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Willamette University faces federal funding uncertainty following new 'Dear Colleague' directive

Karmen Zhao • Staff Writer • Feb. 28

On Feb. 14, 2025, the U.S. Department of Education issued a "Dear Colleague" letter reinforcing the illegality of discrimination based on race, or national origin in educational institutions. This directive clarifies the legal standards established by the Supreme Court's 2023 decision in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, emphasizing that the use of racial preferences in college admissions is unlawful.

The letter suggests that the goal is to ban discrimination in any programs or activities that are federally funded. However, the letter claims that Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs, which often celebrate diversity through acknowledging race and national origin to create safe community spaces, would also fall under this updated definition of discrimination. "The way they are describing discrimination is extremely broad and will blunt the ability of universities to provide essential support systems and diversity programming," said Robin Maril, an assistant professor of law at the Willamette College of Law.

The Department of Education warns that colleges and universities found in violation of the policies stated in the letter will risk losing access to federal funding. It provided colleges and universities with 14 days to take action and correct any violations related to the use of race-based preferences. These laws are actively being enforced as of Feb. 28, 2025.

Maril explained that this is not the first "Dear Colleague" letter that has been issued. Within the multitude of cabinet-level departments amid the U.S. federal executive branch, each department has designated names for publicly released documents used to share information about a legislative issue. The Department of Education releases "Dear Colleague" letters that typically address educational institutions, specifically administrators, faculty and staff. This particular letter was authored by Craig Trainor, the Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights in the Department of Education.

Maril noted that "the department cannot change the law. They can just interpret it. It lets institutions know how they will be held accountable by the federal government." While the "Dear Colleague" letter and the Department of Education plays a crucial role in ensuring that educational policies are implemented correctly and to the stated standards, any changes to the law itself must come from the legislative branch. Maril clarified that any attempts to alter pre-existing laws would require a formal legislative process, not solely an executive action.

Despite the uncertainty that comes with the letter's ambiguous language, Patty Hoban, Willamette's director of financial aid, reassured that "just in reading that 'Dear Colleague' letter and looking at [the university's] policies and practices, we're not who they're initially targeting." Hoban estimated that in the 2023-24 school year, over \$70 million of financial aid



The Renjen Center on the Salem campus of Willamette University, March 4, 2025.
Photo by MAC CHILDERS

support that students received was directly from Willamette's own financial reserve, with \$5 million from federal grant funding for students. The money from Willamette supplies students with a number of large scholarships, including merit scholarships, such as the Trustees or Presidential scholarships. Additionally, Willamette's large endowment provides further funding for students.

Regarding the federal funding that students at Willamette receive as financial aid, Hoban clarified that the main federal grants that students receive are the Pell Grant and the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG), along with some grants that come in smaller packages. The amount of money received in a Pell Grant is determined when a student files for FAFSA and is granted to students with "exceptional financial need," according to the office of Federal Student Aid. The maximum Pell Grant awarded for a single student for the 2024-25 school year was \$7,395.

With 20-25% of Willamette students receiving Pell and SEOG grants, Hoban puts into perspective what could happen if all federal grants were eliminated from Willamette's federal funding. "The \$70 million that [Willamette is] spending on our students will be safe. We will have to work with individuals to see what we can do to help them in place of their [lost federal] funding." For students concerned about the elimination of federal student loans, Hoban notes that there are lenders who provide private student loans. However, she expressed that if the federal government were to accomplish defunding schools due to their DEI programs, "the whole landscape of higher education would change."

Should federal student aid be affected, there is currently no announced backup for the university to take action as of now. Hoban expressed that when looking at the letter, "we're not out of compliance with

what they're stating there, at least as it's written, so we're feeling okay about that."

With frequent adjustments to the regulations of the Department of Education, it is becoming increasingly difficult to anticipate how changes will impact federal financial aid packages. However, Hoban stated, "I am reasonably confident that the financial aid awards we offer to students for the remainder of 2024-25 and will offer for 2025-26 will be accurate and reliable."

Unsure of how future policy shifts might affect financial planning regarding Willamette's federal funding status being dependent on DEI programs, Hoban articulated, "I think we all just need to stay as calm as we can and not project too far into the future." With universities and colleges throughout the entire nation uncertain of what the Department of Education or federal government will deliver next, Hoban stressed that "this may not seem to be a problem for us [right now], but tomorrow, something else can come out."

Maril addressed a choice that educational institutions could have as a response to the letter, noting that it is completely up to the institution as to whether or not a school decides to keep their DEI programs or remove them. However, for schools that choose to keep DEI programs instead, Maril stated that "they would need to go ahead and prepare to be completely lobbied against."

Per an article published on Willamette Week, it outlined that university leadership throughout the state of Oregon are currently discussing future plans and their action in response to the "Dear Colleague" letter. Oregon universities are responding to the government's threats to remove federal funding, with both Portland State University and Oregon State University believing that their programs and curricula are compliant to the law. However, Lewis & Clark

expressed that they are currently conversing about the consequences behind these new legal challenges. All universities are actively monitoring new federal guidelines that could be released.

In regards to how Willamette leadership is actively considering the implications of "Dear Colleague," Vice President for Student Affairs Lisa Landreman stated via email, "[We] are all still awaiting additional guidance before I could comment any further on what the Dear Colleague letter will mean for us at Willamette. Similar to our colleagues at other universities we are carefully considering the letter and are in conversations with professionals across the country."

Landreman reassured that the goal of Willamette leadership "is to ensure that we continue to ensure that students can be successful at Willamette and feel welcomed and affirmed both in and out of the classroom."

For any individuals who are concerned about their financial circumstances, Hoban recommended paying the university's financial aid office a visit on the first floor of Waller Hall to review what types of funding they are receiving and what possible solutions exist should any aid be in jeopardy due to the "Dear Colleague" letter.

