathway to a well-paying job, but that may no longer be as true as it once was." It is understandable that after seeing peers struggle to find a job and financially survive because of a seemingly uncontrollable beast that has weaved its way into daily life, young adults may want to escape to a time of simplicity when AI was an almost foreign concept and the iPhone 7 was the newest piece of technology one could own.

The desire to turn back to the past for comfort is not new. Many generations have lauded the past as a "greater era," with the Roaring 20s, another era of technological advancement, being a prime example. Insider tells of the explosion in capitalistic growth of the 1920s and collective yearning for the 1890s, namely their fashion. A novel named "The Gay Nineties," dedicated to illustrations of post-Civil War era fashion which "re-



You Only Live Once (but only in the year 2016).
Art by BASIL ALLEN

flect, so honestly, the costumes and customs of their dear, dead youth," circulated widely.

In the modern case, being nostalgic for a time when there were no worries is natural, especially in a time of such drastic change as the one we are currently living in. When life gets tough, everyone has something to turn to. Whether it's a comfort show, friends and family, or, in this case, a specific time period, it is only natural to seek help and safety.

Ultimately, living like it's 2016

again isn't a harmful thing. Looking back to the past can be a fun escape from global issues and bring happiness in dark times, but only as long as we simultaneously continue to live in the present. Continuing to engage in hobbies, school, work and socialization is key to a healthy life, and reminiscing should not replace living in the current era; it should supplement it. If viewing 2016 through rose-colored glasses, or filters, makes it easier to get through the year, so be it.

