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## Playing it Forward: blind commentary’s Encore at 441

Bringing bangers back to campus, blind commentary partners with USask UNICEF again for their 441 performance on January 9th.



USask UNICEF’s 331 show January 2025 | @utopiapictured on Instagram

Hannah Ha

Buzzing through campus in the dead of winter, USask UNICEF’s 331 show last January was a night to remember. For the first time in my undergrad, campus seemed like the place to be on a Friday night.

Last time I had seen blind commentary, the venue was humble, but equally electric. 331 was the first time I had seen Louis’ Pub so packed or charged up; hard to believe that this was the same place for a sit-down Beer & Burger combo.

blind commentary is based in Saskatoon and made up of four members from all over the province. Their energized live shows, rowdy crowds, raw vocals and authentic songwriting are central to their sound—a few of many things that made me put down my phone just to headbang the first time I heard them play. Brought together by BandMix.com and high school cross country, blind commentary has carved out a place for themselves within Saskatoon’s alternative music scene.

They describe their sound as part emo, part shoegaze, with elements of slowcore.

The four members, Sam Thomson (rhythm guitar), Lia Swenson (drums and vocals), Liam Jones (vocals and bass) and Malcolm (lead guitar), covered *Title Fight* at last year’s event, amid mosh pits and stage

dives—all for charity.

Thomson, who plays an Epiphone SG Guitar named Lynette (an icon from *Desperate Housewives*), recalls 331 earnestly. “I think it was the highlight of our 2025, at least for me personally. It was so awesome. I love the community aspect of it.” He looks up to the ceiling to recall the energy in Louis’ that night. “It was so much fun seeing people enjoy themselves.”

Jones chimes in, recalling a video that captures a moment between fans at 331. “It’s a person that’s singing along to ‘Frail’, and you just see from the camera angle. They’re looking up, and they’re just screaming the lyrics, and it’s just so cool.”

Nearly a year since 331, blind commentary has seized the stage, opening for Your Arms Are My Cocoon. They’ve played at music festivals such as Purple City Music Festival in Edmonton, NXNE, Winterruption Winnipeg, SaskPride, Swamp Fest as well as Sled Island in Calgary. We talked about their creative evolution through their career, from indie rock to finding their heavier emo sound.

Jones: “You know, my individual process has changed. Flash forward two years, you’re just way more efficient and better at playing the instrument, and when you just know the instrument better, you’re just gonna make better stuff.”

Swenson: “I think a lot of us [have] just gotten a lot more confident with writing too, and putting forward new ideas. I don’t think anyone’s necessarily scared of what anyone’s gonna say when it comes to, ‘Hey, I think we should do this’; ‘I think we should do that’. Just having an idea is cool at all.”

Thomson: “I’d say the main thing that has just changed for me is my influences. Last year, I basically lived and breathed—okay, I don’t want to say ‘lived and breathed’—but I listened to a lot of Title Fight. It was the first time I really got into emo music. It was Title Fight, then it was Joyce Manor, and then, a few months ago, I got really into Captain Jazz. And it just kind of opened the door and allowed me to think of different chords. It was very inspiring.”

Despite having such a cohesive sound, they each cite diverse artistic influences that go into their songwriting and performances.

Thomson: “I’m all over the place like these guys, very broad.”

Jones: “Me and Sam sort of have a similar upbringing where [we’re] just listening to what our parents listen to. I definitely have a classic rock country origin. I think a band like American Football has really influenced our sound, where Sam was talking about using open tunings on the guitar. We’re just playing the instruments

differently now, and tuning them differently.”

Swenson: When I was a kid, I was into dubstep and all that good stuff. And then high school was a lot of metal, so, you know, I’ve been around genre-wise. Ovlov and Stove have been my two main big ones right now. And, you know, Versus self, Train Breaks Down, just for, like, a little bit of influence on vocals.”

Jones: “I think with bands we listen to now, people that influenced us—you see the vocals, the guitars and the tunings—you see all that influence go in and it makes our music different.”

With this annual event, blind commentary recognizes the value of community, especially in the local alternative music scene.

Jones: “It’s bands you meet that are, like, those connections are important for the community. Bands you love playing with, and that you get to play with again, and you’re like, ‘yes!’”

Jones is grateful for sound guys, photographers and promoters who all make the show happen, but he knows the impact of a crowd.

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# University Retires Co-Curricular Record

Why is the university shutting down the co-curricular record, and what impacts will this have on the student experience?

Colton Danneberg

The University announced that it is retiring the Co-Curricular Record (CCR) service last month and that CCR will no longer be available as of May 1, 2026. CCR was an official and personalized record of university-approved activities that students have been involved with outside of their degree, including volunteer work and experiences in clubs and organizations.

After years of the university advertising and encouraging students to participate in extra-curricular activities and volunteer experiences to add to their CCRs, it came as a shock to many that CCR's service would be shut down.

The initial email sent to all students at USask last month announced that CCR was going to be shut down and that students should complete and submit all CCR-eligible activities by March 31, and download their CCR transcript by April 30 of next year for their personal records. There was no reasoning for the retirement of the program in any public correspondence.

In a statement to *The Sheaf*, the university explained that CCR was going to be retired because "although it is popular with some students, overall student participation has historically been low," with about 6 to 10% of students using the service annually. With enrollment reaching roughly 26,000 students this year, this means that up to 2,600 students were participating in the CCR program annually, according to this data.

The university also claims that the CCR

Working Group, the overseer of the CCR program, found that "evidence of the CCR's impact on career or academic success has been limited" and that "employers show little interest in CCR credentials."

The university found this through internal consultations and a campus-wide survey of CCR administrators. The university also says that it consulted academic leadership, such as the Office of the Vice-Provost, Students and Learning and the Associate Dean's Academic Council. The CCR Working group states that it had also met with other post-secondary institutions that found similar patterns of student engagement and overall impact.

The CCR Working Group's conclusion that employers show little interest in CCR credentials is based on feedback from employers and national labour-market research. "In conversations with employers, recruiters and early-talent professionals," the university states. "Our Career Services' Employer Relations staff shared with us that the CCR is not something they recognize, request or reference in their hiring processes."

"This aligns with national employer data. In Brainstorm Strategy Group's annual Campus Recruitment Outlook Report—one of Canada's largest surveys of early-talent employers—the CCR does not appear as a factor employers consider when evaluating candidates. Rather, employers look for evidence of relevant experience, skill development and professional readiness, most often demonstrated through résumés, interviews, letters of reference and experiential learning."

While the university focused on the use of CCR in student employment, some are concerned about how the retirement of the program might affect incentives for students to volunteer without an official record.

*The Sheaf* asked the question: "What impacts will this have on the incentive for students to volunteer and specifically on the incentive for note takers volunteering to support students requiring Access and Equity Services (AES) accommodation?"

The university did not directly address the question, and instead said that "students will continue to have the opportunity to participate in volunteer and extra-curricular activities." The university did not elaborate on whether this would impact the notetaking service that AES relies on for many students who require accommodations. AES Notetaking staff declined to comment on the matter.

Since the co-curricular record is an official statement of volunteer experience, *The Sheaf* also posed the question of how the university will address students who fraudulently say that they have volunteered in organizations without needing CCR for proof. The university responded that "just as we expect students to practice academic integrity, we also expect them to demonstrate integrity in their job search and professional lives." While this may seem like a lacklustre answer, since there is little evidence that employers looked at CCR anyway, the risk of students reporting fraudulent volunteering on their resume may likely remain the same.

The university stated that: "The USSU has

historically been one of the heaviest users of the CCR, particularly through its support of campus groups, so their perspective was very important." It did not comment that it consulted any campus groups about the decision, who often rely on CCR as an incentive for volunteers.

In a statement obtained from the USSU, the union clarified that its executive did not vote on the retirement of CCR, and that "the retirement of CCR appears to have been triggered through the dissolution of an advisory committee and movement of Information and Communications Technology personnel that supported the oversight."

In sum, the consensus from the university is ultimately that, "although it once served a purpose, the CCR does not add value to the recruitment or hiring process in a way that meaningfully benefits students."

The university added that the CCR Working Group will be looking into ways to better track student competencies through curricular and co-curricular experiential learning as a new careers portal is implemented sometime in 2026. The university states that the updated approach will hopefully help students "more effectively identify, develop, and communicate their skills," and that the CCR Working Group welcomes "input from students on what they would like a future system to include so that it can better support their academic and career success."

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# Polytechnic’s Move to USask: How Are Students from Both Campuses Reacting to this Decision?

As Saskatchewan Polytechnic and USask continue to move ahead on consolidating their campuses, *The Sheaf* sought out opinions from both institutions to weigh in on this decision.



Conceptual rendering courtesy of the Saskatchewan Polytechnic website

## Colton Danneberg

The current Saskatoon campuses of Saskatchewan Polytechnic are expected to close across the city in the next few years as students are transferred to a new campus that will be built on USask grounds at Innovation Place. The new Polytechnic campus will be called the Joseph A. Remai Saskatoon Campus, after the philanthropist who donated \$25 million towards the project last year.

As of right now, Polytech’s campuses span 12 buildings across Saskatoon. The main campus is located at 1130 Idylwyld Drive North, where most Polytech students attend and most student services are located.

Ground broke on the new Skilled Trades and Technology building last year, and USask Facilities is beginning to update the utilities underground for the project. With construction expected to begin as early as 2026, *The Sheaf* sought out Polytech students to see how some are reacting to the planned move.

Many Polytechnic students who were interviewed about the planned move were excited about the prospects of combining campuses and research.

Jaman, a BioScience major at Polytech, expressed a positive outlook on the move. “It’s definitely good to move there [because] the new campus’s infrastructure and facilities will be up to date. They can’t install new things here because of the engineering and infrastructure design.”

Annie, another BioScience major at Polytech, hopes that “with some science programs, there could be more collaboration with the university [because] they already have a lot of [buildings] like Innovation Place.”

Eve, a Polytech student in the Primary Care Paramedic Program, says that “I think

it would be kind of cool. It would all be in one spot [and] better than being on 33rd—[which] is kind of sketchy.”

Their concern, however, is mostly around parking. “Right now [at Polytech] we have free parking [on nearby residential streets]. But once you go to the [USask] campus, you don’t—or if you do, they’re only one-hour slots and it’s a few blocks away.”

Some Polytech students who are unhappy with current Polytech infrastructure look forward to the prospect of moving. Michael, a Polytech student in the Medical

residential areas around the Idylwyld campus, others aren’t so happy about the first-come, first-serve system for the school’s parking lots. “If you don’t show up by 7:30 a.m., you’re not getting parking at school,” Brooklyn says. “And you have to pay every single day for parking—there are no passes. We have to pay through the park meter, which is [owned] by a third party.”

Students interviewed at USask are also generally content about the prospect of Polytech moving to Innovation Place, and concerns addressed were mostly over

and USask putting pressure on the city to improve transportation will help address the issue of overcrowding.

Logan, a student in Arts & Science, says that “I think it’s an excellent decision because it centralizes secondary education under one umbrella within the province.” He says that “parking is already an issue,” and that “if I were [USask], I would honestly just make a new parking lot because campus is pretty close to the outer limits [of the city].”

Ashton, a USask student also in Arts & Science, says he has concerns over student housing. “I know there’s a lot of people at USask who could not get into student housing, so how is that going to work with the Polytech campus?”

USSU President Emma Wintermute said in a statement to *The Sheaf* that “the impact on the USask campus should be minimal” and that “university leadership does not foresee any effect on our existing infrastructure.”

Additionally, Wintermute adds that “it will be important to look to Saskatoon Transit and the Link project for support, which are expected to help alleviate transportation and parking concerns.”

Link, the city’s rapid transit bus plan, began construction of new rapid transit stations in 2024 and is expected to be completed in three to four years.

Wintermute concludes that “While there are always questions about how this move could impact the USask campus, the USSU Executive team encourages all members of our campus community to see this as a positive addition. Being closer to students at Saskatchewan Polytechnic is valuable and provides increased opportunities for student leadership collaboration and the exchange of ideas and diverse student experiences.”

***“While there are always questions about how this move could impact the USask campus, the USSU Executive team encourages all members of our campus community to see this as a positive addition. Being closer to students at Saskatchewan Polytechnic is valuable and provides increased opportunities for student leadership collaboration and the exchange of ideas and diverse student experiences.”***

Laboratory Technology (MLT) program, says that the current Polytech campus on Idylwyld is “definitely way too small for what we have for class sizes in our program.”

Brooklyn, another student in the MLT program, adds that “Rooms get double booked, and then when we’re supposed to be in the lecture, we have to get our lectures cut short and have to move to other classrooms sometimes.”

Michael also recounts that there are no male change rooms for lab techs. “There’s some in the gym, but our gym is very small and outdated.”

While some students prefer parking in

parking and space.

Ishra, a Biochemistry, Microbiology and Immunology student, says that “I think it will bring more diversity in students because [right now] Polytech is not nearby and we don’t know anything about how their curriculum or degrees work. I think if they’re around us, we’ll get to know more about [what they’re doing].”

Rahim, a Biology major, also says that “I think it will enhance student culture and it will allow people to be more familiar with different programs that are available to you [and] not just the university programs that are four years long.” She adds that while she believes bussing has always been slow, she hopes the combined efforts of Polytech



# Take a Moment to PAWS Your Stress

How therapy dogs are helping to calm students' stress

Emily Mainprize

On campus, there is a program called the PAWS Your Stress Therapy Dog Program, which is offered by a wonderful team of students, researchers, professionals and, of course, volunteer therapy dogs and their handlers. Through frequent visits to campus, this initiative helps improve the mental health and wellness of students, faculty and staff.

The PAWS Your Stress Therapy Dog Program was first formed in 2013 by the Office of the Centennial Enhancement Chair in One Health and Wellness at USask. Today, it's offered in partnership with Peer Health, the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program and the PAWSitive Connections Lab.

The PAWSitive Connections Lab is run by Dr. Colleen Dell, Dr. Darlene Chalmers and Dr. Linzi Williamson. Their lab focuses on exploring interactions between animals and people, with an emphasis on the benefits that relationships with animals can have for those who are recovering from addictions or struggling with their mental health. Dell takes care to put the word "animals" before "people" when referencing the two together (e.g. "animals and people") in order to counteract the subordinate role of animals in society.

### The Program

The PAWS Your Stress Program is working towards creating a space that can help students adjust to the changes that come with beginning university, teach how to effectively process stress and emotions during times of high stress and comfort the many students who come from different provinces or countries who may have had to leave their furry friends behind at home.

These teams of dogs and handlers drop by

various locations around campus, libraries, student lounges and study spaces to give students the chance to pause, pet and connect. No appointments are needed, and all are welcome.

All of the dogs who visit campus, as well as their handlers, have undergone training and assessments with the St. John Ambulance, ensuring that the dogs who come to campus are effective at calming down and assisting the people who come to visit. Many of the same dogs who visit campus also visit hospitals, senior residences, care facilities, community centres, libraries and vaccination clinics to help support the people in those locations as well.

**What are Therapy Dogs and what do they do?** Therapy dogs are trained to provide affection and emotional comfort to those other than their owners. These dogs will often visit a variety of places to assist individuals in remaining calm in stressful environments, such as hospitals or universities.

These dogs are distinct from service dogs and emotional support animals. Service dogs are typically designated for people who have physical or mental disabilities, and are trained to help these individuals through their everyday lives. The most common examples of service dogs are guide dogs for the visually impaired or dogs that can sense physiological changes in a person with a health condition; for example, some dogs can notify owners with diabetes of low or high blood sugar.. Service dogs, unlike therapy dogs, are allowed in all public spaces, regardless of any restrictions against having animals within that space.

Emotional support animals are designated to help calm the emotional state of one

particular person, their owner. Therapy dogs provide this comfort to many individuals, rather than just one, and have undergone training in order to do this job. Emotional support animals do not require training and registration, and are not entitled to be allowed into public spaces. However, under the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code, landlords are required to make accommodations to allow emotional support animals if the owner has a doctor's letter.

**What is the science behind therapy dogs?** While the idea of cuddling a dog might sound like just a pleasant distraction, the benefits of animal-assisted interventions are well-documented in research. Studies at USask and beyond have shown that spending time with therapy dogs can lower cortisol (a stress hormone), increase oxytocin (the "bonding" hormone) and improve overall well-being.