In providing additional information about the letter, the Department of Education released a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document on March 1, 2025 in line with the release of the "Dear Colleague" letter. The Department of Education website concluded that "the ['Dear Colleague' letter] promised that additional guidance would be forthcoming. ... This FAQ document will be updated periodically as questions arise."

This is a developing story, and this information is subject to change as further guidance is released. Further coverage will be released both in print and online as the story develops.

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'Know Your Rights' information session opens conversation about student support under Trump immigration policies

Amelia Hare • Staff Writer • Feb. 12

On Feb. 6, two immigration professors, Beth Zilberman and Sarah Purce, spoke at a "Know Your Rights" information session for those in the Salem community impacted by anti-immigration policies under the second Trump administration.

While Willamette staff and faculty are supporting students through immigration processes, there are also steps students can take to be an ally to impacted students and members of the broader Salem area affected by the current presidential administration. The "Know Your Rights" session addressed a part of the larger issue of clarifying the university's ability to support students during the second Trump administration, along with his current immigration policies.

The speakers emphasized that the session was not legal advice before presenting information about current policies, what to do when speaking to the U.S. Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE), and ways to prepare in case of detention. This comes as Donald Trump promises a crack-down on immigration, a sealing of the border, and an investigation of law officials that do not comply with an immigration crackdown agenda. The speakers also provided context to Oregon's role as a state during the administration due to its status as a sanctuary state. By law, being a sanctuary state means that state and local officials cannot enforce federal immigration laws without an order signed by a judge.

Emilio Solano, the organizer of the event and the assistant provost for institutional equity and community engagement, assured that Willamette "takes an individual approach" to the support of its undocumented

and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) students. Solano is a liaison to students without documentation and DACA recipients. Solano works in close collaboration with those directly connected to community members who are affected and with students to provide support and resources. He also organizes events such as the "Know Your Rights" information session. In his role, Solano noted that "the question we've always asked ourselves is, 'How do we support students that are directly impacted by this?'"

The university website provides additional information about the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), know your rights information, and counseling services that can be accessed. The website is intended for Willamette students and impacted university community members.

Under FERPA, which applies to all universities that receive federal funding, Willamette cannot share academic records and information with anyone not affiliated with the university unless they have a judicial warrant. A judicial warrant is a warrant that is signed by either a judge or a magistrate. These student records include class schedules, grades, housing and more. It is federal law to keep these academic documents for students private. "It's about truly protecting all students," Solano said.

Along with faculty support, there is student community support available on campus. The Pro-Immigrant Rights Student Union (PIRSU) is a club on campus that focuses on two missions: productive education for allyship and working to create an inclusive society. Samantha Nesta-Arteaga ('25), club president,



Professor Sarah Purce (right) and professor Beth Zilberman (left) speak at the "Know Your Rights" lecture in the John C. Paulus Great Hall in the Truman Wesley Collins Legal Center on Feb. 6, 2025. Professor Purce is also the Director of the Portland Immigration Initiative.

Photo by KEENAN YOSHIZAWA

emphasized the importance of student involvement in organization on campus. "It is important now [more] than ever to be a proactive ally," Nesta-Arteaga stated. Along with student support on campus, Nesta-Arteaga noted that PIRSU is also focusing on "getting immediate information out to the Salem community."

Immigration policies are constantly changing — and potentially confusing. Solano and Nesta-Arteaga emphasized how critical the spread of trusted information is throughout the length of the Trump administration. "There's so much news, and it's so overwhelming," Solano said, which he explained was another motivator to hold an event like "Know Your

Rights." While the information shared at the session is not technically legal advice, it can be critical for those impacted by these immigration policy changes.

While faculty and staff members, such as Solano, are keeping an eye on immigration policies, students on campus now have an opportunity to "highlight how people can be allies," according to Nesta-Arteaga, by joining organizations such as PIRSU and supporting impacted students. While policies can be confusing, sharing accurate information can help keep community members safe.

Una versión en español de este artículo está disponible en nuestro sitio web.

Atkinson Graduate School of Management transitions into new permanent space in Kaneko

Amelia Hare • Staff Writer • Feb. 7

The Atkinson Graduate School of Management (AGSM) has moved to Kaneko this semester, its classrooms now located where the Tokyo International University of America (TIUA) used to hold classes. AGSM used to occupy the Annex, shared with the Exercise and Health Sciences program, as well as the Mudd Building. However, AGSM desired its programs to be under the

same roof, which prompted the transition to Kaneko.

This official transition occurred at the beginning of the spring semester of 2025 and, while in the middle of the academic year, presented an important, fleeting opportunity for AGSM, moving quickly for the lease to the TIUA classrooms. For many, the benefit of the school finally being unified outweighed the nega-

tive setback of the mid-year move.

According to Anne Gallagher, the associate vice president for budget and facilities, planning for the relocation project began during the spring semester of 2024. "You have to be quite efficient when planning," she said. Gallagher worked with facilities and former Dean of AGSM Örn Bodvarsson to budget the project throughout the year. Kaneko seemed like a good fit, with AGSM students "all under one roof," Gallagher emphasized. "I would characterize the move as going quite smoothly."

While AGSM is credited with being the #1 business school in Oregon and second in the Pacific Northwest, students at AGSM have felt the impact of being housed exclusively in the Mudd Building, to splitting between the Annex and Mudd, and now to their forever home of the Kaneko classrooms, all in the past couple of years. "We kind of got kicked around twice," MBA student Saida Seelig ('26) explained. They added, "It doesn't feel like we've settled in yet, as a cohort."