Opinion: The internet’s approach to accountability is ineffective

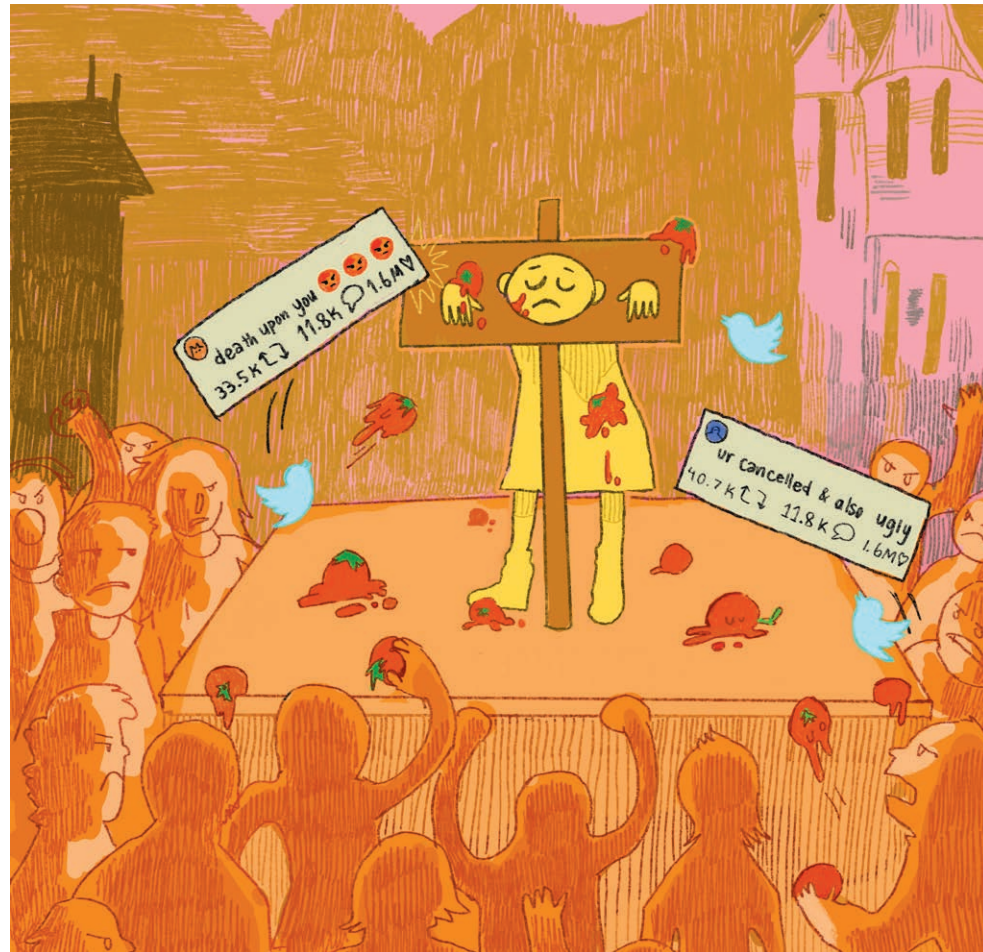
Maisy Clunies-Ross • Staff Writer

Barbara Walters is dead, so everyone is eating chicken now. Celebrity interviews have completely transformed over the past couple of years, going from structured inquiries to silly challenges or casual conversations. Celebrities promote their newest projects on internet shows like “Chicken Shop Date,” “Hot Ones” or “Call Her Daddy” to engage in relatable banter with limited pushback on potential controversies. Interviews used to be a place to get hard-hitting information, but now they primarily serve as another avenue for pure self-promotion. It seems one of the most traditional forms of public accountability is obsolete, and yet, public shaming runs rampant. Suddenly, everyone is more accountable than ever before. But if everyone is “accountable,” that really just means that no one is.

At first glance, the culture of callouts appears progressive. It’s a tool of the people. It’s an opportunity for the rich and powerful to finally be beholden to the masses. Unfortunately, this progressivism is a facade, masking the reality that it primarily serves to perpetuate a punitive notion of justice. It’s a war of attrition on the notion of accountability, masquerading as a quest on its behalf.

This culture of constant surveillance and critique hit its stride in the 2010s, thanks in part to the infamous tumblr blog “your fave is problematic.” The blog chronicles the various reasons different celebrities are problematic, from genuine hate crimes to joking about saving a laptop rather than a cat from a fire, all discussed with the same neutral tone, and by extension, the same implied level of severity. Through this lens, the specific offense becomes irrelevant, which often flattens the harm of acts of hate or violence by equating major offenses to minor ones. Nuance is rendered inconsequential, compared to the nebulous but evocative “problematic” label.

One great example of this phenomenon is infamous popstar Ariana Grande. She is not a pitiful martyr or the real concern of this piece. However, as someone in the public eye for a long time, she exemplifies many of the issues with the current state of accountability culture. Grande’s controversies range from her history of cultural appropriation, to her alleged homewrecker status, to her own health and complicity in perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards, to the undeniably iconic donut incident, where she licked a donut she had not purchased and proclaimed, “I hate



Is shame the best teacher?
Art by DASHA ALLYN

America.” Each of these instances greatly varies in severity, in cultural impact and consequence. Many of them intersect with more complex social forces, far bigger than Grande, and as such, need to be approached with nuance. Nevertheless, they are often listed as they were above, just pieces of evidence, all in service of the same case: Grande is problematic.

The blog “your fave is problematic” also positions itself as the definitive source on one’s controversial history. Posts chronicle celebrities’ every move, leading their audience to become hyper-attuned to people’s previous mistakes. Mistakes of yesterday become cannon fodder for today’s battles, making it impossible for anyone to distance their current self from their past tweets.

Unfortunately for PR teams, the methods for proving adequate growth to one’s audience are limited. While the notes app apology has become a staple of celeb and influencer culture, they are often interpreted as low-effort or insincere. Grande’s apology for her devious donut licking exemplifies this challenge. She pledged her patriotism and tried to frame her comment as an ill-stated but well-intentioned critique of child

obesity. Whether or not she was really sorry and whether or not anyone really forgave her is completely inconsequential. The moment lives on as a meme and as a masterclass in obfuscating responsibility. Many other public figures have also apologized for less trivial matters on social media and their attempts generally meet the same response.

In personal relationships, someone can make amends with a thoughtful apology and an honest conversation. Public figures don’t have this option. They don’t just have to apologize to people they hurt directly; they have to apologize to all those in their orbit who felt harmed by the idea that their parasocial best friend was a person with flaws.

When everyone is constantly on trial at the court of public opinion and apologies are ineffective, past mistakes aren’t something to be learned from. They’re something to be haunted by. This attitude limits opportunities for growth because people aren’t allowed the possibility of change. If people are defined by previous missteps, it breeds feelings of defensiveness. When people aren’t allowed to move on from their mistakes, the only way to situate them-

selves within moral righteousness is to create a new system of morality wherein their actions are acceptable. The barrage of criticism from all sides also makes it nearly impossible to distinguish between good-faith criticism and internet-poisoned gobble-dygook, guaranteeing that the only hope for peace is to drown it all out.

Further dissuading people from growth is the potential to profit from their problematic actions by reclaiming their canceled status and becoming right-wing grifters. For instance, beauty influencer Meredith Foster made a shift towards right-wing and Christian content after receiving pushback about her treatment of other creators and antiabortion and homophobic statements. Foster’s use of this strategy is not unique; many public figures of varying degrees of prominence and controversy have made the same choice. This path can be far more lucrative than trying to amend for past wrongdoings, and thus, there is little incentive to amend. There is little incentive to grow.