Research also suggests that dogs are sensitive to our emotional states and social gestures, and are capable of communicating with humans by using complex behavioural cues such as gaze alternation, which refers to a behavior where dogs will look between a person and an object to indicate meaning. In addition to this, dogs are able to form attachments and relationships with humans. These are all reasons why dogs are really quite amazing as service animals, emotional support animals and therapy dogs.

There are even quantifiable physical effects that therapy dogs can have in reducing pain. One study done by Dell found that by bringing therapy dogs into emergency rooms, 43 per cent of patients reported a decrease in pain. In addition to this, 48 per cent of patients reported a decrease in anxiety, 46 per cent reported a

decrease in their levels of depression and 41 per cent reported an improvement in their overall well-being. This study shows how significant an impact therapy dogs can have on the lives of humans, both in and outside of an academic setting.

Things to consider when attending the events Aliya Khalid, the coordinator for the PAWS Your Stress Program, emphasized how beneficial the program can be for students, faculty and staff and discussed some unexpected ways that therapy dogs can benefit visitors of events.

For example, Khalid spoke of how visits with therapy dogs can help individuals who have fears surrounding dogs to overcome their anxiety. The therapy dogs don't jump and are used to being very gentle with visitors. Because of this, many individuals who have had bad experiences with dogs in the past can work past their fears by meeting these very calm and sweet dogs.

She also emphasized how important it is to also be considerate of the needs of the therapy dogs during these visits as well. She mentioned that, while students and faculty indeed get a lot out of the program—with over 275 attendees at their last two events—it is important to understand that the dogs are sentient beings. They are silly and have their own personalities, and this is an important fact to consider when visiting with them.

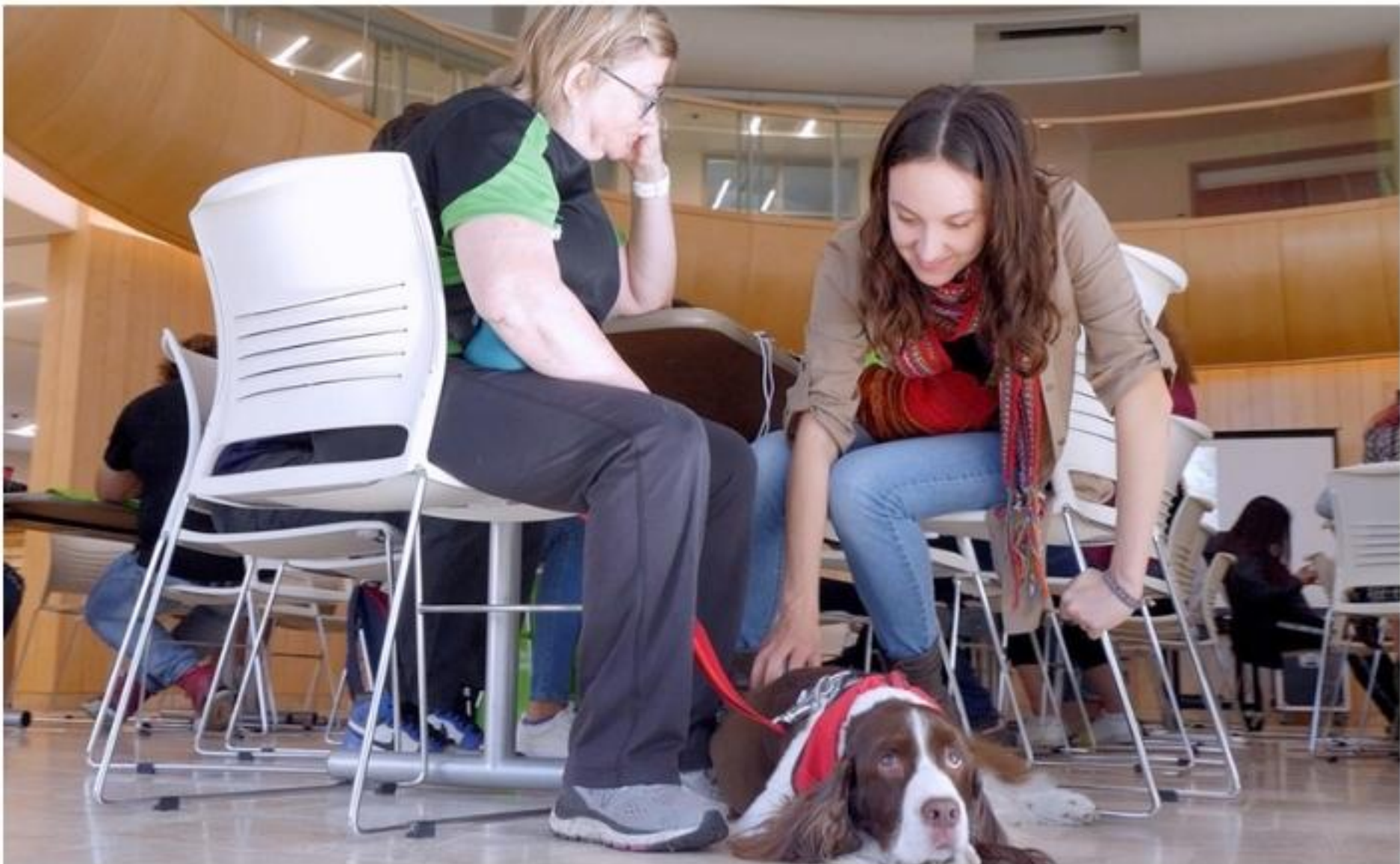
Khalid mentioned as well that there are some steps you can take to ensure the safety of the dogs when visiting with them, such as sanitizing your hands and telling the handler of the therapy dog if this is your first time attending one of their visits, so they can facilitate the interaction. These dogs and their handlers should be seen as partners along the path to wellness.

### How to get involved

The program is always looking for new volunteers and certified therapy dogs. Interested dog owners can contact the PAWS Your Stress team to learn more about the requirements. Dogs must love people, be well-socialized and pass screening through St. John Ambulance's therapy dog certification process.

Students and staff who want to visit the dogs and participate don't need to register; simply show up at a scheduled visit, take a break and enjoy a few minutes of furry companionship. For those studying remotely, virtual therapy dog visits remain available online, offering a comforting connection from afar.

As of Nov. 6, the therapy dogs are done for the Fall, but keep an eye on the @usasklibrary Instagram for any posts on when they will be back. In the meantime, there are always online visits and resources on their website, so you always have the opportunity to get some puppy time.



Handler Jane Smith and Murphy visit students at the USask Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre. | USask News



# Huskies Men’s Hockey: A Cohesive, Relentless Team Aiming for Another Championship Run

Inside the locker room with coach Brandin Cote as the team drives toward another championship run.

Abdulah Amin

The cold air inside Merlis Belsher Place carries a certain sound in the winter months, the scrape of blades on ice, the murmur of fans gathering in green and white and the sharp anticipation only reproduced by watching a Huskie sports team play. At the University of Saskatchewan, Huskies men’s hockey has long been one of the campus’s most spirited traditions. This year, the program not only carries through momentum, but also belief in something more.

Head coach Brandin Cote sees it every time his players step onto the ice. “We’ve got a really good team again this year,” he said in an exclusive interview with *The Sheaf*. “We recruited some really good new guys, and we’re lucky to have quite a few players from last year’s team return. We’ve got a good mix.”

That balance between weathered and junior athletes is shaping the Huskies into a rounded team with the depth and leadership necessary to compete deep into the season. Though the preseason brought a few injuries, the roster has stabilized, and key contributors have started to regain form. The team opened strongly, hit a small lull before their bye week, and now gears up for an important stretch that will help define their season.

“I really believe we’ll be right in the mix at the end of the year,” Cote said. “We have the team that can take another run at it, just like we did last year.”

Last season marked one of the program’s strongest campaigns in recent memory. Saskatchewan finished first in Canada West, earning home-ice advantage through the playoffs and energizing the campus with a deep post-season run.

“It’s a fine line between winning and losing,” Cote said. “We found a way to get first overall in our conference last year, which really helped us to be able to have home ice.”

Finishing atop the Canada West standings gave Saskatchewan a crucial advantage: playoff games in front of their own fans at Merlis Belsher Place, where momentum tends to swing quickly and the Huskies’ depth shines. Cote said earning that top seed “really helped to propel us” through the conference postseason, setting the tone for another deep playoff run.

That push eventually carried Saskatchewan to the U Sports national championship in Ottawa, where their season ended in a razor-thin semifinal against Concordia, a single-game elimination that could have gone either way. “It was a really good experience for our guys to see what it takes



The Huskie Men's Hockey team after winning Canada West last year. | Huskie Athletics

to win in that tournament,” Cote said. “It’s very difficult because it’s only a one-game elimination ... but to go there and see it firsthand was big for our group.”

The loss left the team hungry, sharpening their focus as they entered the new season looking to take the next step.

One of the most unique pieces of the program’s development was their preseason trip to Europe, a project years in the making. It offered the players a chance to play exhibition games against professional clubs overseas, learn from new styles of hockey and build team chemistry far from home.

“It was a huge undertaking,” Cote said. “So we were very lucky to have an alumni step up to help us with that. And then [through] other various fundraising initiatives that we did with our team were able to get that planned and organized.”

“[That experience] really checked all the boxes with how that unfolded,” he said. “Play some good hockey and help them prepare for our season, and also be exposed to potential opportunities to play pro hockey in Europe.”

“Guys got to see different parts of the world that they normally wouldn’t.”

For recruits considering the program, opportunities like that matter. For returning players, it reinforces what makes Huskies hockey special: investment and community.

Ask Cote to describe the on-ice identity of this year’s Huskies, and he points to three pillars.

“Relentless, connected and pace,” he said. “Those are really the three indicators that we talk about.”

Relentlessness means constant pressure,

forechecking aggressively, challenging for every puck, denying opponents time and space. Connectedness refers to structure: playing tight, supporting each other, making quick passes and maintaining close support everywhere on the ice. And pace, the signature trait of the Huskies’ system, demands that the team skate efficiently and make fast decisions.

“To play with pace, you have to be connected and relentless,” Cote said. “They all tie into each other.”

It’s a style that has shown itself in flashes, impressive penalty kills, stretches of dominant control and games where the offence flows naturally. But the Huskies are still chasing full consistency.

“We’re seeing lots of good things ... but we want [a] more offensive finish,” Cote said. “Last year, our power play was the best in the country. This year, we’re doing lots of good things, but we haven’t quite found the finish yet.”

Even so, the underlying structure is strong, and the group has bought into the identity. “So we work on these daily, we work on these weekly,” he said. “In the playoffs, that’s where we have to really see that come out.”

With a roster that blends experienced veterans and emerging young talent, leadership has naturally spread across the team.

Among the forwards, Cote highlighted several Huskies who have taken meaningful steps this season, beginning with first-year winger Conner Roulette, a highly regarded recruit who he said is “starting to find his groove” as he adapts to the pace and structure of U Sports hockey.

Veterans Chantz Petruic and Dawson Holt, both fixtures in the lineup and in the dressing room, continue to anchor the front

end, serving as longtime leaders who, in Cote’s words, “propel our offence and do things right on both sides of the puck.”

On the blue line, fourth-year defender Rhett Rhinehart has emerged as one of the team’s most reliable presences, with Cote describing him as “our most consistent player on both sides of the puck, a big physical force” capable of shaping the game at both ends.

Third-year defenceman Landon Kosior remains equally important, even if his early-season numbers have been quieter; Cote emphasized that “he’s doing a lot of the right things” and continues to be “such a key part of our team.”

In goal, the Huskies boast rare depth and internal competition, led by veteran Jordan Kooy, who has carried forward the strong form that defined Saskatchewan’s elite defensive identity last year. He is joined by Bryan Thomson, a first-year goalie fresh from pro hockey who is still settling into the university game but gaining momentum with each outing, while rookie James Venne pushes both from behind, a dynamic Cote believes will serve the team well as the season progresses.

When asked to describe the personality of the group in one word, Cote chose “cohesive.” “Our guys hang out with each other all the time,” he said. “They support each other. They enjoy coming to the rink. And above anything else, you need that to win.”

Cote said that even in moments of adversity, like their recent two-game skid, the team hasn’t panicked. Instead, they’ve stayed steady and optimistic. “We’re going through a bit of a blip, but the guys have handled it really well,” he said. “They’re encouraging each other, staying the course, understanding what we need to get better at.”



Running Toward Something Bigger: Inside Saskatchewan Through Sport

A look at the program reshaping Indigenous youth pathways in track

Abdulah Amin

In a modest office on Broadway Avenue—a late-autumn sun cutting across stacks of meet schedules and training binders—Saskatchewan Aboriginal Track & Field (SATF) is quietly shaping a movement. It’s a movement of youth, community, reclamation and running not away from something, but toward something better.

On a November evening, I sat down with Brett Lachance, who has been instrumental in helping turn founder Derek Rope’s idea of SATF into the thriving organization it is today, to learn how SATF and its athletics arm Running Wild are transforming lives and rewriting what Indigenous sport can look like in Saskatchewan.

What I expected was a conversation about track. Instead, what I got was a powerful story about healing, identity and the radical power of a safe place.

For Lachance, the journey into SATF didn’t begin in an office or board meeting; rather, it began on the track. Growing up between Big River First Nation and James Smith Cree Nation, he gravitated toward athletics early. “I competed in... everything,” he laughed. “but track and basketball were kind of [what] I was really kind of good at.” That path eventually led him to the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG), where he first met Rope, who was then the coordinator for the track and field team, in 2017.

He laughed as he recalled those early days. “I was an athlete just coming up.” Their connection strengthened when Lachance entered university and later reached out to Rope for summer employment. One job turned into a mentorship, then into a shared vision.

As Lachance tells it, SATF wasn’t born from a single incident. It was rather the culmination of years, decades even, of trying, stumbling, learning and trying again. “This has always been kind of one of Rope’s dreams,” he said, “to have... an organization... devoted to track and field and the overall growth and development of it.”

The dream began long before SATF had a name. Back in the early 2000s, a much younger Rope attempted to build a program out of White Buffalo Youth Lodge, under the name Running Wild, long before it took its current shape. “He ran into a lot of issues,” Lachance said. “He was trying to organize it for a class of 14-year-old girls, and it came as a bit of a rude awakening when he was talking about the program with one of his mentors. It was failing, and it was failing because Rope didn’t know what it was like to be a 14-year-old girl. He didn’t know what they were interested in, what they were going through developmentally.”

That early attempt failed but the lessons stuck. Years later, around 2007–2011, a new group of young leaders came together, people like Giselle, Jordan, Jill and Holly, whom Lachance affectionately refers to as “the foremothers.” They formed the first real structure of SATF, eventually partnering with Saskatchewan Athletics to create a sister organization with a focus on Indigenous engagement.

SATF’s mission is not abstract. It’s painfully concrete. Lachance spoke openly about a statistic he cannot forget:

according to 2016 data released by the Canadian government, Indigenous youth made up 92% of incarcerated boys and 98% of incarcerated girls in Saskatchewan. “It’s really hard to... hear,” he said. “[It doesn’t mean] us as a people or anything are hurt or broken or shattered or anything.” It means the systems around us are broken.

He described how gangs can provide the structure many youth don’t receive at home like hierarchy, identity, organization, colours and belonging. “Because, you know, if you don’t know how to do something, how are you expected to teach somebody else to do that, right?” he said. “A lot of First Nations kids don’t have in their own home somebody to provide organization, somebody to provide safety, somebody to provide authority.”

SATF’s response is simple but poignant: If harmful systems are recruiting youth, then healthier systems must too. This is where track and field comes in.

Sport, Lachance repeated, is the “biggest safe space anyone can access.” He cited a famous Nelson Mandela quote, a guiding principle for the organization:

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does.”

This is the philosophy at the heart of SATF. Sport not only for performance, but as protection. Identity. Life.

“I never know what’s going on at kids’ houses,” Lachance said. “But I know that when they’re here, for this hour, they’re safe. They’re accepted. They can be loud. They can be kids.”

In Indigenous teachings, wellness is not simplistically constrained within the physical domain. It’s whole, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. This

learn to honour it.