Ashley Nixon, who is an associate dean of academic affairs at AGSM, said that the "move is ongoing." Facilities is still working to adjust the temperature throughout the building, along with working to outfit the building with charging towers in classrooms. As Seelig observed,

students are also still adjusting, considering the move was recent. A new building means new routines for students, such as finding new places to park and routes to find classes.

Seelig claimed that they felt "the project was very rushed" due to AGSM students not being notified of this move until the summer before the fall semester of 2024. "The classrooms are still very much bare bones," Seelig said. This may improve as professors make the space their own. Seelig also noted, "I'm taking four classes, and three of them are in the same room."

The new AGSM school may take some time to feel like home, but the move has not seemed to inhibit learning in any sense. Nixon added that AGSM being under one roof with faculty and students "has the benefit of helping strengthen our community."

Nixon said that "we [AGSM] have a multiple year lease with TIU," which means the AGSM has no plan of moving in the near future. Gallagher also credited her team for working relentlessly on the project, claiming, "Everyone pitched in and did a great job of getting things settled in." This move gives AGSM the chance to focus on community building in the shared space of Kaneko, with offices and classrooms situated close together.



An empty lecture hall in the Kaneko building on Jan. 30, 2025.

Photo by PATRICIA KREPEL

Infinity Room's future unclear following announcement of closure

Karmen Zhao • Staff Writer • Feb. 28

The Infinity Room, a popular performance venue in the heart of downtown Salem, has announced its final day of operations as June 21, 2025 via its Instagram page. However, this closure could be revoked if "someone [was] interested in buying and continuing the business before the official closing date," according to an article by the Statesman Journal.

Known for its eclectic mix of music, comedy and drag shows, the Infinity Room has become a staple location for local and visiting performing artists who have looked to join downtown Salem's art scene. As one of

the few establishments that remains open for entertainment later into the night and contains a fully vegan menu and bar, the business became known as a late-night hangout location for Salem locals and Willamette University students. Events and its variable opening hours can be found on its website.

Emma Jonas ('15), a Willamette alum and co-owner of the Infinity Room since April 2022, noted some of the reasons behind the closure announcement. With financial burdens becoming heavier over the years, "running a business is very taxing," Jonas stated. "Rent is increasing,

utilities are increasing, but pay is not increasing, so we can't rely as much on people having the extra income to spend money on their day off as frequently."

Jonas also explained the origins of the Infinity Room, which opened as a merger of the businesses Capital City Theater and The Space Concert Club. The Infinity Room continually hosts bands and comedy shows, attracting audience members with well-known performers such as MC Chris, The Dry County Crooks and Eddie Pepitone.

Along with showcasing a variety of comedy and music artists from different genres and backgrounds, drag shows have allowed the Infinity Room to generate a community driven by diversity and inclusion. Leading drag queen RiRi Caliente hosts and books shows with other local and traveling queens to schedule appearances and performances at the Infinity Room.

The Infinity Room's versatility as a space for creativity and acceptance also created an open environment for Willamette to host the colloquium "Improv: Making Something From Nothing." For the past two years, the colloquium concluded its semester with a final improv show at the Infinity Room. Expressed on Willamette's colloquium course offerings website, the program is taught by chemistry professor Chuck Williamson, where the course description states, "No experience in improv or other theater is necessary to join this class — just a willingness to be bold, take a risk, and have fun supporting your fellow improvisers."

Trevor Bailey ('27), a defensive lineman on Willamette's football team and a business major, participat-

ed in Williamson's improv colloquium during his freshman year. "Improv is being able to unleash that childhood nature of just playing and doing that with adult intelligence. It's just so much fun," Bailey recalled.

"I think that was the moment I realized I wanted to be on a stage," Bailey said. Shortly after discovering his enjoyment of the craft, Bailey began standup comedy performances and found work in the Infinity Room's all-vegan restaurant. Though his focus has shifted since then toward music production, Bailey has found the opportunity to weave his comedy bits into his new album, "A Costco Manifesto." In describing the colloquium to rising first years, he emphasized that "it changes your mindset as a person through focusing less on yourself and focusing more on other people, making you much more loving and accepting of others."

With the Infinity Room moving toward its potential closure, Jonas is hopeful that the establishment will be purchased and run under new management. "We would sell them everything that's under our ownership, including all the equipment," Jonas explained. New owners would also be paying for the expertise of Jonas and her team, as they will offer to fully train incoming employees and provide them with all the materials they need to run the Infinity Room.

The uncertainty of whether the Infinity Room will remain open or not will be announced as the summer months begin. "My hope is just that people will take advantage of it while it's still there, with Monday night improv classes, open-mic Wednesdays and comedy shows on the weekends," Bailey stated.



Sign and entrance to the Infinity Room, located at 210 Liberty St. SE #150 in Salem, Oregon, on Feb. 18, 2025. Photo by IRIS MCCLURE

RA, CA and OD leaders: A close look at leadership on campus

Violeta Basenko • Staff Writer • Feb. 17

As first-year students, transitioning to college life can be exciting and stressful. Living independently, leaving behind close friends, family and beloved pets at home, and stepping into an unfamiliar environment can feel daunting. However, to ease this transitioning process, students receive support from Resident Advisors (RAs), Colloquium Associates (CAs) and Opening Days (OD) Leaders. Each year — with 2025-26 applications having just finished — students have the opportunity to apply for RA, CA and OD leader positions, but each of them has its own unique responsibilities and requirements.

The first people to welcome new students on campus are OD Leaders. Their main responsibilities include guiding first-year students, helping them settle into their rooms, and supporting them during their first week. Each first year is placed in a small group led by an OD Leader, who organizes activities, gives presentations, and ensures students attend scheduled events.