This isn’t intended as a conservative diatribe against “cancel culture,” nor is it an attempt to disregard the importance of holding public figures accountable. There is no disputing the fact that the actions of celebrities can have larger ramifications, and thus greater weight, than the mistakes of ordinary citizens. However, as the culture of surveillance promoted by social media turns more everyday people into victims of public ire, dismantling punitive justice becomes more important.

Ideologies which emphasize retribution for wrongdoing eliminate the possibility of growth. In this view of the world, the only triumph of good is through the punishment of evil. People are far more complicated. People can make mistakes. Celebrities can be thoughtless and cruel. They can hurt those around them. They can disappoint those who rely on them and look up to them. So can ordinary citizens.

Everyone has within them a capacity to cause pain, even violence. And yet, to a certain degree, people still deserve a chance to make amends. No one deserves forgiveness or absolution. But most people deserve a chance to try. A chance to grow. A better world will not be achieved through perfect people. It will be achieved through problematic faves. It will be achieved by messy people, recognizing their mistakes, and working to be better going forward.

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More faces, more stunts: Cheer's journey since disaffiliating from varsity sports

Virginia Vaughan • Staff Writer

In the fall of 2023, the Willamette cheer team disaffiliated from varsity sports, in part due to the university being unable to pay the insurance to be able to do certain stunts, said cheer cocaptain Brooke Busby ('27). Despite the challenges that came with disaffiliation, club leaders say the team has since found a new identity as a club by being able to do more stunts and recruit more students.

The insurance that Willamette used for its cheer athletes didn't allow for the waist of a flyer to go above the head of the base, or the person holding the other. This limited the stunts that the cheer team could perform at football and basketball games. Ultimately, it was the team's decision to become a club rather than an affiliated varsity sport, a move which allowed them to practice movements like extensions, in which the base lifts the flyer into the air above their head with a straight arm.

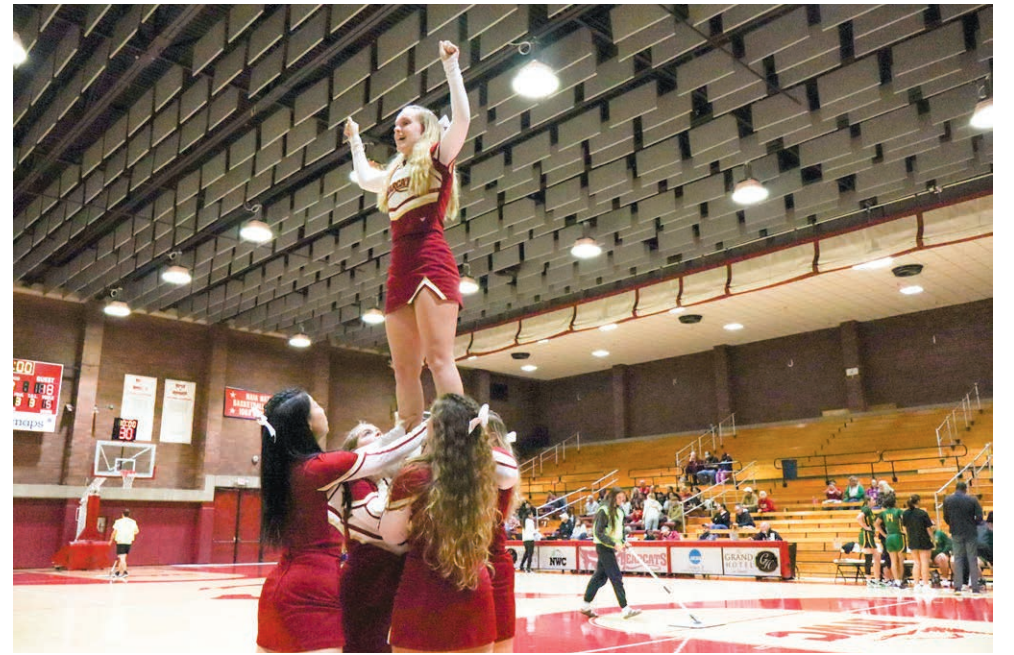
Currently, cheer finds itself mostly student-run, with cocaptains Sophia Rabbanian ('26) and Busby ('27) taking a lot of the administrative reins. Setting up the new contract that ensures the coaches are paid has become an issue this year because now that cheer is a club, their funding

comes from the Associated Students of Willamette University (ASWU). Before the switch, coach Brianna MacInnes was part of the Willamette staff, but now she relies on the ASWU funds to be paid.