This holistic model extends beyond athletes to coaches as well. One of SATF’s most innovative contributions is its emphasis on localized coach development, training teachers, community volunteers and local leaders so that knowledge stays within communities.

This ensures long-term stability. “If I go up to a First Nation to run a clinic, that’s great,” Lachance said. “But as soon as I leave, track and field leaves too.” He explained how he can travel to places like Whitecap, Carry the Kettle, Kakwistāhaw and other communities to deliver a session, but the moment he drives home, the momentum disappears. “As soon as I leave, how does sport, how does track and field maintain in that community?” he asked. “Well, it doesn’t. Because I leave. And so track and field leaves.”

That reality is exactly why SATF focuses so heavily on local coach development. By training teachers, community volunteers and local leaders right where they live, the sport becomes rooted in the community instead of temporarily imported from outside. Those coaches can call SATF anytime, “Hey, I need help making a practice schedule,” Lachance said, and the support continues long after the clinic ends. In this model, track and field doesn’t vanish when Lachance steps off the reserve. It stays and evolves with the people who live there. By building coaches in the communities they serve, SATF creates true long-term stability and genuine, sustainable growth.

This approach directly answers Calls to Action 87–91 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, especially around Indigenous athlete development and culturally safe coaching.

The club is staffed by what Lachance lovingly calls “the four silverbacks”, legendary long-time Huskie coaches with nearly a century of combined experience. They mentor not just young athletes, but also the younger coaches stepping into leadership roles.

SATF’s connection to the Huskie track and field team has become one of the program’s greatest strengths. Many current Huskie athletes serve as mentor coaches, leading training in the same event groups they compete in, sprints, jumps, distance, throws and even pole vault. “These athletes teach in the same areas they compete in,” Lachance said. “That’s insanely valuable.”

Mentorship is central and follows a clear pathway. As Future Greats athletes age up, they begin helping with younger groups. Developmental athletes support the Future Greats, gaining experience and confidence, while High Performance athletes are expected to model leadership. This layered





# Aboriginal Track & Field’s Mission to Uplift Youth

and field.

system creates a perpetual cycle of growth, where athletes learn, teach and eventually lead.

One of the most striking moments in our conversation came when Lachance described what it feels like for Indigenous athletes to walk into mainstream competitions. “We’re not less than,” he said. “We’re just a little bit more different, in the way we engage with everybody, in our perspectives and understandings.” For many athletes, especially those coming from places like Oskāyak High School, that difference becomes visible the moment they leave SATF-run spaces.

“When we go to our own meets, like Tony Cote or the Saskatchewan Aboriginal Track & Field Championships, we feel like we’re top dog,” Lachance said. “But when we enter a mainstream sport or a mainstream event, we’re now all of a sudden up here, and we get stuffed all the way down to the bottom.”

That shift is felt immediately, particularly by SATF’s “brown-faced athletes,” as Lachance described with honesty and care. In SATF environments, they feel seen. When Indigenous athletes enter spaces where few, or more often than not, none look like them, the difference can be felt immediately. Running Wild helps bridge that divide: the team is diverse, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, working shoulder-to-shoulder, learning from each other, building trust. “We don’t separate anybody,” Lachance said. “We don’t discriminate against creed, culture or code. Anyone involved with SATF and Running Wild belongs here.”

When asked directly how SATF contributes to reconciliation, Lachance didn’t hesitate: through representation, education and partnership. As facilitators of the Anti-Racism and Cultural Awareness (ACM) course, now mandatory for Saskatchewan teachers, SATF helps educate coaches, athletes, volunteers and partner organizations.

Their partnership with Saskatchewan Athletics is especially significant. “They handle mainstream track... Our energy and everything is engaging with First Nations people,” he said. But together, “we’ve come to grow and form a really close, tight-knit partnership” talking about how they grow the sport as a collective.

This partnership is an attempt to go beyond symbolic gesturing. Its aims are structural, it affects facilities, coaching pathways, competition access and community programming. SATF is reconciliation in motion.

When asked what impact he’s seen most clearly, Lachance immediately mentioned Oskāyak High School. “And what we do there is actually giving the [students their] first [opportunity to experience organized athletics]...having their first cross-country team, their first track and field team,” he said. “That’s a lot of firsts.”

Families are coming out to meets. Youth are traveling hours to train, sometimes an hour each way, because the space means that much to them. One young SATF athlete said in relation to the program, “some days I have a lot of just pent-up emotions, those emotions from, you know,

school, drama, family, whatever, right? [SATF lets me] vent that out and express that in a helpful way.”

This growth is doing anything but slowing down. “We doubled in size from last year to this year,” Lachance said. With growth comes the need for structure, new policies, safer systems, more training and more capacity.

But despite the growth, the dream is the same as it was when Rope first tried it as a young adult: Create a safe place. Build identity. Give youth something healthy to belong to.

In the final moments of our interview, Lachance explained that understanding Indigenous track and field in Saskatchewan means first understanding the communities themselves and how different they truly are.

“A lot of people can’t separate Big River from Big River,” he said, meaning most people don’t even know the difference between the town and Big River First Nation. That lack of awareness expands into a broader misunderstanding of northern life. Many people picture Saskatchewan as one giant flat prairie, the old joke where “my dog ran away last week and I can still see him running.” But Lachance pointed out that once you head north, “it’s a completely different landscape... a lot more rocks, a lot more trees, a lot more hills.” Geography shapes culture, and culture shapes the needs of each community.

“Not one community is the same,” he said.

“We all have different customs, different ways of knowing, different beliefs.”

That uniqueness is exactly what SATF works to uplift. Instead of pulling everyone into Saskatoon or forcing northern athletes into southern systems, SATF wants people to be able to train, compete and take pride in their own places. The goal is not to smooth all differences into a single story of “Indigenous sport,” but to honour each community’s identity on its own terms.

SATF refuses to pan-Indigenize these experiences; it recognizes that every community carries its own histories, teachings and relationships to land. In celebrating those differences, not erasing them, SATF builds a track where every young person can run as who they are, not who someone else expects them to be.

With every practice held in a safe space, every coach trained in cultural awareness, every youth who feels “seen” for the first time, SATF is proving that track and field is more than just sport. It is a pathway toward connection and community.

It is, as Lachance said, the safest language youth can speak, loud, fast, joyful, healing. And as Saskatchewan’s Indigenous athletes keep running, one thing becomes clear:

They are not running alone anymore.



## blind commentary’s Encore at 441

Continued from the cover.



Jones: “Honestly, that’s the most meaningful, the people that actually buy the ticket and show up. You know, they’ll end up singing your song or something. I think that’s the most rewarding connection you get, I would say.”

One thing about blind commentary, they leave it all out on the stage. When asked about each of their favourite parts of the whole artistic process, no one hesitates.

Thomson: “It’s performing for me. It’s so

much fun. Even when I’m nervous, I always walk away from the experience like, ‘I’m still glad I did that’. So much fun. I love playing with other people, in general. It’s something I always wanted to do since I first started playing guitar. On any level, it’s pretty cool.”

Swenson: “Performing is awesome. Yeah, it’s wonderful. It’s such an adrenaline trip, and you’re just like, ‘Oh man, I never want to stop doing this.’”

Scuffing my boots while moshing and crowd-surfing with classmates from my 8:30 class made me wonder why these events are so rare. 331 sold more than 320 tickets last January, and nothing has topped it since. USask’s UNICEF sees clearly that in between our term papers and labs, students on campus crave connection and good music.

Jones: “331 was an insane event, uplifting the Saskatoon music community. And I think 441—it’s gonna be even better for it.

Swenson: “If 331 is so good, why isn’t there a ‘3312’?”

You’re in luck, Swenson. Sponsored by SaskMusic, UNICEF is bringing music lovers together again this January with their 441 show: 4 local bands, 4 covers, 1 cause.

The four local bands are set to cover four iconic artists: Blu Beach Band as The Strokes, Tracy Waters as The Tragically Hip, Leon’s Getting Larger as Marianas Trench, and blind commentary as Deftones.

Swenson: “I guess we should probably start learning those songs, guys?”

Mark your calendars: the 441 show will be at Louis’ Pub on Friday, January 9th, 2026, at 7:30 p.m.

Psst! Use code “3312” for 10% off tickets.





# More than an Armband: Anna Oliver’s Huskie Legacy

Anna Oliver, graduating captain of the Huskie women’s soccer team, reflects on her seven years with the program.

Nammi Nguyen

## Journey to the Huskies

Anna Oliver, a graduate in Kinesiology now pursuing a master’s in Community Health and Epidemiology, joined the Huskies women’s soccer team back in 2019.

Growing up in Saskatoon, she was always heavily involved in sports, with a love for soccer, basketball and volleyball.

“I had really positive experiences in all three sports. But then, when it came to Grade 12, I knew I had to make a decision. I wanted to pursue sports at the university level. It just so happened that I had a really bad concussion in Grade 12 and missed the basketball season. That whole year I only did soccer, so it just made sense to go forward with it.”

Oliver wanted to stay close to home and already had a connection with Huskies head coach Jerson Barandica-Hamilton through the Jr. Huskies program.

“He invited me to train with the Huskies a couple times, and those trials went well. He saw some potential and offered me a spot when I was in Grade 12.”

## Injuries and Bouncing Back

But Oliver’s first year did not go as planned. Before the season began, Oliver tore her ACL, MCL, LCL, meniscus and shattered her kneecap all at once.

“There was the mental toll of coming into my first year and pretty much accepting it as a write-off. I wasn’t going to be able to play, and that’s gonna affect my ability to integrate into the team and maybe even make friendships. But I remember Jerson told me this would be a blessing in disguise. At the time, you don’t believe that, but it lit a fire under me.”

Oliver didn’t want to just sit around and be injured.

“I took all of the physio really seriously, and just really took any opportunity I could to work on fitness and strength and get back.”

The setback also helped her grow mentally. “In high school, I had such bad performance anxiety. I just wanted to do so good that anytime I messed up, it would cause me to shut down. After that year-long recovery, I came back thinking, I don’t care whether I’m good [or] whether I’m terrible. No one has any expectations for me because I’ve been out for so long. I just want to play.”

Her resilience paid off. Oliver finished her first season having started all 14 regular-season games and earning a Canada West second-team all-star nod.



Anna Oliver after her U Sports win. | Huskie Athletics

For two years, Oliver remained a regular starter, and in 2023, the Huskies reached the final four after beating UBCO in the quarterfinals. But during the bronze medal match against Victoria, adversity struck again.

“I felt and heard a snap, but I didn’t feel pain. I knew something was wrong.”

Despite the injury, she finished the game, helping the Huskies win their second-ever Canada West bronze medal. Initially, doctors didn’t suspect an ACL tear but later scans told a different story.

“When I got the MRI that said it was my ACL, I was devastated because by now I’d played three solid years and couldn’t imagine going back to what I’d done in my first year—being out for 16 months.”

But Anna felt strong and physically stable, and with support from therapists, she decided to see how far she could push it.

“I think it was just maybe a little bit delusional, but [I was] believing in myself, trusting my body and listening to myself.” Oliver chose to pursue recovery without surgery and has since played two full seasons without having to miss a game due to injury.

Reflecting on her journey, Oliver emphasizes perspective.

“My first [advice] would probably be not to catastrophize things so much. In the moment, it’s easy to think your entire world is over. Soccer was my world, and now I can’t play. But I learned to take things day by day and celebrate the small steps.”

Her resilience on the field also translated into leadership off it.

## A Humble Captain

Oliver’s leadership emerged in her third year when teammates unanimously voted her onto the leadership group.

“I was still young, leading people older than me. I took a backseat, led by example and hoped people followed. By my fourth and fifth year, Jerson wanted me to take a more active role. I learned you can set the best example, but some people don’t want to follow. At some point you need to be more vocal, set standards and have hard conversations.”

A humble leader, Oliver doesn’t like to wear the captain’s armband.

“I do value being a captain. I am super grateful that my teammates [and] my coaches saw me in that role, but it also doesn’t mean anything to me. At the end of the day, myself and all of my teammates are equal, and it’s just a formality that I have to wear the band.”

She adds, “Just because I can win a coin toss means nothing.” (Oliver impressively wins an estimated 80% of coin tosses, far above the 50/50 odds.)

Her leadership has helped shape team culture which is rooted in ten standards developed in Oliver’s first year. They emphasize not only being a good player but also a good teammate and person.

“I really value that this team puts such an emphasis on not only the type of athlete you are, but also the type of person you are. How you’re doing in the classroom and

in the community, and just like the type of person or day-to-day [which] puts more value on the players that aren’t just the starting 11.”

She adds, “The culture and the people you surround yourself with make a difference. It makes wins sweeter and losses harder when you’re really rallying for everyone around you.”

## Commitment to Community Service

Beyond the field, Oliver has been deeply involved in community service. She’s worked with Crohn’s and Colitis, Special Olympics, Ronald McDonald House and other organizations, which reflect her passion for volunteering and giving back.

She currently serves as VP of Community Engagement for the Huskie Athletic Council and her leadership extends to initiatives like the Huskie Women’s Soccer Goal-a-thon, where each goal scored translates into an act of service. With her volunteer connections, Oliver plays a major role in organizing the dozens of acts of service the team completes after each season.

In 2024, her efforts earned her recognition at the highest level.

Barandica-Hamilton nominated Oliver for the Canwest Community Service Award, which takes into account academic success, athletic performance and community involvement. She ended up winning, which then put her in contention for the nationwide U Sports award.

“Jerson took me to Halifax, didn’t tell me to prepare a speech and I ended up winning.”

This became the first time a player from the Huskie women’s soccer team had won a major individual U Sports award.

## Becoming the All-Time Minutes Leader

This season, Oliver made history again by becoming the Huskies’ all-time minutes leader, recording 5905 minutes—an achievement she never imagined when first joining the team.

“I guess it just goes to show all the work behind the scenes I did to make myself strong and consistent enough to do that. I’m not taking any opportunities for granted. Being injured reminds you of what you’re passionate about. It goes from, ‘I have to be here,’ to, ‘I get to be here.’”

She notes that the recognition was especially meaningful, considering her position.

“As a defender. I’m not going to be on goal-scoring sheets, so something like that to remember my time is really cool. I appreciate the trust my teammates and coaches had in me to play all those



minutes.”

Reflections and Memories

Oliver reflects fondly on both the big wins and the everyday memories.

Defeating Calgary in penalty kicks in 2021 and beating UBCO in the 2023 quarterfinal to proceed to winning Canwest bronze are obvious highlights. But she emphasizes the smaller moments with teammates as equally meaningful, such as just being in the team room or the team’s dance circle. She’ll also miss the level of competition that comes with being a U Sports athlete.

Her final game came in this year’s quarterfinal against UBC, a hard-fought match where the Huskies dropped a narrow 0–1 decision to the top-ranked Thunderbirds.

“Had I been done in my true fifth year, I probably would have had more of an identity crisis and been more devastated. But not many people get the opportunity to be with this team for seven years. It was still a tough pill to swallow, looking around the room, knowing I won’t play with these people again. But I’ve taken so much away from this team that I can be proud of myself, grateful for the experiences and ready to be [a] supporter for the next generation.”

For now, she offers this advice to younger players.

“At the end of the day, you can’t control coaches’ decisions or how others play, but you can control your work rate, communication [and] the type of person you are in the locker room. If you focus on doing one good thing a day, versus all the things that you can’t control, that’s so important to your growth. Also, approach everything with gratitude. Not everyone gets this opportunity to play at the university level.”

Gratitude and Thank-Yous

Oliver is quick to acknowledge those who shaped her journey.



Anna Oliver signing autographs for young fans. | Taylor Duchscher

She wants to thank Huskie women’s soccer head coach Barandica-Hamilton, for seeing her potential and instilling confidence in her from a young age.

She is also grateful to coach Abumere Okonofua for “always being such a hard ass on [her]” and reminding her to always keep pushing.

She credits coach Amy Prokop for being “the most supportive person ever and pivotal in the team’s culture.”

She also values coach Sam Martin for what he has done for the team in terms of injury prevention and “giving me reassurance that what I’m doing behind the scenes doesn’t go unnoticed.”

And of course, she wants to thank all of her teammates.