"The training at first was a lot of hours, but after that, it was mostly just hanging out with students, which was fun," shared Cassie Thomas ('27), an OD Leader in 2024. "It wasn't too much actual work, and the training was really helpful." She not-

ed that the biggest time commitment was arriving early for training, but during Opening Days, the role mainly involved helping students settle in a new place. Despite the time investment, Cassie found the experience rewarding, adding that OD Leaders earn about \$500, though the experience itself was more valuable to her.

At the start of college, every first year takes a college colloquium course, which begins a week before regular classes. Some courses remain the same every year, but they also change as professors choose other topics to teach. A college Colloquium Associate is a position that keeps students engaged in academics and helps them develop their teaching and organizational skills. CAs' responsibilities include supporting faculty with course planning and materials and helping students with assignments, research and group work. They also serve as mentors to students, navigating them through academic plans, career advice or personal development.

The CA hiring process consists of two steps: an application form and an interview. While prior discussions with a professor aren't required before applying, it's worth considering which faculty members you'd be excited to collaborate with. "You apply generally, just expressing interest. During the interview, they ask if



An RA, Opening Days Leader, and a CA walking on campus. Art by ALYSSA DIGGDON

there's a professor you'd like to work with," explained Aidan Sowder-Sinor ('27), a 2024 Colloquium Associate for the colloquium "Putin's Wars." His process was smoother since he had a professor Sarah Bishop who wanted to work with him. However, the role

isn't without challenges. "It's a time commitment — it's real work, not something simple or easy. You never know what will come up during the semester, but you have to be ready for it," Sowder-Sinor emphasized. (continued on next page)

People who become long-term support during the academic year are RAs. Applications for this position typically open at the end of October and close by mid-November. It can be highly competitive, and this year, only one new RA was hired. One of the most attractive perks of being an RA is receiving a free single room and meal plan. The main duties include two hours of staff meetings and two hours of community service each week, along with an additional roughly two hours for planning and attending monthly events. RAs also have duty shifts, or times they are on-call for things such as lockouts and emergencies. RAs are on duty around once per week, and duty shifts run from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. on weeknights and 24-hour shifts from 5 p.m. to 5 p.m. on weekend nights.

“My employer told me after the interview, ‘We can teach people how to be an RA, but we can’t teach them how to be a good person, how

to genuinely care for others,’” said Christina Wesel (’27), RA of Terra House. Beyond organizational skills, it’s essential to have a genuine willingness to care for others and a desire to help, especially if you enjoy being someone others can rely on. Wesel shared that she applied for the position because she could personally relate to the experiences of those she would be helping: “I had just gone through it the year before, and I wanted to support others going through that transition.” She highlighted that first-year students often face challenges, such as adjusting to a new environment, dealing with anxiety, meeting new people, and being away from family for the first time.

For students looking for a way to be more involved on campus, develop leadership skills, and make a real difference in the lives of fellow students, roles like Opening Days Leader, Colloquium Associate or Resident Advisor may be a good fit.

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Leadership, community and growth: Inside Willamette’s Greek life

Violeta Basenko • Staff Writer • Dec. 12

Among the many clubs and organizations at Willamette University, students might be interested in Greek life, communities that are divided into fraternities and sororities. Greek life organizations aim to offer lifelong friendships, leadership opportunities, networking, philanthropic engagement, academic support and a strong sense of belonging. However, many students may not be aware of their existence or fully understand how they function at Willamette, what the recruitment processes look like, and what values they share.

At Willamette University, students looking to be a part of Greek life can join sororities Alpha Chi or Alpha Phi or fraternities Kappa Sigma Theta-Delta or Sigma Chi. Greek life typically uses the term “chapter” to refer to a specific local group of a fraternity or sorority. The costs for attending one of these chapters are \$524, \$589, \$450, and \$650, respectively. This money goes to international annual dues including training, webinars and member communication. It also supports chapter activities, such as

sisterhood and brotherhood events, social activities and recruitments. Not all students can afford to pay these funds, but all groups provide installment plans and scholarships, so that finances will not be a burden for anyone. New members must attend one of the recruitment events held by Greek life organizations. Typically, at such events, prospective members interact with current members, demonstrating their characteristics and personalities. Another common requirement for every chapter is a GPA of 2.5.

Nationally, college fraternities and sororities often face criticism for issues like hazing, partying, sexual assault, racism and homophobia, which can contribute to students’ reluctance to join. Looking back, some members of the Willamette community may recall an incident on campus in 2013 in which screenshotted conversations between members of the Sigma Chi fraternity containing sexist and vulgar commentary about students, faculty and recruitment practices made national news. Responses included the expulsion of 12 students from

the fraternity and a suspension of the fraternity by the university. However, over ten years since this incident, Sigma Chi has taken steps to foster a more responsible and values-driven environment. “We now use that example in our full-fledged education of what not to do, and not just in the sense of not letting anyone see it, but in avoiding such behavior at all,” said Harrison Beattie (’26), the president of Sigma Chi. “Our education now focuses more on leadership and values, and that incident serves as a counter-example.”

Joel Garcia-Pena (’26), the president of Kappa Sigma Theta-Delta, emphasized the fraternity’s commitment to accountability and education. “There are a lot of lectures that we go through and training mandated from the national body. We also get posters that we are required to put up in our household, including anti-hazing policy posters and a hotline number for students to call in case they witness this type of behavior,” he said. With these reforms, fraternities at Willamette strive to create a space where every participant feels safe, informed and supported.