Rabbanian said that other difficulties with disaffiliation have centered around communication between other sports, which is unique to cheer because their performances rely on other sporting events. Cheer is no longer a part of the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, or SAAC, which is where most of the communication about spirit wear for games is figured out. The loss of membership in this administration has made it more difficult to get the word out for themes, such as wearing gold for certain games, Rabbanian explained.

Also, recruitment was rough for the first year after disaffiliating. "We had a really old team; most people were juniors or seniors. We weren't getting as many newcomers as we were losing people for a couple years," Rabbanian said. But this year, cheer has found success in its recruitment methods: the team had 10 members in the fall 2025 semester, doubling last year's count.

The cheer team recruits largely via social media and tabling during



Willamette cheer at a Bearcat Basketball game on Nov. 23, 2024.

Photo by KEENAN YOSHIZAWA

Bearcat Days. Cocaptain Busby added, "Now that we are a club, we also have the ability to recruit current students through the club sports events and the fall activities expo." She explained that this access to other recruiting methods has been a large part of their recent success.

As a senior, Rabbanian hopes that the groundwork laid down will benefit future years and future cheer teams. "My whole time being here I've just wanted to grow the program, to continue to have a fun and close team," she said.

Willamette's skiing and snowboarding class for spring semester canceled, second year in a row

Virginia Vaughan • Staff Writer



Skiing and snowboarding in the spring 2025 class.

Art by BASIL ALLEN

For the past 12 years, psychology professor Mark Stewart has been leading a skiing and snowboarding class open to Willamette students of all levels, run through the local resort Mount Hood Meadows. But this year and last year, the course has been canceled due to low registration numbers.

Stewart said the class initially

saw 23 students register, higher than last year, but by the start of classes that number dropped to 20, not quite enough to meet the threshold needed to ensure the course had enough funding and interest to be offered.

By taking these lessons, students can earn course credit through the university. The class originated as part of a program similar to the Out-

door Program but was later turned into a course credit for Exercise and Health Science. It serves primarily as a more organized form of recreation for students who want to learn or continue snow sports and have the free time to do so, similar to the fencing and yoga courses also offered by the university.

Stewart has been teaching this course for years after he took over for the previous professor, Russ Cagle. Although Stewart didn't start the class, he said that it came about from a desire to offer Willamette students a "way to kind of get away from campus" while doing something physical such as learning to ski or snowboard.

The class isn't just for experts in skiing — or even people who have ever seen snow. For Stewart, the class is somewhat unique on Willamette's campus because of the wide variety of people who take an interest in it, like students in the college's American Studies Program and students from Hawaii who have never seen snow and have loved the experience.

The class has a cap of 32 students, but as Stewart said, "In the past, we've had years where we've gotten very close to reaching the max on a bus, which is 55." He elaborated later via email, "Each year we do our best to recruit as much as we can, but because it's a 55 passenger bus Meadows provides, we really need to get as close to 30 students as possible."

One of the biggest barriers to joining the course, and a contributing factor for why it has failed to reach its minimum threshold the previous two years, is that the course has fees that are not covered by Willamette tuition. The fees get put directly toward the Meadows program and pay for

the rental equipment, lift tickets and the bus that gets the students to and from Mount Hood.

In the past, Willamette students looking to enjoy winter activities had to take initiative themselves to get things organized, with student-run clubs similar to the Outdoor Program renting buses to travel up the mountain. But that led to semi-dangerous scenarios, wherein student drivers would have to take the northern trek in hazardous conditions like snow. The class offers a much more well-organized — and safe — way to partake in winter sports as a group.

The program is open to more than just Willamette undergraduate students. Graduate students can enroll for the skiing and snowboarding class, and although they won't get a credit for the class, they still get to enjoy the other perks of enrollment, like the discount for the rental equipment and additional expenses.

Downhill skiing and snowboarding aren't the only options. In the past, there has been interest in Nordic skiing, or cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing. Meadows also provides lessons and rentals for Nordic skiing, providing some flexibility in the type of snow sports a given student wants to pursue.

The lessons for skiers and snowboarders are provided by Meadows instructors and are available for students of every level. There are advanced levels for students who are very familiar with the snowy slopes, and there are beginner lessons for students who have never seen snow before. The lessons take up two hours of the day, and the rest is for students to enjoy themselves on the mountain.

Photojournalism: Fun-guys around campus

Jack Godsil • Staff Photographer

Fungal friends abound in a variety of climates across the world, and the Pacific Northwest is an especially ripe environment for mushrooms. Over the course of the fall semester, several species could be found budding from the soil and clinging to trees across Willamette's campus, from fairy tale fly agarics to appetizing oyster mushrooms (though be very careful consuming any mushrooms without identification experience). Many species will crop up and disappear back into the soil off and on depending on the season, so while the pictured species might not appear in the spring, there are sure to be many more to scavenge during the spring semester, for those who know where to look.