“I couldn’t reflect on the success I’ve had, but also just the experience I’ve had without everyone that’s been a part of my journey from first year all the way to fifth

year. I’ve valued all of the relationships that I’ve had with everyone and all the opportunities for growth and just the laughs and the good times.”

Looking forward

Oliver intends to finish her master’s thesis, a secondary analysis of the Neural Health Project examining what differentiates participants’ results in its study of integrative versus standard approaches to treating depression. At the same time, she is exploring physician’s assistant programs and keeping her options open for other healthcare opportunities.

She continues to enjoy her full-time role as a Residential Team Leader at Light of the Prairies, where she provides day-to-day support to individuals with intellectual disabilities living in a group home environment. She also looks forward to more time for herself and her family, and to do some travelling.

As Oliver turns the page to focus on her career and personal life, her years with the Huskies remain a defining chapter. Oliver leaves behind a legacy of resilience, leadership and humility. An exemplary captain, she will be greatly missed, but her impact will continue to shape the Huskies women’s soccer team for generations to come.



Canada West bronze in 2023. | Rich Lam

Men’s Hockey

Continued from page 5.

He described a group that jokes around, keeps the mood light, and arrives at the rink ready to work. “To perform, you’ve got to enjoy coming to the rink. And I think our guys do that really well.”

Cote also reflected on how his own coaching style has evolved. “I really feel that my core values have stuck throughout, and that’s really what we talk about with some of our team identity stuff,” Cote said. “It’s what’s important to me, but my ability to adjust certain things as we move forward has evolved. I think how it’s evolved is just being able to understand and communicate with each individual. That’s something I’ve continued to evolve with.

“When I first came in, I might have been a little bit more team-oriented, but as you go,

you really have to learn it’s all about the team. But it’s also about trying to get every player to be at their best. It’s not a one-size-fits-all model,” he said. “Leaning on my ability to communicate with each player and being upfront and honest with them in a respectful manner is something that’s evolved with me from the time I’ve been here.”

He also credits his staff for much of the team’s success.

“I wear a lot of hats, but I’m fortunate to have a great support staff. Leaning on them has been a big part of our success, and it will continue to be as we move forward.”

The Huskies have already had their share of memorable games, but none stand out to Cote quite like their home opener against Mount Royal University, a rematch of the Canada West final. The banner-raising ceremony, the sold-out crowd and the tight back-and-forth game created an

atmosphere that embodied the spirit of Huskies hockey. “That one sticks out,” Cote said. “A sold-out arena, physicality, back-and-forth play and our guys were ready. Those experiences are what make playing here special.”

The coach said home ice, when energized by students, can be a game-changer. “The more students we get out, that’s what our guys love, is when they walk out of the tunnel, to see that student section full and energetic, and it really does elevate our game when we have that,” he said.

With major matchups ahead, including a crucial series against UBC, rivalry games with Regina and a January showdown with the University of Alberta Golden Bears, the Huskies want the student body behind them.

“There are lots of really important games coming up,” Cote said. “Those rivalry games, community events like the teddy

bear toss, hockey fights cancer night, they’re always well attended. And if we get to host playoffs again, those are fantastic events.”

His message to students was simple: “We’ve got a fantastic group. We have a great opportunity to do something special. It’s an exciting brand of hockey, and student support really elevates us.”

As the winter season builds and the team sharpens its identity, the Huskies are chasing not just another banner; rather, they are focused on building a culture that’s cohesive and relentless, shaped by shared goals, pressure-tested experiences and a belief that they can finish what last year started.

For Cote and his team, every practice, every shift and every home game in front of students is another chance to push toward something bigger.



# CFCR 90.5 FM: Saskatoon’s Community Radio

A look into CFCR, its origins and student influence, with interviews with Station Manager Neil Bergen

**Colton Danneberg**

As Saskatoon’s non-profit community radio station CFCR 90.5 FM approaches its 35 years on-air milestone next year, *The Sheaf* caught up with its station manager, Neil Bergen, for a look into the station’s history and mandate.

When asked about the origins of CFCR, Bergen explained that: “We actually came about as a result of the UofS campus radio station being shut down many, many years ago. The university pulled the funding for the station, and it ceased to exist. There were a couple of people that were involved in the university station that thought there had to be some kind of alternative radio in the city. There were five of them initially that had a little meeting—they each threw in 10 dollars and said, ‘we’re gonna start a radio station.’ Of course, they had no idea how difficult it is to start a radio station.”

**“It’s a community radio station, but it’s actually a community of people. Everybody sort of identifies with the same things. It’s [also] a very musical community ... It doesn’t matter what kind of music you like, whether you’re a classical person or a jazz person or a rock person or a country person—most people who love music love all kinds of music.”**

Bergen explained that the many hoops of starting a radio station included the engineering, licensing and legality due to radio being a federally regulated industry. It was the founders’ naivety, Bergen says, that ended up being a good thing for the station. They pieced together the station with help from a recently graduated lawyer from the UofS to get the licensing of the station in working order.

“One of the beautiful things about this radio station was that the people who started initially decided to go with a block programming kind of format.” The advantage of block formatting, opposed to other community and university radio stations, Bergen says, is the predictability of genres that are set to be played on air every day.

A typical weekday consists of two back-to-back shows of *Green Eggs and Ham*, the first from 6 a.m. to 8 a.m. and the second from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. This is comprised of a variety of music that volunteers choose to play. After that, *So Many Roads*, which plays a mix of bluegrass and country music, will run from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., followed by *Hot Buttered Soul* from noon till 1 p.m., which plays soul and funk music. Jazz on the *Swing Shift* runs from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., followed by *Canadian Waves* from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., which showcases a lot of indie and local Canadian artists. Each of these schedules is subject to change slightly from day to day to accommodate new and different programs.

The radio also promotes local events through a brief Community Calendar show that runs four times a day, which is free to nonprofit organizations and cultural groups

things interesting. “That’s the key to the station,” says Bergen. “We play something for everybody. If you don’t like what you hear, wait an hour, and it’ll be totally different.”

It’s also the personal touch of the volunteers that helps to make each show different, Bergen explains. For example, on a program like *Hot Buttered Soul*, Bergen says that: “[There’s] a different host every day, so that means a different show every day. One show might be Motown stuff. Another show does British funk stuff ... So, even though they’re the same show, they’re totally different because there’s a different host and they have different tastes.”

“One thing we do not play, as a rule, is commercial music ... We don’t play in the Top 40. Part of our mandate is to be alternative, so we’re allowed a certain

generally play much more than our minimum CanCon (Canadian content) requirements.”

Bergen tells me that CFCR used to see much more student involvement, but radio is simply a format that isn’t as popular with many young people because of music streaming. When asked what the impacts of technology such as streaming services have had on local radio, Bergen pointed out that community radio still has a lot of advantages that other platforms don’t.

“One of the advantages of listening to us is that you can find new music all the time. We play music that you may not be aware of. It’s all well and good to be able to play whatever you want on Spotify or Apple Music or whatever, but you have to hear it first to know that you want to go play it.”

A show dedicated to new music on CFCR



CFCR station manager Neil Bergen | Colton Danneberg

to advertise on. As Bergen explains, one of CFCR’s main mandates is to “provide a voice for the people who don’t have a voice.”

Weekdays after 6 p.m. typically include a talk show and subjects will vary depending on the program—for example, Mondays from 6 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. airs *Feminist Intersectional Radio Education (F.Y.R.E.!)* program, which features diverse social issues with a feminist intersectional lens, while the same spot on Thursdays airs *Board On The Air*, a father-daughter radio show about their experiences playing the newest board games.

While those who tune into CFCR generally know what programs will be played at what time, the variety of shows keeps

amount of hits to be played, [but] it’s very small.” Bergen explains that this also helps to expose local artists to the community, since they’re not going to be played on a commercial radio station.

The local aspect of community radio is also furthered by a uniquely Canadian law around radio stations having to play Canadian content. As a rule, 35% of what a radio plays has to be Canadian content. Bergen explains they generally exceed that because of the amount of independent Canadian music available.

“When I was in commercial country radio, there were about 15 artists that would get played that were Canadian—and you get sick of that real quick. But because there’s just so much independent music, [we]

is called *The Buzz*, which runs from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. during the week. *The Buzz* features interviews with local musicians, touring musicians and any kind of new artists that aren’t on commercial radio stations’ radars.

“You’ll hear lots of stuff that’s been released a day ago. One of the things I enjoy the most is if I’m listening and I’ll Shazam it to try and find out what it is, and lots of times it won’t even be able to find it [since] it’s pretty new.”

“I [also] think we’re fortunate that we have a niche market in the city. We don’t really compete with anyone else because of what we do ... We have over 130 volunteers who do shows here on the station every week, so that gives us variety. We have



# Nears 35 Years on Air

and USask student host Greta Mader-Stevens

music, spoken word and 14 multicultural programs that run on the weekends, which is another aspect that nobody else does.”

Bergen also explains that CFCR’s talk show programming is just as varied as the music the radio plays. “Again, it depends on what the volunteers want to do. We don’t program it and then look for somebody to fill it. People come to us with their ideas for a program, and if it’s something we don’t have, then there’s a high likelihood that we’re going to try and get it on the air.”

The interest of volunteers remains at the heart of the station. “We don’t choose them, they choose us ... You can make people aware that you’re here and that there’s an opportunity to volunteer here, but it’s really up to the individual to approach us and volunteer.”

Bergen spoke about how the station has been very fortunate to have dependable and passionate volunteers over the years. “Radio is not the kind of thing where if you don’t show up, nobody notices. If you don’t show up, it’s a big problem because something has to go on the air, and somebody has to do something. So we’re very fortunate—the volunteers we have are very dependable.”

Because the radio is a nonprofit and based on volunteers, they host an annual fundraiser entitled ‘FM-phasis’ in the fall. The fundraiser this year saw the community donate a total of \$85,000 towards the station. FM-phasis typically offers donors to be entered into a number of prize draws, with this year’s winners taking home prizes such as \$800 worth of gift cards to restaurants around the city, a Fender Squier guitar package with accessories, a John Taylor Bass Guitar valued at \$3465 and more—all prizes donated by local businesses and community members throughout Saskatoon.

When asked about the ‘community’ aspect of community radio, Bergen explained that “we’re a very niche market, but we have a very loyal audience.”

“It’s a community radio station, but it’s actually a community of people. Everybody sort of identifies with the same things. It’s [also] a very musical community ... It doesn’t matter what kind of music you like, whether you’re a classical person or a jazz person or a rock person or a country person—most people who love music love all kinds of music.”

One student volunteer The Sheaf spoke with was Greta Mader-Stevens, who has been a host on Green Eggs and Ham for the past year from 6 a.m. to 8 a.m. on Wednesday mornings.

When asked about her initial interest in local radio, Mader-Stevens said that she had always loved music and its variety. “I like finding different music genres and artists, and connecting over music with people from different cultures.”

Mader-Stevens says that she usually plays a variety of music on her program and has a list of local artists that she keeps on her radar for new releases. “I always try to include something from a Quebec artist to get a francophone song. I’ve also been trying to do one German song because I have a friend in Germany who gives me suggestions, and one Portuguese song—just to have some language variety. I’ll include an old artist that maybe wasn’t a hit, but that I really appreciate, so I can have new music and some older ones. I try to get a bunch of different angles.”

Despite being on an early timeslot, Mader-Stevens says she has had numerous call-ins of support from the community in the past year she has been on the air. “One of them was a woman who just called in and was like: ‘I listened to your show and I really enjoy it.’ And she wished me a Happy

New Year, because it was the Chinese New Year [at the time]. I thought that was really nice. It was the first time that someone had called in, and I honestly thought no one was listening because you don’t know how many people listen.”

“[One time] I played a Waltons song, a Saskatchewan band from the 90s that had a presence here... I played one of their songs, and this guy called and was like ‘Was that The Waltons? I haven’t heard that in forever!’ That was really nice because it made me feel that my research paid off, because I had been asking my mom about what was big when she went to the UofS, and she had recommended The Waltons.”

Mader-Stevens’s pitch for students who may be interested in listening or getting involved with community radio stems from her own experiences with music. “You know when you become obsessed with a song and you just love it and listen to it so many times? That used to happen to me about once a month. [But] with CFCR, if you listen consistently or if you plan a show, because you’re getting so much variety and different things like artists that have very few listeners, or different languages, I get that feeling so often ... I love listening at random hours of the day, especially on the weekend when they have their multicultural programs, and you’re just like, ‘this is a German banger,’ and then I become obsessed with it. And then the next week, another one happens.”

“I love that feeling, and I think other people do too. I think that when you look at music that way, instead of just listening to whatever Spotify is throwing at you (especially because some of that is sponsored), it’s just a better way to find new artists that you love.”

She also says that radio has a practicality to it that other mediums can’t offer. “I think people talk a lot about how expensive

it is to do things ... Radio is free, and everyone has a radio in their car, and you can buy a radio for so cheap at second-hand stores, so you don’t need to pay for a streaming service. I do think that buying CDs and vinyls from artists is good to support local music, but there have been studies showing how little [profit] from streaming services actually goes to the artist, so radio is a great way to do both. And the money from [CFCR] goes directly to [those] being played.”

Mader-Stevens’s final point about her time at CFCR is the variety of people she has been able to meet through volunteering for the station.

“Getting into a community like that is pretty remarkable. I was trained by one host who has been around since they began, and he was one of the people who helped found [the station] ... [I’ve] talked to people who have family who are local artists, and they want to help support them. [There’s] high school programs and kids programs that CFCR runs, and it’s such a great way to think about the generational difference—a lot of the hosts are retired, but we have a few people my age, kids, and it’s just so fun.”

CFCR’s radio tower, which has been in use by the station since the first broadcast, will no longer be available in 2026. The station will have to find a new tower to place their transmitter, which is no easy task. Despite the work involved in finding a new tower, Bergen remains optimistic. “We look at it as a positive. Things could turn out to be bigger and better after we’re done.”

CFCR is always looking for volunteers to host radio shows and bring new ideas that they would like to hear or broadcast on the station. Interested students are encouraged to submit an application at [cfcr.ca](https://www.cfcr.ca) and seek more information.





# Timothee “Chalant”-met: Fighting a cultural epidemic

“But the truth is, I’m really in pursuit of greatness. I know people don’t usually talk like that but I want to be one of the greats.” – Timothée Chalamet, SAG Award Acceptance Speech 2025

Hannah Ha

In an era when celebrity often feels like a performance within a performance, Timothée Chalamet has become something rare: a Hollywood star whose appeal lies not in perfection, but in his willingness to be seen. Throughout his broad acting range and Academy nominations, his sincerity remains constant. Amidst a “nonchalant” pandemic, what can his successes teach us about earnestness, vulnerability and authenticity?

Increasingly among Gen Z, there is more and more value placed on effortless perfection. A non-chalant epidemic is on the rise among the younger generations, with a habit to downplay enthusiasm and effort, and meet life with a shrug: “no-makeup” makeup, casual photodumps on Instagram, the perfect messy bun. Asking out the girl or applying for the dream job is minimized to hide hope and emotional investment, “I didn’t want it anyway”. Passion and care are often hidden behind layers of irony to emulate an effortless coolness and be cringe-averse.

As a generation, we tend to downplay our efforts and our true desires, because maybe it will soften the blow when the risk doesn’t pay off, or maybe it will look more impressive when we pretend that we barely lifted a finger.

There is an attempt to generate intrigue and mystique by being withholding and detached, but not only do we get in our own way, there is an insincerity quite obvious to those around us. Chalamet’s rejection of that posture tells us something about the appeal of authenticity. Caring has become his whole brand. His openness has become an antidote to this cultural trend, and to *Time* magazine, Chalamet confesses, “I feel like I’m here to show that to wear your heart on your sleeve is O.K.”

Raised in New York’s Hells Kitchen, Chalamet has got grit from day 1. Graduating from Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts— with alums like Nicki Minaj and Jennifer Aniston— he was set up for stardom. As a child actor, he landed small roles like *Interstellar*, and has since

worked his way up to a household name. From smaller indie movies like *Beautiful Boy* to blockbusters like *Dune*, he has amassed a vast repertoire of work and major nominations for nearly every role. It’s also no small potatoes to be named Anthony Edward’s “White Boy of the Month”. But a professional resume only gets you so far, it’s really his character that pulls you in.