Across the board, all chapters are actively involved in philanthropy. For example, Alpha Phi, apart from weekly chapter meetings, hosts something called Heart Health Week, which aims to raise money for women’s heart health research. “Red Dress” is one of the events organized during that week, which is open to the whole Willamette community. To raise money, hosts sell tickets for the gala concert with dance, food, snacks, soda and water served there for no extra charge. “We also organize Mock Rock, where all of fraternity and sorority life comes

together to raise money for the Marion Polk Food Share,” said Laura Cady (’26), the president of Alpha Phi. “It’s an amazing way to support a great mission and have fun at the same time.”

Being a member of a Greek life community also provides opportunities to receive scholarships to travel across the states and meet members of different sororities and fraternities from various colleges. Many Greek organizations offer scholarships for academic achievements, leadership development and community service. These can include funding for educational programs and conferences or even study-abroad opportunities. “Kappa Sigma Theta-Delta is the largest organization in terms of fraternities across the world. I’ve had the opportunity to travel to places like New Orleans, Charlottesville, Virginia, Las Vegas and various parts of Oregon — all funded by Kappa Sigma Theta-Delta,” commented Garcia-Pena. These trips serve as an opportunity to attend meetings, workshops and leadership training.

Among the advantages of traveling and participating in charity events, the sense of community in Greek Life is also worth highlighting. By joining a sorority or fraternity, members receive a valuable resource: support and help when they need it most. “Having people around you, especially when it comes to men’s mental health, which often doesn’t get enough attention, is very important,” commented Beattie. “It’s nice to have a space where we can talk about our feelings and what’s going on in our lives, beyond just the organization itself, and know that we’re surrounded by people who trust and care for us.” Most events organized by Greek life organizations are aimed at uniting and strengthening friendships.

While national perceptions of Greek life and past challenges may have shaped the way these organizations are seen on campus, Willamette’s chapters now value a commitment to growth, accountability and inclusivity. Whether through philanthropy, academic achievements or simply fostering friendships, fraternities and sororities continue to be a meaningful part of campus life. For students looking to get involved, Greek life can be a rewarding experience that extends far beyond college, building a network that lasts a lifetime.



The Alpha Phi sorority house at 880 Mill St. SE.
Photo by KEENAN YOSHIZAWA

Opinion: The transfem loneliness epidemic: What is it, what causes it, and how can we deal with it?

Thalia Reddall • Staff Writer • Feb. 26

Members of the LGBTQ+ community have always faced isolation due to discrimination, and the United States is in a particularly precarious time in this regard. While all queer identities face unique challenges, there are particularly problematic conditions that lead trans women and transfeminine non-binary people into a self-inflicted solitude. A unique combination of social and psychological conditions makes it difficult for many transfeminine people to get the support they need, including within the Willamette community.

Social anxiety is more of a problem than ever in the age of the internet, especially when dealing with the opposite sex, but it must be acknowledged cis men and cis women experience two very different kinds of social anxiety. While cis men often fear being perceived as dangerous, creepy, obsessed with sex, or generally coming off as one of “those” men, cis women often fear actual violence and abuse, whether it is physical, verbal or sexual. Transgender women face both of these anxieties simultaneously, the degree of each depending on how far they are in their transition. Should college transfems be lucky enough to be on hormone replacement therapy (HRT) by their sophomore year, they are put in the worst of both worlds during one of the most hectic periods of their lives.

To leave one’s dorm while presenting masculine is to leave the dorm wearing a metaphorical mask, one that disconnects you from the people around you and makes conversations feel awkward, fake and generally pointless. To leave one’s dorm

presenting feminine is to receive the worst of both worlds, treated with the same mistrust as a cis man while facing the same level of danger as a cis woman. Or at least that’s how it can feel.

Out of all the places in the world, one would think a progressive-leaning university would be a place where members of this isolated population can find their people. But colleges, especially smaller colleges like Willamette, tend to be somewhat cliquy in nature, and transgender women don’t really fit in most of these cliques. Most isolating is the athletic side of the campus, where extroversion and hypermasculinity are largely the norm and queer identities are often treated like jokes, even by those who aren’t consciously homophobic.

On the other end, woman-dominated spaces tend to be even more intimidating for trans women. These feelings partially stem from the constant transphobic rhetoric about trans women supposedly trying to “infiltrate” these spaces for malicious purposes, and partially from the perpetual dysphoria and “otherness” it can cause when a trans woman realizes just how far “behind” she is compared to others in terms of knowledge in makeup, variety in clothing and other factors. Even more queer-friendly communities on campus seem to have very few transfeminine people, with much of the queer presence being cis gay people or transmasculine people.

The million-dollar question is whether this isolation college trans women feel is the fault of these communities for not being adequately supportive enough. The fact of the matter is that while a lot of conscious



An isolated student sits by herself.
Art by WES MOWRY-SILVERMAN

and subconscious discrimination against trans women exists, this same discrimination exists against other marginalized groups who still tend to have an easier time finding close friends and communities. Many of the aforementioned factors keeping trans women stuck inside their dorms aren’t a product of these communities actively trying to keep trans women out, but rather a product of social anxiety, learned helplessness and self-inflicted seclusion on the part of trans women themselves. This isn’t their fault — it is a product of a viciously transphobic and patriarchal society on a micro and macro scale, conditioning trans women to put up walls and keep secrets and avoid strangers. But there is only so much other communities can do to try to make trans women comfortable and sociable. Some effort has to be on trans women — perhaps an unfair amount of effort, considering their uniquely challenging circumstances, which compound on and exemplify the same problems faced by every other young adult. But all we can do in the face of injustice is do whatever we can to mitigate it.

So what can be done to mitigate it? Well, on the part of non-transfems, simply properly gendering us does a lot. For one, while generally you shouldn’t assume genders and it’s rarely a bad thing to ask someone’s pronouns, it’s definitely a good idea to double-check if the person has

long scalp hair paired with little to no facial hair.