All photos taken by Jack Godsil.



A fly agaric at Meadow Lawn Golf Course on Nov. 21, 2025.



Oyster mushrooms on the Willamette University campus on Oct. 24, 2025.



Nitrous bonnet on the Willamette University campus on Nov. 16, 2025.



Warty knight on the Willamette University campus on Oct. 3, 2025.



Yellow fieldcap on the Willamette University campus on Nov. 16, 2025.



Fairy ring marasmius on the Willamette University campus on Oct. 28, 2025.

Late January Puzzle

Crossword by EZRA NELSEN

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12	13
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17				18						19				
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60						61							62	
63						64							65	

Check your answers on our website: www.willamettecollegian.com

ACROSS

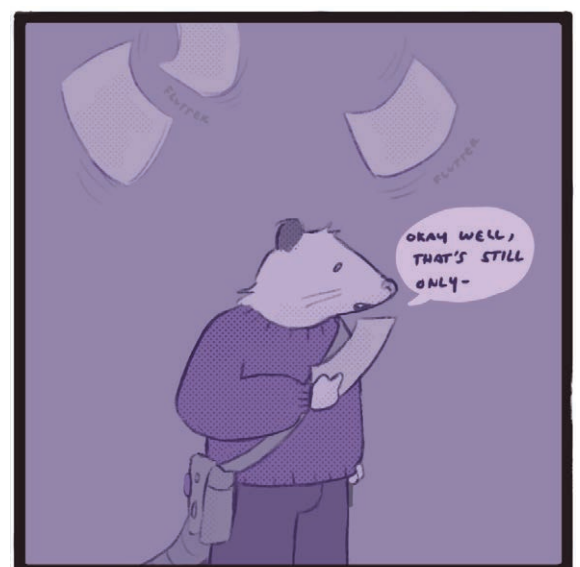
- 1 Deli bread
- 4 "Are not!" response
- 9 Many Punjabis, religiously
- 14 Clothes line?
- 15 "I want my ___!" (50s commercial slogan)
- 16 In ___ (agitated)
- 17 Baseball garment
- 18 Couch potato
- 19 Capital of Egypt
- 20 Like some founding fathers
- 23 1930s bomber
- 24 Poet Frost
- 25 African fly
- 27 Positive Hydrogen atom
- 29 Primitive eyes
- 31 The lady's
- 32 Seasoned pros
- 34 Greeting which originated during the Vietnam war
- 35 Corp. fiscal executive
- 37 Like some Xings
- 38 Hair goop
- 40 Statue, perhaps
- 43 Universal blood type, for short
- 44 Wanderers
- 45 Stirs
- 47 Bikini Bottom's "Goo ___"
- 49 Seuss turtle

- 51 "The Walking Dead" actor Steven
- 52 Clock out, and a clue to 20-across, 32-across, and 40-across
- 56 ___ Sergeant
- 58 Heartbeat
- 59 Fib
- 60 Aegean region
- 61 Excludes
- 62 Palindromic Dutch city
- 63 Helpers: Abbr.
- 64 "Hey you!"
- 65 Tennis unit

DOWN

- 1 "Under the Bridge" band, for short
- 2 12 months
- 3 "Happy Feet" characters
- 4 2014 Nintendo toys-to-life platform
- 5 Legendary sports commentator
- 6 Polk's predecessor
- 7 Like shoes you wouldn't hike in
- 8 ___ cloud (source of comets)
- 9 Capital of Cal.
- 10 Largest island of the Galapagos
- 11 Clothes making tools
- 12 Employs

- 13 Emma of "La La Land"
- 21 Drunkards
- 22 Take turns?
- 26 Some cameras
- 27 Degree held by MLK
- 28 Stack of paper
- 30 PC corner key
- 32 Empty
- 33 Understood
- 35 Santana's "Oye ___ Va?"
- 36 Swiss bread?
- 39 Some TVs
- 41 Like a bright night
- 42 Sanctuaries
- 43 Tex. neighbor
- 45 Spots to keep a watch?
- 46 Bear witness
- 47 Youngest Bennet sister in "Pride and Prejudice"
- 48 Former Houston hockey team
- 50 New York's ___ Island
- 53 Per
- 54 Assistant
- 55 2014 meme originating on Vine
- 57 ___ Vegas



When it rains, it pours.
Comic by WES MOWRY-SILVERMAN