To understand Chalamet’s magnetism, you have to look at the landscape he emerged into. The late 2010s were marked by polished celebrity personas, meticulously curated Instagram grids and the illusion of accessibility. Amidst this hyper-managed culture, Chalamet’s Lil Timmy Tim persona and “Statistics” rap made him disarming and magnetic.

This cultural landscape helps to understand his pull among the younger generation across so many demographics. It is proof that this authenticity is something we crave and appreciate in each other, and that among this hyper self-conscious culture, a sense of unguardedness and honesty is disarming and pulls people in. In our blase epidemic, his earnestness stands out. He proves the magnetism of passion, especially when pursued with humility.

If Chalamet’s authenticity draws people in, his vulnerability keeps them there. From *Beautiful Boy*’s portrait of addiction to the quiet ache of *Call Me by Your Name*, he dives headfirst into roles that explore emotional intensity rather than physical dominance.

That choice is part artistic instinct, part cultural statement. Chalamet’s characters flip Hollywood’s paradigm of brooding, stoic masculinity. His leading characters cry, doubt, desire and often fail, yet those moments of emotional openness never read as weakness. As a leading man, he chooses to portray the quiet strength in being fully seen. Both a leading man and an everyman, he is somehow capable of carrying massive blockbusters while maintaining the soft-edged curiosity of an indie actor.

Off-screen, Chalamet’s vulnerability resonates. He has spoken candidly about the pressures of fame and the surreal

disconnection that can accompany success, always prefacing his immense gratitude and admitting to *GQ* “every career is a miracle”. This kind of emotional transparency is especially powerful in a generation raised amid digital filters and social expectations. Young audiences, in particular, see in Chalamet someone who embraces sensitivity without shame. He has, in a quiet way, redefined what it means to be a modern man: expressive, curious and unafraid to feel deeply.

Behind Chalamet’s charm is his obvious, almost uncontainable passion for his craft. In press interviews or red-carpet moments, he is never shy to praise his costars and directors. Every project is taken on with great care and seriousness, whether it be a musical about an eclectic chocolatier, or Bob Dylan’s biopic.

This intensity isn’t calculated, but instead, contagious. When discussing his role in *The Complete Unknown*, his enthusiasm spills over into conversations about storytelling, human complexity and the power of cinema itself. That passion becomes a form of authenticity in action. It shows that fame doesn’t have to dull one’s sense of wonder. It’s no coincidence that his most memorable performances radiate this energy. In *Beautiful Boy*, Chalamet channels emotion with a kind of fearless sincerity that makes the audience feel with him, not just for him. Chalamet admits to *60 Minutes*, “I don’t like to know exactly what I’m going to do in a scene, because the most interesting moments as an audience member are moments of truthful spontaneity.”

That sense of transparency has become a kind of rebellion. His authenticity challenges the cynicism that often shadows celebrity culture. It’s not that he rejects fame, but that he treats it as something to coexist with rather than to perform for. In doing so, Chalamet offers a model of success that doesn’t require self-erasure.

In a world obsessed with image, perhaps the most radical thing any of us can do is to stop performing and start feeling again. That may be Timothée Chalamet’s greatest gift, not his face, not his fame, but his reminder that to be fully human, we must be fully ourselves.



Timothée Chalamet after his win for *A Complete Unknown*. | Jordan Strauss | Invision | AP

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# Writing About Writers: Zach Tennent's Debut Novel Therapy Blues

USask Grad and Sheaf Alumnus Zach Tennent tells all on his latest project.

Laila Haider

Born and raised in Saskatoon, Zachary Tennent has lived a life familiar to many USask students. After graduating from high school at Aden Bowman Collegiate Institute, he decided to pursue a degree in History. During his tenure at the University of Saskatchewan, he joined *The Sheaf*, where he worked as the opinions editor for two years.

After earning his degree, Tennent moved eastward to Montréal, interested in delving further into the world of writing. Drawing from his previous experiences in writing and his love for cinema, he was inspired to become a film critic and screenplay writer, eventually starting a podcast—*Formatted To Fit Your Screen*—where he interviews filmmakers and authors and discusses movies.

Tennent's latest project is a self-published fiction book titled *Therapy Blues*, available for purchase on Amazon and in-store at Turning the Tide.

"It's about a writer who is trying to learn more about himself, trying to have a journey of self-discovery, and through learning more about himself and going to therapy, he doesn't necessarily like what he finds out about himself," says Tennent.

The book follows the journey of Peter Mills, a young Canadian author both blessed and cursed with success. After his YA novel, *The Asimov Principle*, becomes a bestseller, Mills finds himself celebrated by teenagers and ridiculed by critics and fellow authors. Worst of all, he is deeply allergic to the Canadian literary scene that insists on parading him around as the newest "voice" of his generation.

Now plagued with imposter syndrome and a deadline for a second novel that he cannot write, Mills spirals into therapy sessions with an eccentric psychoanalyst whose advice toes the line between profound insight and "I can't believe I'm paying for this."

Their sessions push Mills to confront his complicated relationship with his parents, his inflated yet fragile ego and his pathological need to seem like a tortured genius—even if he is only mildly inconvenienced by life, at best.

Outside therapy, Mills stumbles through awkward interactions with fellow authors and teaches creative writing at a Montréal college, where his students idolize him for all the wrong reasons.

The novel takes constant jabs at the Canadian publishing industry, academia and the performance of literary identity. Beneath the humour, it explores loneliness, artistic insecurity, the search for authenticity and the uncomfortable truth that success doesn't magically fix your psyche. Mills' inner conflict forms the book's emotional core: he yearns to create something meaningful, but can't stop tripping over his own ego, self-pity and desperate desire to be admired.

The book is equal parts comedy and psychological character study, inviting readers to laugh, cringe and see parts of themselves and tiny bits of their own lives reflected at them in the form of Mills' existential crisis.

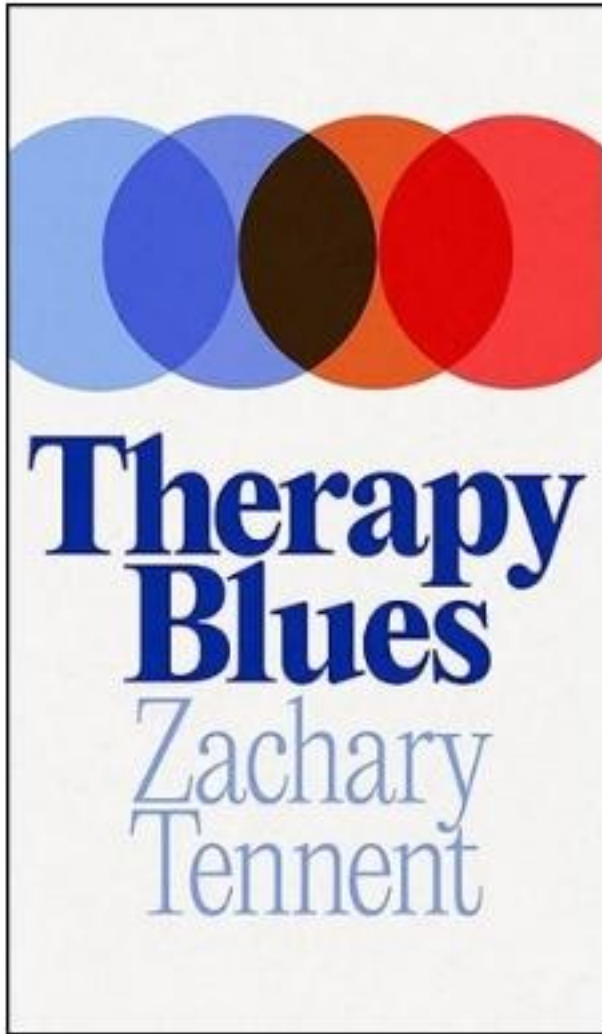
When asked what inspired him to write the novel, Tennent explains that he wanted to write something real and lighthearted.

"I think in the current moment, there are a lot of stories out there regarding trauma that are very heavy and aggressive in their messaging and tone. I wanted to tell a story that explores someone who has those same feelings within themselves, but takes the piss out of the situation a little bit and deflates the struggle when we sometimes take it so seriously, with the trauma of our past."

Inspired by elements from real life and his own experiences with therapy and living as a small-town boy in the big city, Tennent was itching to start writing *Therapy Blues* after his first session with a therapist.

Drawing inspiration from movies and other authors—in particular the film *Adaptation* by Spike Jonze, and books by Philip Roth and Mordecai Richler—Tennent was initially planning on making the experience into a screenplay, before deciding to publish it as a novel.

"This book, interestingly, did start out as a screenplay, so readers may find that it, at times, moves a bit like a movie, or it has a bit of that react structure to it. But when it came time to write it as a book, I was



Zach Tennent's book cover and self portrait | Zach Tennent

mostly looking to preserve the strength of the dialogue, because I always felt that the characters and the way the conversations between the characters in the book propel the story forward was the real strength of it, and the goal in turning it from a script into a book was to not get in the way of the conversations."

He continued. "Filmmaking is a very expensive and complicated process that involves a lot of people and time and scheduling, and I felt that I didn't want to have to prove myself to other people to have this story be out there, and I didn't want to need to wait around for the right person to approve before I could share the story, which is why I ultimately went [the] self publishing [route to have] full control over the project."

As anyone who has any experience with writing novels and getting them published will tell you, especially independently, it is much like Sisyphus and his boulder—an endless struggle to reach the peak. Upon finally self-publishing his work, Tennent felt immense relief in slaying the beast.

Working on this book gave Tennent the opportunity to read more, developing skills and efficiency he feels will be useful in future endeavours in writing. Giving me the inside scoop, he tells me that he is currently working on his next novel—a

darker fiction influenced by the works of Stephen King, set in Saskatoon. The tentative title is *Nutana Split*, and Tennent believes readers who enjoyed *Therapy Blues* will definitely enjoy this one too.

Looking back on the process of writing the book and becoming a published author, Tennent looks fondly back at his time at *The Sheaf*. He urges students to write and volunteer if they have something they want to say.

"Nothing was more instrumental in my development as a writer than my time at *The Sheaf*, both as a volunteer and then when I worked there. The key to becoming a confident writer is practice and working at it. I don't know where I would be if not for the time and training I got working with Naomi, Shantelle and everybody else at *The Sheaf*."

He recalls the office fondly: its posters, clock and fridge, among many other things. It is with a heavy heart that I have to tell him that the fridge stopped working last week.

For hopeful future authors and USask students looking to follow a similar career path, Tennent has these words of encouragement: "Practice and have fun, because you're going to need to practice. So you may as well learn to enjoy it."

Your words. Our pages. Pitch today.



# Am I in a Situationship...With My Degree?

The major I loved, ghosted and maybe still stalk on Instagram...

**Darshana Lanke**

You know that weird “talking stage” where you’re not sure if it’s love, codependence, or just fear of being alone? Yeah, that’s how I’d describe my relationship with my university major—a two and a half year long situationship with computer science.

At first, it was exciting. The kind you uncontrollably giggle over with your friends and make joint plans for the future. In casual conversations, I started to use the word “algorithm”, thinking I was all in. I thought I had found the one.

But like all toxic relationships, the red flags were there early on.

My first year I like to describe as the honeymoon phase. I still remember my first coding class, CMPT 141: Introduction to Computer Science with Dr. Jeff Long. We learned to print “Hello World!” in Python, and I thought I was five lines of Python away from founding the next billion-dollar startup (ethically, though and with a focus on improving the communities I call home).

Computer science made me feel powerful with its potential. Everyone kept telling me “You will never be unemployed,” which, let’s be honest, is basically the university equivalent of “They have a good job and own a house.” I ignored the fact that I didn’t love it. I mean, who loves their major? That’s not a real thing, right?

Wrong.

Year two is when the cracks start to show.

Sure, computer science still brought me joy, the kind you get after working so long and hard on trying to solve an assignment question and having it finally compile. But most days? It was a lot of crying and frustration sitting in Spinks because I couldn’t figure out why my code wasn’t working.

My relationship with my degree turned into one of those toxic dynamics where you’re constantly second-guessing yourself. My thoughts would be filled with “Am I just bad at this? Would I like it more if I understood recursion? If I switch majors, am I quitting or redirecting?”

But like any situationship, computer science kept stringing me along. Every time I considered leaving, something pulled me back: a great midterm grade, submitting an assignment that worked or the best one being the occasional compliment from a professor that made me feel like maybe, just maybe, I could make this work.

We were on and off for months. I’d swear it off during finals, only to enroll in harder courses the next semester.

The breakup happened in my third year.

Like most situationships, the end came quietly. It wasn’t some dramatic falling out. It was me, sitting in a computer science lecture halfway through third year, realizing I’d been dissociating for the past 20 minutes and had no clue what the professor was talking about. I looked around at my classmates with their eyes lit with passion (or maybe it was the caffeine)

and fingers flying across their keyboards and thought, “Wow, I don’t belong here.” I realized, sitting in that lecture theatre, that I don’t love computer science the way my peers did. I wasn’t loving computer science the way it deserved, and in return, computer science was not giving me the relationship I knew I deserved.

That was my breakup moment. I dropped computer science faster than I’d debugged any code, which in reality was never fast, pivoting to something that had always lingered in the background: Economics.

Switching to economics was like dating someone your friends describe as “safe”. It made sense and was structured. It didn’t give me panic attacks every time an assignment came around.

At first, I felt a bit like a sellout. Had I wasted two and a half years? Should I have tried harder to make it work?

But then I started to take economics classes on topics like labour economics and environmental economics, and I actually understood it. Like fully. I didn’t need to Google “What is marginal utility” in the middle of class, after the professor had sped through the explanation, trying to cram the entire slide deck into the 50-minute lecture. I even started looking forward to assignments. Who was I?

For the first time in my academic life, I felt secure and like I wasn’t constantly being gaslit by a compiler. Sure, maybe economics wasn’t as sexy as computer science in the eyes of Reddit bros, but I wasn’t crying every Friday before 6:00 pm

anymore (why does the computer science department choose that time as the deadline to submit?. That’s got to count for something.

Now the million-dollar question: do I still check computer science’s Instagram?

Absolutely.

I still catch myself browsing through computer science course syllabi like I’m stalking an ex’s vacation pics, and linger a little too long on the special topics courses offered this term in the registration channel in PAWS. I tell myself, “I’m just curious.” But we both know I am zooming in on those descriptions like they are selfies with someone new.

Sometimes I get caught in the what-ifs, wondering “What if I’d just stuck it out? What if I’d learned to love BASH and assembly instead of resenting it?

But then I remember burning the midnight oil for assignments worth only two per cent of my final grade, the imposter syndrome and the way Canvas notifications felt like passive-aggressive texts from a toxic ex: “Hey, just a reminder your assignment is due tonight. But I know that you haven’t even started.”

Economics might not always be riveting, but it’s healthy. I get it, and it gets me. We vibe. Most importantly, I don’t leave lectures feeling like a hollow shell of myself.

I hope readers can learn from my lessons from the academic trenches. If you are currently in a major you are not sure about, just know that you are allowed to change your mind.

You are not a failure. You aren’t “giving up”. You are evolving. Our society makes our majors out to be a lifelong commitment, but sometimes it’s just a rough draft.

I spent two and a half years in a situationship with computer science, but now I am in a stable relationship with economics. Do I miss it? Sometimes. Do I regret leaving? No.

Because at the end, your degree should challenge you and not emotionally drain you like a bad Tinder date.

So here’s to choosing majors that treat us right...or at least don’t crash every time we hit “run”.



Woman scrolling social Media | Dragon Images | Canva Prot



# Gift Cards Are Not Your Enemy

Gift cards: the most underrated gift of the season. And every season, honestly.

Laila Haider

As we approach the season of giving, mothers, fathers, friends and lovers across the world hurry to empty their bank accounts in search of the perfect gift. From gua shas to Uggs, to concert tickets, to video games, books and more—they search high and low to find the one thing that'll make their loved one's eyes light up with joy.

Little do they know, the best gift lies right under their noses, often overlooked and criticized—a pocket-sized portal into an endless realm of possibility: gift cards.