And do not, under any circumstances, compare them to Kurt Cobain, David Bowie, or some other rock star with long hair. We have heard it before.

As for transgender women, and really anyone in a similar situation, you have to force yourself to get out of your dorms. Stay on top of your transition, and don’t let helplessness set in. Most importantly, GO TO CLUBS. TEXT PEOPLE BACK. MEET UP WITH FRIENDS. Do not make excuses to keep yourself locked inside like Rapunzel. There are people who hate you, and there are people who fear you, but they are a vocal minority. Your identity’s validity is not predicated on anyone else’s perception of you. Don’t let anyone or anything convince you otherwise.

The future is terrifying, and the present is a slow crawl to a theoretical finish line. In the modern age, especially for college students, it’s easier than ever to trap yourself in a prison of your own making ... and it’s easy to forget what makes it all worth it. Making new friends and hanging out with close friends are the best ways to remind yourself. Most importantly, it’s important to be kind to ourselves, and remind ourselves that it’s not our fault we’re scared.

It isn’t our fault, but it is our responsibility.

STAFF PICKS

Compiled by Priya Thoren • Opinions Editor

Topic: Favorite restaurant in Salem

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed are from the individual staff members and do not reflect the perspective of The Collegian as a whole. The submissions are unedited and unaltered from what was submitted by individual staff members.

The Pick: Al-Aqsa

Submitted by: Rohan Srinivasa Babu, Business Manager

Staff Comment: Really good Mediterranean restaurant located a block away from campus.

The Pick: 503 Sushi

Submitted by: Patricia Krepel, Staff Photographer

Staff Comment: Such a cute environment and lookout to the streets, and decent sushi for the price.

The Pick: Marco’s Place taqueria

Submitted by: Basil Allen, Staff Artist

Staff Comment: Small business with delicious Mexican food.

The Pick: Taproot

Submitted by: Eleanor Hu, Editor-in-Chief

Staff Comment: There’s a variety of vegan options, the atmosphere is great, and they’re open late.

The Pick: Happy Bibimbap House

Submitted by: Priya Thoren, Opinions Editor

Staff Comment: The best Korean comfort food and the kindest staff!

The Pick: Happy Bibimbap House

Submitted by: Maya Darski, Lifestyles Writer

Staff Comment: I especially like the beef bulgogi and they give freebie food too!

The Pick: Happy Bibimbap House

Submitted by: Devyn McMillen, Digital Media Manager

Staff Comment: The people who work there are so sweet and they give you free appetizers and fruit at the end of each meal! Best sushi in Salem too :)

Read the "Fast Break," Willamette's premier university athletics column ... or else. New issues Tuesday mornings.

SCAN ME

[HTTPS://WWW.WILLAMETTECOLLEGIAN.COM/SPORTS](https://www.willamettecollegian.com/sports)

Willamette Basketball Club embarks on first-ever regional venture, meets tough competition

Catie Mohr • Staff Writer • Feb. 27



The Willamette Basketball Club women's squad poses after their scrimmage at home against UO Club Basketball on Feb. 9.

Photo courtesy of Karina Akre

Last weekend, the Willamette Basketball Club took on opponents from powerhouse schools such as ASU and U of A in Phoenix, Arizona, as a part of the National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association's (NIRSA) Western Regional Tournament. For the club's exec team, going to a national tournament didn't

even seem like a possibility last semester.

The club, started by alumni Joaquin Ocaña ('24) and Maxwell Fontaine ('24) in the spring of 2023, has seen a surge in consistent turnout since they moved their practices to Mondays and Thursdays at the beginning of this spring semester. Accord-

ing to Ocaña, who has been hired as the club's official coach since graduating, they have around 19 total members going to Arizona — 11 for the men's team, 8 for the women's — with this number not reflecting the total regular turnout they get at practices.

This roster represents a vast improvement from where they were last semester: "Last year, we only had around four or five people," said Malachi Washington ('25), the current co-president. When asked about the club's popularity, Washington said, "We're pretty inclusive, so like we encourage all skill levels. There's a lot of people here who are still learning how to play basketball." Along with novices to the game, the club has drawn some of its membership from former Willamette varsity players such as Ava Kitchin (MBA '25) and Carolyn Ho ('25).

A cross-state travel tournament hadn't always been on the club's radar. "Malachi brought it up sometime around November, and initially we were like, 'No way. No way we can make this happen,'" said Ocaña. But as they began to do some investigating, the club's exec team found that there was more precedent than they'd anticipated for club sports traveling. "We looked at [previous funding requests from other clubs] just to get an idea of what was feasible. ... We were

like, 'Okay, if we budget ... it might be doable,'" said Ocaña.

According to Ocaña, the final price tag ended up being around \$9,000, with the participants having to front some of the costs themselves for flights. That number covers everything the club might need, with hotels, registration, jerseys and transportation forming the bulk of the expenses.

Prior to the tournament, Ocaña explained, "As a coach, I feel a little like, I don't wanna say [I'm] nervous, but [the tournament's] gonna be eye-opening and pretty hard." Regardless of their nerves, Ocaña and Washington are focused simply on getting better. "I think that's kinda the biggest reason we went through with it, because regardless of how good we are, maybe one day Willamette can, as a club team, really compete in tournaments like [this one]," said Ocaña.

The tournament, hosted by Grand Canyon University, started Friday, Feb. 28, and went through Sunday night. The women's squad took staggering losses at the hands of the Arizona State University's club (12-89), Cal Poly Pomona's club (11-73) and Grand Canyon University's (GCU) "Gold" club (17-79). The men fared slightly better, losing to University of Arizona Neighbors (44-64), GCU National (38-83) and GCU 4 (35-56).