For too long, gift cards have borne the title of the "laziest" gift. The gift given at company retreats, trivia nights and to the friend of a friend whose birthday dinner you somehow got invited to. The band-aid of gifts, if you will—one size fits all. They're mocked for lacking personality and effort, as if the average person's gifting strategy is anything more sophisticated than "I hope this is their vibe."

To that I say, how would we live without it? Nearly every store and company sells gift cards. Airlines, car companies, clothing stores, grocery stores and more all recognize how valuable gift cards are as products and presents. There's a reason every checkout aisle, website and customer service kiosk has a designated selection of them.

Gift cards can do it all. They're rechargeable, shelf-stable, timeless and can save your pockets when you least expect it. They sit in your wallet until the day you find yourself stranded at the mall and starving, when you suddenly remember that \$25 Visa gift card you won in a raffle two years ago. Your plastic saviour.

Like Atlas, the gift card carries the weight of the world. I shudder to think of what we'd do without it.

So why do they get so much flak? Why are they seen as a bottom-of-the-barrel present you'd get your least favourite coworker? People treat them like the participation trophy of gift giving when in reality they're the only gift that acknowledges a



Canadian gift cards | Canadian Tire

simple and universal truth: human nature demands freedom of choice.

Maybe it's a personal opinion, but I think we need to get off the gift card's hypothetical neck. It's time we stop pretending we don't love flexibility. At the end of the day, not all gifts are made equal. They aren't all going to be sentimental representations of how our loved ones perceive us.

There is a storm cloud of shame surrounding functional gifts. We've bought into a cultural myth that gifts have to reflect deep emotional thought in order to be worth anything. Birthday presents and Christmas gifts have become a performance, brought on by the expectation that a proper gift requires emotional labour. The more specific, obscure or impractical, the more heartfelt it supposedly is. A candle in the scent "summer rain"? Thoughtful. A gift card? Apparently, unforgivable.

People would rather empty their wallets on useless junk the receiver will never, ever use—that costs the same amount as a gift card—because they're convinced that gift cards are the emotional equivalent of a pipe bomb.

The fact of the matter is that gift cards make people uncomfortable. They shatter the illusion that you spent hours scouring store shelves and agonizing over options. Instead of theatrics, they give you the truth: people enjoy receiving things they want. They don't offer a compelling and heartwarming backstory. You can't say "This gift card reminded me of your love

of dinosaurs," unless it happens to be from the Jurassic Park store, which does not exist.

We avoid gift cards like the plague, terrified of giving "impersonal" gifts, but nothing feels more impersonal than receiving something that shows the giver doesn't know you at all.

A lavender-scented bath set, when your apartment doesn't have a tub? A crafting kit when I've openly declared that I don't craft, have never crafted and I won't be starting now? That's not personal; that's evidence that you don't know me as well as you pretend to. You saw an item, vaguely thought "People like these," assumed I was interchangeable with the rest of the faceless masses, and then expected my gratitude for it.

Forgo the shame! Why are we so embarrassed to admit we weren't sure what someone might want? Since when did uncertainty become a moral failing? There's nothing noble about confidently buying someone the wrong gift.

I would go as far as to argue that the "impersonal" gift card is far more personal than half the physical gifts people scramble to buy.

There's a gift card for every type of person. Every interest—popular or niche—is covered. There are gift cards for sock stores, knife stores, massage places, coffee shops, gardening centres, subscription boxes and online marketplaces full of things you'd never think to buy, but they'd love to buy themselves.

If you know someone loves coffee and you get them a gift card for Second Cup, that's personal. If they love gaming but can't bring themselves to buy the game in their Steam wishlist, a gift card is remarkably thoughtful. If they love not spending their own money, every gift card is the perfect present.

In terms of practicality, gift cards have all keychains, bath bombs and remarkably unflattering items of clothing beat. It's 2025. We're in one of the worst financial climates of our lifetime, no one is getting hired post-grad and we're all saddled with the weight of tuition fees and loans. The last thing we need is more clutter disguised as kindness while our pockets remain empty.

Gift cards are a celebration of financial wellness. It's money that bypasses your sense of fiscal responsibility—like girl math on crack. Someone gives you a Visa gift card, and suddenly that overpriced hoodie you saw online is entirely justified. Someone gives you a Sephora gift card, and now buying that \$80 face wash "just to try it" becomes a perfectly reasonable decision.

Giving people gift cards saves us from wasting our money on a gift that will be disdainfully donated or sit collecting dust on a high shelf for the rest of eternity and allow the receiver to be inconvenienced on their own terms.

They are the backbone of the modern gift-giving ecosystem. They might not be glamorous, but neither is indoor plumbing, and you never see people complaining about that.

Maybe we, as a society, need to release ourselves from the shackles of dramatic gift-giving and acknowledge that not everything needs to be life-changing. At the end of the day, maybe not every gift needs to have a backstory. Some gifts can just be pleasant and useful, rather than a symbolic representation of your relationship.

Free yourself and your loved ones from the gift-giving matrix. Be open and honest with each other. Maybe that would be the biggest gift of them all.

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# Saskatoon's Winter Highlights: Seasonal Activities to Enjoy During the Break

These winter events showcase how Saskatoon stays vibrant, welcoming and full of life even in the coldest part of the year.

Hajra Ghuman

With the winter season approaching, students are preparing for the familiar mix of cold weather, final exams and the anticipation of time off. Even during the busy end of the semester, it is important to pause and make space for moments that bring comfort and joy. Saskatoon offers a wide range of winter activities that allow its residents and visitors to experience the season in meaningful and memorable ways. Whether you hope to unwind, explore or celebrate, this winter's local events provide many opportunities to do so.

### BHP Enchanted Forest 2025

The BHP Enchanted Forest returns this year from Nov. 15, 2025, to Jan. 4, 2026. The light displays run nightly from 5:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the Saskatoon Forestry Farm Park. This event has grown into one of the most beloved holiday traditions in the city. It is known for its longevity and its stunning arrangements of festive lights. The drive-through format makes the event accessible and relaxing. Visitors remain in the comfort of their vehicles while enjoying illuminated figures, animated scenes and familiar holiday imagery. The atmosphere feels peaceful and nostalgic, which makes it an ideal choice for a quiet evening after a demanding week or during the holiday break. The Enchanted Forest remains a cherished part of the city's winter identity and continues to welcome thousands of guests each year.

### Glow YXE 2025

Glow YXE will take place on select dates from Nov. 27 to Dec. 28. The event remains closed from Monday to Wednesday to prepare and maintain the displays. Glow has gained popularity as Saskatoon's major indoor holiday light festival. It offers large, illuminated structures, themed environments and

festive décor that create a bright and cheerful atmosphere.

Because it is indoors, Glow is especially appealing during extremely cold weather. Visitors can enjoy the displays comfortably while exploring the interactive areas and seasonal photo opportunities. The event attracts students, families and individuals of all ages who are looking to add a sense of celebration to the winter months. Tickets often sell quickly, so staying attentive to Glow's updates is recommended.

### Holiday Dinner Party 2025

The Holiday Dinner Party at TCU Place will be held on Nov. 28 and 29 and again on Dec. 5 from 6 p.m. until 12:30 a.m. This event invites groups from across the city to celebrate the holiday season with a formal evening of dining, entertainment and music.

Guests can enjoy a full dinner service and live performances before spending the remainder of the evening on the dance floor. The event has become a festive favourite for workplaces, families and groups of friends. For students, it offers a chance to dress up, enjoy a celebratory evening and unwind after the pressures of the fall semester.

### Kith and Kin Holiday Market 2025

The Kith and Kin Holiday Market will be held on Dec. 13 and 14. This market brings together local artisans, creators and small businesses from around Saskatoon. The event is a warm and vibrant space filled with handmade goods, art, home décor, treats and wellness products.

Visitors often appreciate the atmosphere of the market because it feels community-oriented and welcoming. It is an excellent opportunity to find gifts that feel meaningful and personal rather than



Pure Saskatoon | Andy Hu Getty Images | Canva Pro

generic. For students, it also offers an enjoyable break from studies while supporting local talent and creativity.

### Saskatoon Santa and Sleigh Rides 2025

Located about thirty minutes from Saskatoon, Champetre County Vacation Ranch hosts the Santa and Sleigh Rides on Dec. 14. The available time slots run from midday to mid-afternoon. The ranch provides a warm and inviting escape from the pace of the city.

The sleigh ride itself is a peaceful experience through a snowy prairie setting. Cozy blankets are provided, allowing visitors to settle in and enjoy the crisp winter air. The environment feels both rustic and comforting.

This event is ideal for students who want an outing that feels like a true getaway without travelling far. The quiet atmosphere and natural landscape provide a refreshing change from indoor studying and end-of-semester routines.

### Meewasin Sip and Skate 2026

Meewasin's Sip and Skate evenings take place on Jan. 3, 17 and 31, as well as Feb. 13, 14 and 28. Each session runs from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Meewasin Skating Rink in Kiwanis Park, and the event is restricted to guests 19 years of age and older. The rink is frequently recognized as one of Saskatchewan's best outdoor skating locations, and these special evenings offer a more intimate experience without the usual crowds.

Each event includes access to the closed rink, time to speak with the Meewasin team about local conservation work and a fireside area where visitors can warm up afterward. Guests receive a sweet smores box prepared by The Prairie Grazer and a hot beverage featuring LB Distillers spirits served in a take-home Meewasin mug. A savoury charcuterie box is available for purchase in advance.

The Sip and Skate event provides a calm and memorable winter evening, whether you attend with friends or as a date. It blends outdoor activity, local flavours and community connection in a way that feels distinctly Saskatoon.

### Polar Plunge Reset Retreat 2025

The Polar Plunge Reset Retreat takes place on Jan. 4 at Blackstrap Lake. This three-hour guided experience combines meditation, heat exposure, cold immersion and time in nature. Participants begin with a grounding meditation designed to settle the mind and encourage awareness. They then enter a wood-fired barrel sauna that helps release tension and regulate the stress response.

After warming up, participants take part in an ice-cold plunge in Blackstrap Lake. The immediate shock of the cold water promotes clarity, alertness and a renewed sense of focus. Facilitators guide the process carefully and provide all necessary equipment, making the retreat accessible to beginners and experienced individuals alike.

This event is ideal for students who wish to start the new year feeling centred and renewed. The combination of nature, breathwork and physical reset provides an energizing transition into the winter term.

Even though Saskatoon's winters are long, the season offers many opportunities to enjoy moments of calm, beauty and celebration. These events highlight how vibrant and welcoming the city can feel during the colder months. Whether you prefer festive lights, outdoor experiences, quiet retreats or lively gatherings, there is something to explore before the next academic term begins. Taking time to enjoy these winter activities can help you reset, reconnect and appreciate the season in a meaningful way.



Santa's workshop | BHP Enchanted Forest



# Higher Education or Humiliation Ritual? The Lamentations of a Post-Grad Applicant

If someone asks me to write a personal statement outlining my right to an education one more time, I might just lose it.

Laila Haider

When I first ventured out into the world of higher education, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, I looked at my education as a noble quest, the beginning of some grand intellectual journey. Entering university felt like walking into a Build-A-Bear for my future, where I could customize my life to my heart’s content, optimizing my chances of success. Now, nearing the end of my degree and looking forward to what life post-grad will look like, I’ve realized that the transition from undergraduate to graduate school is less of a journey and more of a psychological test of endurance designed by someone who exists to stomp out joy and spread misery.

Applying to grad school seems to be this inevitable right of passage for all those uncertain about the weight their bachelor’s degree holds.

Each program and school asks for something new, something weirdly specific, something you absolutely did not prepare for because no one told you that to pursue knowledge, you’d have to produce seven different statements, all spiritually identical but formatted in different fonts. Research statement, statement of purpose, personal history, portfolio of work and the contract you signed with Rumpelstiltskin, signing over your birth day for your dream life.

Then, there’s the specialized exams—DAT, LSAT, MCAT, GRE, CASPer, language tests, you name it. You spend hundreds of dollars to register for the exam, however, many more on prep books and tutors, dedicate months of your life to passing it and in the end, you leave the testing center questioning not only your academic capabilities but your value as a lifeform. In the academic world, it could almost be considered the equivalent of fighting in the colosseum, only you paid for the privilege of being intellectually and spiritually demolished.

Not to mention the psychological strength it takes to request references from your mentors. Is there anything worse than having to email your professors, managers and research supervisors, begging them to write you a little letter telling the admissions committee you’re competent? Maybe being stabbed.

Emails sent out to everyone that you have ever had even a modicum of a good relationship with, nearly grovelling for them to vouch on your behalf.

“Hi professor, I hope this email finds you well. Would you do me the honour of writing me a letter of reference? I’ll owe you my academic career, my life, my soul, my firstborn child and all of the wealth my bloodline has ever accumulated.”

Or even worse, reaching out to prospective research supervisors after scouring department websites to find at least one person whose: a) research area overlaps with your subjects of interest and b) demeanour seems relatively approachable based on the two-sentence introduction they have written beneath their name.

And then, of course, there’s the cost of applying. Outrageous. Almost laughable, if it weren’t directly siphoning money you don’t have. Each application costs roughly the same as a week’s worth of groceries, plus a processing fee, because apparently the university needs compensation for the insurmountable labour of possibly admitting you. Add the price of official transcripts and standardized tests, and it suddenly becomes clear that the real admissions requirement is generational wealth. If you’re applying to multiple of these programs? Good luck, Charlie.

The irony is cruel and palpable. You’re asking a population famously known to be broke and unemployed—whose pockets were emptied by your very institutions—for money so they can apply to your programs and give you even more money. Right.

Just when you think you’ve reached your breaking point, scholarships enter the chat. Because if grad school is expensive, the process of trying not to be crushed by debt is even more tiring. Every scholarship has its own theme: leadership, community engagement, academic excellence, personal tragedy, ability to tell a fourteen-part storytime on TikTok—who knows. Each one demands a fresh essay, new documents, references and a blood sacrifice, if they’re feeling fancy.

At the same time, your final year of undergrad doesn’t just politely step aside so you can dedicate time to your essays

and extra exams. You’re still balancing your course load, your job, your volunteering positions, your research, your relationships, your caffeine addiction and whatever crumbs of your life remain in between all of that.

Unfortunately, life does not pause during these trying times; it crowds in further, driving you up the walls as all of your obligations take up more and more room. You’re finishing assignments by day and statements of purpose by night, squeezing in exam prep during lunch breaks, hoping your professors remember to upload their reference letters and trying not to fail the course you need to graduate.

school or professional school is like a full-time job on top of the obligations you already have. You drink iced coffee in December because you don’t have time to wait for anything to cool. You become a machine powered entirely by anxiety and dread, deadlines and the tiniest glimmer of hope that your efforts will all eventually pay off.

By the time you finally submit your first application, you will no longer be the starry-eyed student who walked into university imagining their future like a teddy bear they could stuff and dress to their liking.



Stressed student facing academic pressure and challenges | Tschieder's Team | Canva Pro

Some days, you wish you had listened to the advice of the sage old people who had told you to start early. There’s always some requirement you should’ve mastered years ago: research experience, internships, shadowing, volunteering, six publications, a patent, fluency in three languages and the ability to drive a moped. You curse your first-year self for spending time at trivia nights instead of networking events, and your toddler self for not getting started on a cure for cancer by the time you could walk. Maybe if you had begun collecting volunteer hours or drafting a research proposal in the womb, things would be easier.

It is beyond exhausting. Applying to grad

Yet despite all of the agony, imposter syndrome, fees and frantic 11:59 p.m. submissions, you still want to go. You endure the whole circus not because it’s fair or reasonable, but because, against all logic, you believe in what comes next. You believe there’s something waiting for you beyond this gauntlet of stress and paperwork. You still see some version of the potential you glimpsed when you first walked into that metaphorical Build-A-Bear workshop for your life.

Maybe that’s admirable. Maybe it’s delusional. Maybe it’s both.

I just wish they weren’t so hell bent on emptying our pockets.