Ciatti joins swim's record-breaker's club as Hornbeck, Lindberg retire

Kat Thornton, Staff Writer, & Skeet Starr, Sports & Rec Editor • March 1

Entering the 2025 NWC Swim Championships on Feb. 16, the only active school record holders, Cole Lindberg (MBA '25) and Anna Hornbeck ('25), were set for their last-ever meet in Bearcat gold. However, it was sophomore Tessa Ciatti who continued their legacy, cracking the 100 and 200 butterfly records (with times of 57.83 and 2:10.82 seconds, respectively) in a single contest.

The 100 butterfly record, which Ciatti broke by almost a full second, was last set in 2018. The 200 butterfly record had been standing since 1994. Ciatti recalled, "I [wear] glasses and I don't swim with them on. It takes me a second to focus on the board. When I realized [I'd broken the first record], my mouth dropped." Overall, the women's squad landed a No. 5 championship finish, up from No. 6 last season.

Ciatti hails from the Bellingham Bay Swim Club, which she describes as "kind of a butterfly powerhouse." She readily admits she was not the fastest butterflyer on her club team growing up and often branched into other events as a way to stand out. Now, she says that versatility has helped her in her secondary role as a "utility swimmer" for the 'Cats. "I [sometimes] get put in the stuff no one else wants to do," she explained. But her recent success has given her a role to incur envy: fastest women's butterflyer in recorded Bearcat history.

Early in the season, a back injury kept Ciatti from two months of the team's lifting program. "I went into conference thinking, 'I may not swim as well as I hope,'" she explained. She says her strength work over the summer kept her in the game, alongside

her summer coach, her physical therapist and the Bearcat coaches. "It was all of those people together and then, of course, me a little bit in there," she said.

Describing Ciatti's achievement, Hornbeck, the current record holder in the 100 and 200 breaststroke, said, "It was like looking at myself in a younger mirror. It was so cool." Hornbeck explained that when she broke her first record in 2022, she "didn't even know it was something [she] could do," and recalled confusion at her team's excitement. Now, seeing Ciatti break through, she says she understands the hype.

Hornbeck, whose last meet was the recent championships, had breakout underclass seasons, securing a record in each. However, she began to suffer health issues in her later career. She says a non-life-threatening brain tumor made it such that on some days, her biggest success was getting out of bed. She continued to compete as much as her health would allow, rounding out her final championship race at nine seconds off her 200 breaststroke record. "I never felt good. I never felt like I was physically up to the challenge. I think that defines what [swim] is to me, because I did it anyway," she said.

Cole Lindberg, who holds the school record in the 100 butterfly, 200 butterfly and 200 individual medley (IM), also ended his college career at the recent championships. After entering his first year with mixed feelings about the sport, Lindberg says the improvements he made in his inaugural swim season motivated him to work harder.

Lindberg explained that he locked in on the 100 butterfly record,

beat it, and earned the 200 record as a byproduct of that effort. Then he set his sights on the IM record, enlisting the help of alum and then "resident breaststroker" Logan Copeland ('24), shaving less than a second off the previous record in 2024.

Although he stayed within striking distance, landing the top six times in school history, Lindberg was unable to breach his 2023 100 butterfly success. "The fastest I've ever gone now [is] ... that record I set two years ago ... that's a little disappointing," he said. Despite his individual accolades, Lindberg recalls an upset relay win over George Fox as the favorite memory of his career.

Although swimming is a largely individualized sport, all three

record breakers hold the team aspect in the highest regard. "The things I remember are practicing with my friends and going to swim meets with my friends," said Lindberg. When asked what message he would give to the next generation of Bearcat swimmers, Lindberg expressed, "It's hard to understand just how limited the time is when you're a freshman." Hornbeck, who's looking forward to healing now that the season is over, explained that she will miss seeing her teammates the most.

For her part, Ciatti says that now that she's the swimmer to beat, she's not focusing on breaking another record. She just wants to get better and let the history come where it may.



Anna Hornbeck ('25) raises a fist at the February 2023 NWC Swim Championships, where she set the 200 breaststroke record.

Photo courtesy of Anna Hornbeck

A Salem Snowfall

Iris McClure • Staff Photographer • Feb. 13

Classes were canceled on Thursday, Feb. 13, and the opening of school was delayed until noon on Friday, Feb. 14 at the Salem campus as a blanket of snow fell upon sleeping Bearcats. Many students were seen building snowmen on the Quad and having snowball fights.



A snowman made on the Quad on Feb. 13, 2025.
Photo by IRIS MCCLURE



The Japanese Garden covered in snow on Feb. 13, 2025.
Photo by IRIS MCCLURE



Snow at Gatke Hall on Feb. 13, 2025.
Photo by IRIS MCCLURE



A snowman made in front of the Star Trees on Feb. 13, 2025.
Photo by IRIS MCCLURE