## Seen something on campus worth talking about? Tell us.



# Blue and Boo

How Halloween 2025 turned Toronto Blue Jays baseball into campus-wide camaraderie



Evergreen Toronto Blue Jays Yard Sign, Halloween Treats for Fans | Evergreen

Katherine Walcer

On most campuses, Halloween is a collection of college costume parties, midterm recovery and group chats trading last-minute plans. This year Halloween at Canadian universities coalesced into something rarer. A mass of interfaculty, inter-friend group rituals staged around a single sporting event, with students on campus watching the game in costumes, some joining into the watch groups and making friends. When the Toronto Blue Jays returned the World Series to Canadian soil for Game 6 on Halloween Friday, the calendar and the schedule clicked into place. Halloween wasn't just Halloween; it was Jays vs. Dodgers, not just under the Rogers Centre roof but also on screens all around campus.

The baseball was tense and ultimately cruel for the home side. The Dodgers stacked their offence in the third and squeezed every drop of leverage late, winning 3-1 to force a decider. The final image of the night, a one drive double play that snapped shut a ninth inning Jays rally, was the kind of punctuation mark that leaves a whole room breathless. That's the baseball storyline. But the social story was bigger.

Cities around the Greater Toronto Area and beyond hosted official and unofficial watch parties. The vibe across the nation that week was openly "Halloween is a Jays

Party," a civic permission slip to rearrange the holiday around communal baseball. On campus, some lecture halls turned into viewing halls, student unions booked projector rooms, residence floors became little theatres and study rooms had groups of 15 or more people watching on the big screen. Costumes were paired with jerseys or hats. Bars all over Saskatoon became official places for students to watch the game in high quality and gather to cheer on the Jays.

Think about the factions that make up campus: different majors and faculties, year of study and commuter versus residence life. Halloween Game 6 bulldozed those silos for the night. The content of the sport helped; baseball is episodic and social. It allows chatter between pitches, and it encourages shared nervousness. This gave non-fans easy on-ramps ("what happens if...?") without derailing the diehards.

A dark lounge or student bar becomes a true commons in the old school sense, a place where (almost) everyone feels licensed to step into conversation. You didn't have to know opposition to gasp at a diving catch or to understand that a line drive double play with the tying run on base is heartbreak in any language. The rules' complexity that sometimes pushes casual viewers away becomes, in a crowded room, a prompt for quick

teaching. Compression of a whole sports grammar into "force at second" and "tagging up", strangers tutoring strangers. Halloween aesthetics helped too; costumes lowered the social cost of participation. It's easier to join a crowd when you're in a Spiderman suit or dressed up as a ginger jester (what a funny sight to behold). The hybrid costume-jersey mashup made baseball feel like it belonged to the night rather than interrupting it.

That's important; campus unity doesn't happen when an event competes with people's plans it just happens when it becomes the plan.

Then there's the "Canada" of it all. The Blue Jays represent the nation, as opposed to an individual city. On Halloween night, in science lounges in Saskatoon, arts co-ops in Halifax and engineering basements in Calgary, the same broadcast rolled. The ballpark was in downtown Toronto, sure, but the emotional geography was the entire country. Municipal social accounts and local venues amplified the message with the sign "watch here tonight," and students did the rest, threading group chats into meetups and meetups into full rooms. Community centres and towns far from the Rogers Centre promoted Jays watch parties as part of the evening's festivities, efficiently braiding Halloween with the World Series.

What cemented this year's Halloween as uniquely unifying on campus is that it didn't end when the candy bowls emptied. The last game took place the very next night, in the same city, with the same players and with every storyline ratcheted up. If Friday was a collective inhale, Saturday was the 11th-inning exhale.

The Dodgers ultimately won 5-4 in extras. The game had everything: early leads, late heroics and a go-ahead home run that will live in highlight reels forever. For campus life, that meant the same living rooms, lounges and pubs filled again, now with sequel energy. People came back because they wanted a resolution, but also because they had found each other the night before. Two nights, one communal plot.

It's worth exploring why baseball did this in 2025 when other sports often own the campus calendar. Part of it is scarcity. The Jays hadn't played a World Series game since 1993, and you don't need to be a stathead to recognize a once-in-a-generation moment when it lands on a Friday night with a holiday theme. Scarcity sharpens attention; it makes people

reorganize their weekend around a shared screen.

Another part of the formula timing: an 8 p.m. EST first pitch meets the social rhythm of student life perfectly, late enough for costumes and dinner, early enough for the West to join with room for overtime drama if the game runs long (which Game 7 did). There is narrative clarity, Game 6 clinch or else face a decisive finale, Game 7 was win it all or go home for the winter. You can drop a casual fan into that binary, and they immediately understand the stakes.

Were there fractures? Sure. Not everyone likes baseball, not every campus space is inclusive, not every watch party is accessible. Regardless, the Jays Halloween weekend created more bridges than walls. The talk next week was universal, not just "did you see what happened in the ninth?" but "Where did you watch?", "Who were you with?" and "How much did you cry?"

Professors referenced it in Monday lectures and group chats kept ping-ponging with clips and "how did that double play work again?" The Blue Jays didn't just unify sports fans; they generated a short-term campus folklore that included the non-fans who walked in wearing vampire teeth and walked out knowing who turned a game-ender at second base.

While the series ended in heartbreak for Toronto, this, in campus terms, turned out to be another binding agent. Saturday night's extra-inning loss gave students a common language to process, a "what could have been" you could unpack with your lab partner or the person you met at the bar over the costume rack. The citywide and nationwide watch party ecosystem primed by Friday's Halloween tilt made sure people didn't have to process it alone.

Looking back, Halloween 2025 on campus reads less like a holiday and more like a spontaneous pop-up festival with baseball as its main stage. The Jays Game 6 set the terms—costumes plus closers, pumpkins plus pitching changes—and Game 7 gave an arc to finish.

Universities are always searching for events that cut across cohorts and concentrations and make everyone feel like they're part of the community. For one weekend, the Blue Jays provided exactly that. Although the scoreboard didn't cooperate, the community definitely did.

Stop doom-scrolling. Start story-telling.  
Join The Sheaf.



# Choosing Depth in a Digital Era: How a Personal Curriculum is Changing My Mind

How my personal curriculum is helping me rebuild my mind to become a better learner, while still enjoying the process.

**Hajra Ghuman**

I have noticed now more than ever, people are realizing that they are consuming more information than ever, but remembering almost none of it. It is the kind of half-life learning that comes from TikTok videos or Instagram reels that condense information into a handful of seconds.

I have lived in this cycle for some time now, and have begun to feel as though my mind fills up quickly like a cup with overwhelming information, but then when I put the phone down, it is almost empty from what I just consumed. Short-form content has encouraged a mode of thinking that is quick and interesting, but shallow and forgettable.

Eventually, I began to turn to long-form content that demanded my attention for a longer duration. Whenever I engage with content that causes me to slow down, reflect and follow a sustained line of thought, I feel a different part of my mind reactivating. When I recently completed a real estate law certificate, I found myself genuinely energized by how much I retained. That kind of learning felt grounding, and I knew I wanted more of it.

As I leaned into longer, more deliberate forms of learning, I began to develop something I now call my personal curriculum. It is not a list of things I hope I do someday or a rigid academic plan. A personal curriculum is a framework for the kind of mind I want to build. It is a self-designed education shaped entirely by the subjects, skills and areas of personal growth that matter to me. It is made up of categories that reflect my intellectual, creative, physical and spiritual interests. Although mine has grown quite extensive, it did not begin that way. The idea behind it is simple: curate your own education instead of letting the algorithm curate it for you.

What surprised me most was how naturally my screen habits changed once I committed to longer forms of learning. I did not force myself to spend less time on my phone; I just found myself drawn to activities that held my attention more deeply. For example, I have been very into documentaries recently, which have become more engaging to me again than short videos.

I have also come up with a list of certificate courses I want to go through, because those feel more enriching than fast-paced trends and quick explanations. My mind wanted to slow down and retain what I consume.

I have come to understand that building a personal curriculum is about reclaiming

your mind. Your attention is valuable and worthy of intentional investment. Curiosity is a skill that must be nurtured, not numbed.

Your own curriculum does not need to look ambitious to be meaningful. Begin by paying attention to what you wish you understood better. Think about subjects that you return to repeatedly in your thoughts. Think about the skills that would make your life easier or more fulfilling. Once you identify your interests, group them loosely into categories. Perhaps some are related to physical health, academic goals, creativity, spirituality, finance, personal projects or intellectual passions you never explored in school. These categories give structure to your curiosity, and these are all ones I have in my own personal curriculum.



Person reading a book | Nothing Ahead Pexels | Canva Pro

From there, choose learning formats that require long-term retention and focus. Books, documentaries, lectures, slow-paced long videos, in-person experiences, hands-on practice, reflective writing or structured courses all qualify. These formats allow learning to sink in and allow one to really immerse oneself in the material. I am always left feeling nourished rather than resentment towards myself for wasting my time, which has also prevented me from draining away my day.

A personal curriculum's purpose is to guide growth without adding unnecessary pressure on yourself. Twenty minutes of reading, one documentary a week, a module of a course or limited time but consistent skill practice is enough to create meaningful progress. A personal curriculum about adopting a lifestyle of

continuous learning that moves with you through different seasons of your life. Some seasons will emphasize physical growth. Others will be dedicated to academic knowledge or creative skills. At other times, it will require you to focus on personal reflection or spiritual development. Your own curriculum should adapt to these shifts in your life.

One of the most interesting outcomes of maintaining a personal curriculum is how it changes your relationship with time. When your days are filled with meaningful learning, time feels richer. Even the quiet moments, the ones that used to be filled with scrolling, become opportunities for curiosity. You begin to feel excited about what you will learn next, and this anticipation brings a sense of purpose. You discover that learning is not only

something you do in classrooms or when you are preparing for exams. It becomes something you do because it makes you feel more alive.

Ironically, this has reminded me of how much I used to enjoy learning in an academic context and has made that more enjoyable and fulfilling again as well.

When you spend time learning things that matter to you, you begin to feel more capable. Your thoughts become clearer and your writing improves. The conversations you have daily have more depth, and you begin to understand the world with more nuance. I feel a lot more connected to my identity because my learning reflects my personality.


This is why I believe that building a

personal curriculum is one of the most valuable things a student can do, especially in an environment like university where it is easy to become consumed by academic learning. A personal curriculum allows you to take ownership of your intellectual life rather than letting only your degree dictate the scope of your mind. It reminds you that you are allowed to be curious beyond your major, to study things that will never appear on an exam and to grow in ways that are not showcased on a transcript but are present within your character.

In a world that encourages quick consumption and forgettable knowledge, choosing depth is an act of self-respect. Building your own personal curriculum comes with realizing your mind deserves nourishment.

The slow and deliberate joy of learning something truly stays with you, and that is the way we should all be indulging in consumption.

Join the feed  
@sheafteam





# How I Write an Opinion Article, a.k.a. Pretending I Know What I Am Doing

A chaotic yet sincere walkthrough of the very unscientific, unstructured and unexpectedly joyful way I create my opinion pieces.



Coffe and journaling | Slonme | Canva Pro

## Hajra Ghuman

This is my third year being the Opinions Editor for The Sheaf, which means that at this point, I should have some sort of refined, elegant, highly strategic system for creating an article.

Instead, my process looks a little bit like a chaotic scavenger hunt mixed with a child-like creativity. People sometimes ask me how I write an opinion piece, and I pretend to have an answer, but the truth is that I make it up as I go along and hope that the overall idea does not fall apart halfway through. Ironically, that is also the exact method that led me to write this very article about how I write articles. If this sounds circular and a little confusing, do not worry. I too am confused, and I am the one writing it.

If we are being honest about my origins as a writer, it started in elementary school when I discovered my love for creative writing. I wrote stories constantly, like I was already a famous, well-known author with a huge fanbase. I read constantly, which fueled the creative chaos, and everyone in my life knew this about me. In high school, the pattern continued. I kept reading, kept writing and kept having far too much fun with it. My love for writing would show in other creative disciplines, like having input as the stage manager in the musicals and writing up scenes for my drama classes. I never questioned whether my ideas made sense. I simply placed them on the page and moved on.

Then undergrad arrived, and the academic reading load took over my time for personal reading. When I did read, it was not for enjoyment. Law school increased the reading load by 100 times. I read cases, articles and statutes, and at this point I am convinced that my brain has become a legal database. A practical and interesting

one, but still a database (not good enough yet to be used as a secondary source). Despite all of that, I have held onto my love for comics and graphic novels. They are the one form of reading that I have been able to stay consistent with in the academic world.

When I stepped into this editorial role about two years ago, I felt like I had to write formally and perfectly. I would type a sentence, delete it, type it again, delete it again and then stare dramatically in any given direction, like it would help break the fourth wall of my writer's block. Sometimes I still fall into this trap, but thankfully, I now have a much healthier system that embraces both chaos and joy in an equal way.

One of the most important parts of my process is my Notes app. Whenever I have a random thought, I write it down instantly. I do not wait or filter it. I do not question why I am writing down the phrase; it is like it simply goes into the vault. There have been times when I am in the middle of a conversation with my friends, and something interesting comes up. I will smile politely, raise a finger and express that I need to write this down right now. I immediately start typing like the thought might expire in the next ten seconds, and my friends have learned to accept this behaviour.

Slowly, as I have continued in this role, something funny has happened. Every time I have a thought that I want to explore privately, I immediately also think if it could be an article. It happens automatically now, as if it were a reflex. I have become someone who thinks in potential pitches, which feels both efficient and slightly alarming.

At any given time, I have 40 to 50 rough s

ideas floating in my Notes app. Sometime I look at one and genuinely wonder what past me was trying to communicate. Other times, I find something that sparks an entire chain of thoughts. When pitch time arrives, I scroll through each idea quickly and wait to see which ones jump out. I ask myself whether I can build more around the topic. I also ask whether the idea matters to anyone other than me. Since most students around me are the same age, the answer is often yes, or at least yes enough.

After I have sorted the promising ones, I leave them alone for a bit. I let them simmer in the back of my mind while I go about my regular life. When I am doing dishes or walking somewhere or waiting for my coffee, I will occasionally return to the idea mentally and see if it still feels worth writing. If it does, then I know I have a winner. If it does not, I return it to the chaotic notes archive, where it will remain until I can do more with it.

When it is finally time to write, I make a small cluster of jot notes, just enough to remind me of the shape that the article should take. Then, in a dramatic burst of productivity, I write the entire thing in one go. I cannot explain why this is my method. I simply sit down, type with the energy of someone trying to beat the clock and pour out every thought I have on the topic. It is very possible that this resembles chaos from the outside. Internally, it feels like controlled chaos, which I personally think is an important distinction.

Once I have written everything, the editing begins. This is where I reread my work, clean up sentences and try to make sure that I have not gone on a tangent about something that is entirely unrelated to the topic. At the end, I choose a title. The byline comes next, and I write it as a single

sentence that summarizes the entire article. I do not write it first, because I do not know what the article is fully about until I have finished writing it. This is arguably not how professional writers are supposed to work, but it is how I work, and at this point, I have accepted it.

Strangely, this process has brought me back to my childhood love of creative writing. Even though opinion articles are different from fictional stories, they share something important. They both begin with curiosity and require an idea that feels worth exploring. They both require a tiny spark that makes me want to write more. In law school, which is filled with its own kind of writing, this playful and chaotic way to do it reminds me that I still enjoy creating things. It reminds me that writing can be silly and fun.

Being the Opinions Editor has taught me that writing does not need to be perfect. It does not need to be formal at every moment. So, if someone ever asks me for a guide on how to write an article, this is the most honest guide I can give. Collect your strange thoughts and write things down the moment they appear. Allow yourself to explore ideas that surprise you, and allow your Notes app to become an unhinged museum of your thoughts. Trust that a good idea will rise to the surface of it all and will inspire you to write it all in one go (if that is your vibe of course, you can also always take breaks in between).

However, above all, make sure you are having fun, because readers can sense when the writer enjoyed themselves. This article may be about how I write opinion pieces, but it is also proof that writing can still feel playful and alive, even when I am balancing all my other responsibilities. If anything, the chaos is part of the charm of these articles, so learn how to embrace it.



# Wellness isn't a workshop; it's a structure

Students don't need more wellness infographics or mental health workshops; we need a semester structure that doesn't purposefully lead to burnout

**Darshana Lanke**

Every semester, without fail, USask rolls out familiar messaging: take care of yourself, prioritize wellness, reach out if you're overwhelmed and remember that mental health matters. Posters go up, social media graphics circulate and instructors emphasize that students should "just ask" if they need help. In theory, it sounds supportive.