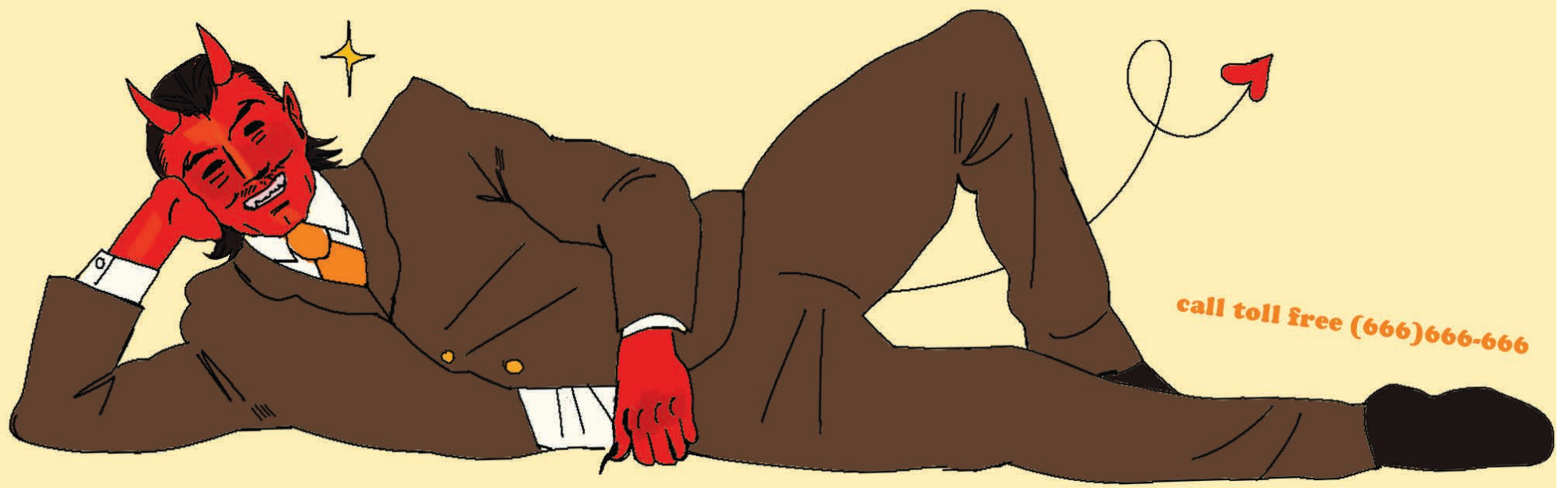


A snowman made in front of Smith Auditorium on Feb. 13, 2025.
Photo by IRIS MCCLURE



A walkway covered with snow on Feb. 13, 2025.
Photo by IRIS MCCLURE

NEED AN ADVOCATE? WANT SOME ADVICE?



Art by BASIL ALLEN

The Devil's Advocate

Lee Parsons • Lifestyles Editor

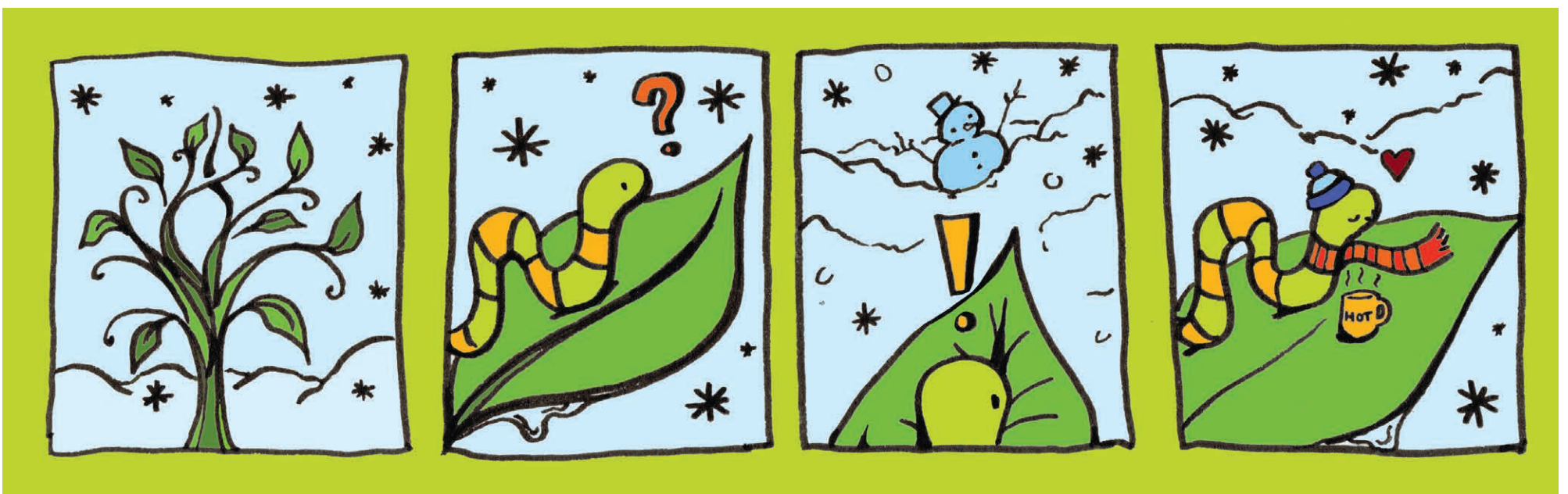
Disclaimer: The Devil's Advocate is a satirical column that does not reflect the views or opinions of The Collegian. The Collegian and columnist do not recommend the advice and are not responsible for its consequences if acted on.

How do I pass? (Up to you to interpret what type of passing I mean)
-Troy Bolton (HSM)

If you're looking to make a pass at a potential romantic partner — just do it. Be blunt. You'll probably be rejected, but the pain of knowing is usually worth the knowledge. If you're trying to pass a class (although you could try the previous kind of pass to accomplish this one), you should spend an excess of time plugging potential grades into your Canvas grades page. This will let you know what your grade would've been if you'd spent that time working. Following this, you should make a to-do list of everything you have ahead of you. This will overwhelm you to the point that you will pass out — thus achieving a third kind of pass — and render you unable to worry about passing your class until you wake.

How can I avoid my ex on campus? I actually cannot deal with this right now.
-Someone's ex

You should mail them brochures for other universities unceasingly until one of the alternative options is so tantalizing they can't help but transfer there. If this fails, you should get someone to convince them to dye their hair bright yellow. This will serve as a beacon that will alert you to their presence before they are close, allowing you to make a quick escape.



A surprise in Salem.
Comic by ALYSSA DIGGDON

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