But then week six arrives. Then week 11. Then the final three weeks of the semester, and suddenly every class has a midterm, a lab report, a research paper, a group presentation, all on top of weekly assignments and quizzes, all crammed into the same ten-day window.

Your wellness? Never heard of her.

It's at this point that the university's messaging starts to sound less like support and more like satire. Because if there's one thing the academic calendar is committed to, it's creating a series of perfectly predictable academic bottlenecks that torpedo student well-being with the elegance of a synchronized dive team.

The message becomes clearer than any wellness poster ever could: Student well-being is important, but not important enough to challenge the current structure.

If this were a one-semester quirk, students might shrug it off and push through. But this is a pattern that repeats with mechanical precision. Every semester, deadlines from different classes stack up at the same time, and even though this happens every year, it still causes severe stress for students. The university's academic rhythm is so entrenched that every student can predict the exact weeks when their life will fall apart.

Week five to seven: The "midterm migration," when every course decides it must test you at exactly the same time. Week 10 to 11: The avalanche of papers, labs and presentations. Final two weeks: The "good luck surviving" era, when that avalanche of deadlines collide with final exams prep to create a perfect storm of burnout.

The problem usually isn't the total amount of work. A semester's workload is challenging, sure, but survivable. The issue is that the work arrives all at once, like a herd of bison stampeding through your calendar.

Even students with perfect planners, colour-coded schedules and 12 different productivity apps can't "time-manage" their way out of six deadlines in five days. It's not a personal failure; it's a structural one.

"Start early," people say. And of course,



Under pressure | Devoreaux | Canva Pro

yes, in theory, starting early is great. Absolutely. Let me just grab the instructions for that major assignment—oh wait, they're not posted yet. Or they are posted, but the content needed to complete the assignment won't be covered until the class right before it's due. Or maybe it's group work, and half your group disappears into midterm madness in their other courses, with someone only able to meet between 7 and 7:15 a.m. on Tuesdays. Or maybe it's a lab report that requires data that you can only collect during the lab, which is three days before the report is due.

No amount of bullet journaling saves you from that.

When deadlines stack, students switch from learning mode to triage mode. It's no longer about understanding material, but instead it's about calculating what can be done fastest, what can be sacrificed and how many sweet treats it will take to survive until Friday.

The university says it wants students to develop a deep understanding and critical thinking. But deep learning requires time. Not three overlapping deadlines, a midterm and a 400-word discussion post due on the same day.

USask is not alone in its wellness branding. Universities across Canada have adopted the language of mental health and resilience. But there's a disconnect between messaging and practice when the broader academic structure hasn't changed.

Workshops on stress management don't undo a six-course pileup in Week 11. "Take breaks!" doesn't help if you'll fall behind in three classes by doing so. "Use campus supports!" doesn't lighten your workload or delay your deadlines. The self-care messaging ends up becoming unintentional comedy.

Student wellness campaigns often feel like universities placing the responsibility for managing stress onto individual students, while leaving the systems that create that

stress untouched. Telling students to "reach out if they're overwhelmed" is meaningless if courses are structured to make being overwhelmed inevitable.

The narrative that students can simply "cope better" is a dangerous deflection. For years, university culture has framed burnout as something students must individually prevent through better habits, mindfulness, self-care routines or organizational tools.

But no amount of self-care compensates for systemic overload. You can meditate all you want—you're still going to have four back-to-back deadlines and a midterm on the same day.

Universities love to tell students that mental health matters. Yet when push comes to shove, academic tradition wins. The underlying expectation remains: wellness is a personal project, while the academic structure is untouchable.

It's easy for students complaining about the pile-up to imagine professors cackling in their offices, plotting their next deadline. But in reality, most instructors are juggling constraints students never see.

Many of them are locked into shared lab structures, inherit syllabi designed long before wellness became a campus buzzword, teach multiple courses with their own competing deadlines, try to space things out but still must cover required material by midterm and finals seasons and genuinely worry about overwhelming students, while also having to balance the worry about falling behind.

Most instructors don't want to stack deadlines. Quite a few actively try not to. Some even move assignment due dates when they realize every student is dying that week. Others drop low-stakes quizzes or shift timelines to help students breathe.

The issue is that even the most compassionate instructor is operating inside a larger ecosystem—one shaped by tradition, departmental planning and the

relentless pace of a 13-week semester.

Universities have built a structure where bottleneck weeks are nearly unavoidable. Blaming individual instructors for assignment stacking is like blaming one rower for the direction of the ship.

There are many reform options that USask can implement to fix this structure. For example, implementing a centralized deadline coordination system for courses within the same program. Instructors would enter their planned major deadlines, such as midterms, term papers and assignments into a shared scheduling tool before the semester begins. The system would flag weeks where too many assessments cluster, prompting the program courses to redistribute.

Other structural options include extending the semester so students have enough time to actually learn and for assessments to be properly spaced; capping the number of high stakes assessments in each course; ensuring weekly assignments are genuinely low stakes, short, predictable and consistently timed (for example, always due Thursdays at midnight); and providing early starter tasks that let students begin parts of major assignments even if some required content will only be taught later.


The wellness posters in the arts tunnel aren't lying: mental health does matter. Support is important. Students should take care of themselves.

But none of that matters if the academic structure is designed in a way that doesn't allow for this wellness to be implemented.

Students don't need more reminders to drink water. They don't need more pastel Instagram slides about stress. They need a semester that doesn't collapse into chaos on a schedule.

If USask wants to support student well-being, it has to go beyond messaging. It has to change the system that keeps overwhelming students in the first place.






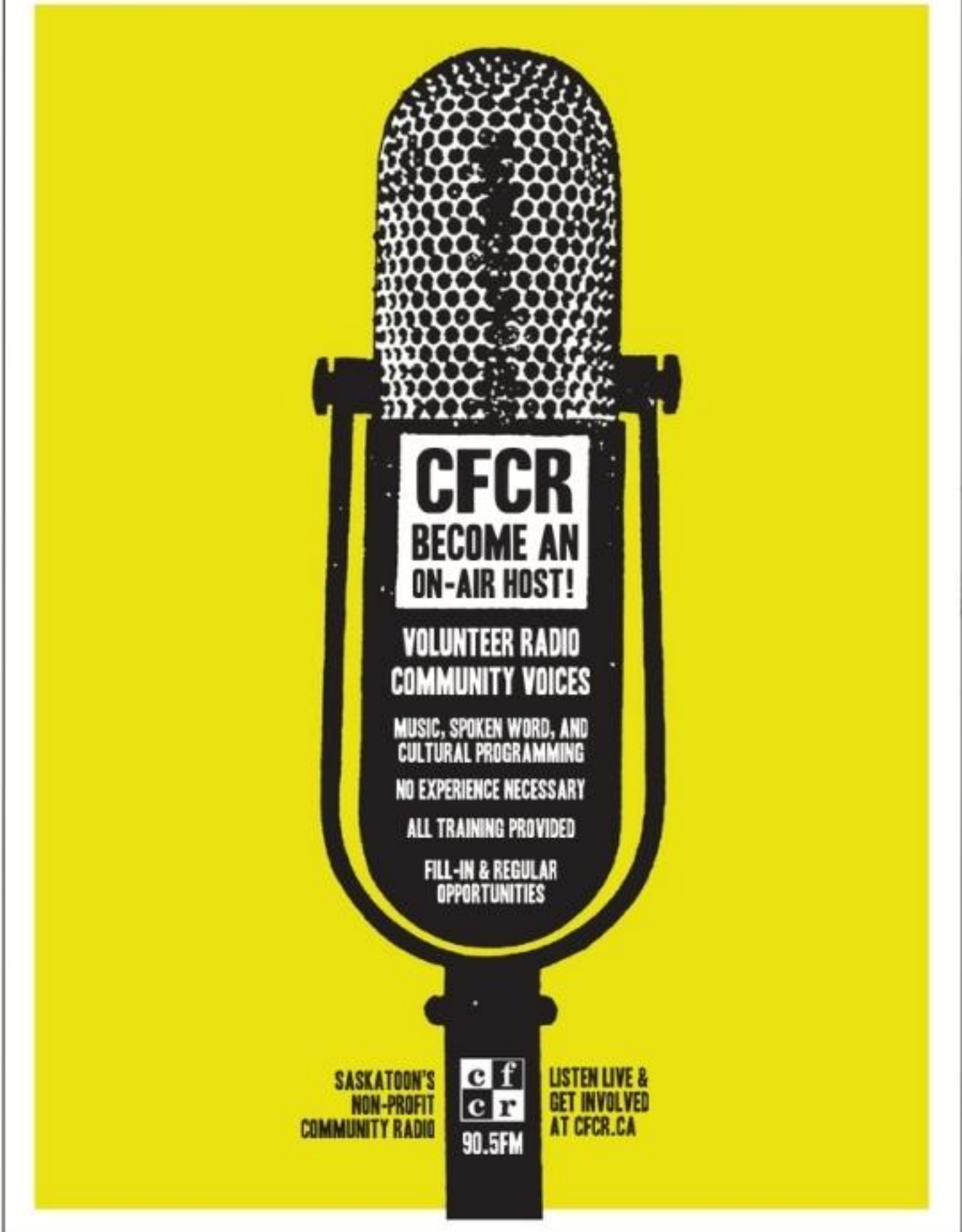
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WORD SEARCH

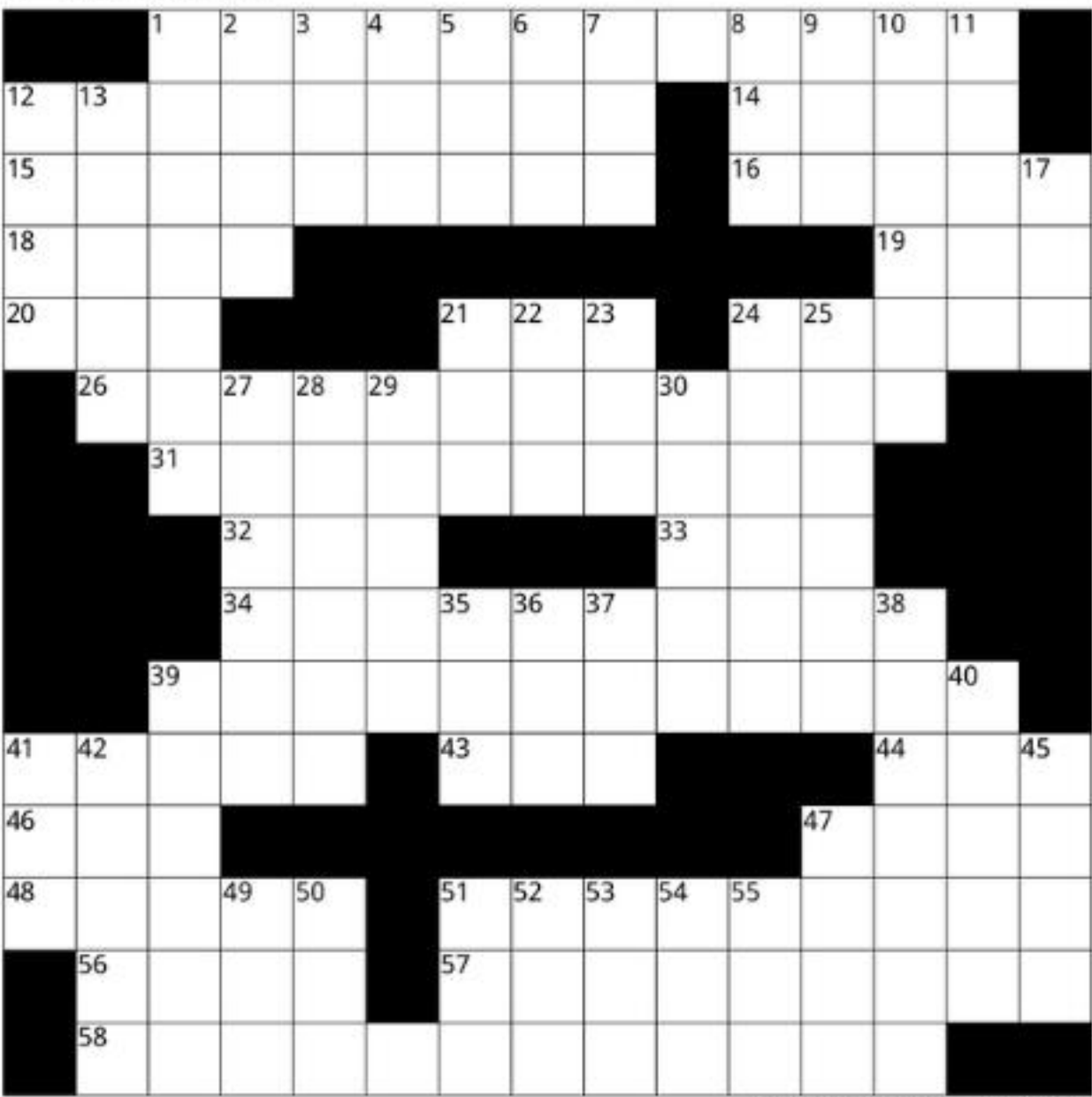
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E A Y E A C F W L A L  
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N B F M I D F A Q E K  
W I T U O N R U B R E  
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O P Y Z O C A N D L E

Eggnog  
Snow Flake  
Blizzard  
Exams  
Sow  
Elf  
Holly  
Candy Cane  
Holiday  
Jingle Bells  
Ugly Sweater  
Break  
Focus  
Burnout  
Candle  
Cozy  
Peppermint  
Jolly  
Coffee  
Library



CROSSWORD

- Across**  
1. He sounds like Christmas or merry berry sparkling water? (2 words)  
12. Spoke softly, like in one’s ear  
14. One who is prostrate  
15. Like a relationship that is honest versus a dishonest one  
16. The founder of Impressionism  
18. Church recess  
19. Military acad.  
20. Who controls the subway in N.Y.C.  
21. \_\_\_\_\_ Tai  
24. Vessel leaving the heart  
26. She sounds like Christmas or the yellow brick road? (2 words)  
31. Like Tahoe or Louise (2 words)  
32. Toy franch. with animals  
33. Eu. standard for colour matching apparently  
34. Beige or brown in the States (2 words)  
39. He sounds like Christmas or a pack of rats? (2 words)  
41. Hannah of “Splash”  
43. Aut. month  
44. CFL gains  
46. Language suffix  
47. Baghdad’s home  
48. Military patterns  
51. He’s pretty christmassy when you think about it (and blue) (2 words)  
56. Shoulder muscle  
57. Like Earth 2.0  
58. He sounds like Christmas or Breakfast at Tiffany’s? (2 words)
- Down**  
1. Main actress in “Ferris Bueller’s Day Off” (2 words)  
2. \_\_\_\_\_ of Wight or Man, for example  
3. Like Ahab or Nemo for short  
4. “That’s funny”  
5. Nickname for 26 across  
6. Noise of excitement  
7. Pres. or P.M.  
8. Einstein’s birthplace  
9. You might choose between this or chem  
10. Haymitch’s girlfriend: \_\_\_\_\_ Dove  
11. Upright  
12. Sounds like Christmas or an alarm clock?  
13. Beginning to women’s multi-event contest in athletics  
17. Airport secur. for snowbirds perhaps  
21. He might be gentle, sales or milk?  
22. It matters for cheese and wine  
23. Not online, online  
24. Capital of 47 across’ neighbour  
25. Mini poem  
27. “I can’t make any promises but ... ” (2 words)  
28. Take to a higher court  
29. Passover month  
30. Taylor-Johnson or Burr  
35. Debit payment choice in the states: \_\_\_\_\_ or svcs  
36. Sugar ending  
37. \_\_\_\_\_ stick or \_\_\_\_\_ gloss  
38. Rehearsals (2 words)



Crossword | Greta Mader Stevens

38. Natives of Arrakis  
40. Cape \_\_\_\_\_: location of first documented landing on Antarctica in 1895  
41. Beginning to men’s multi-event contest in athletics  
42. Carne \_\_\_\_\_  
45. Measur, for house size  
47. Mosque leader
49. \_\_\_\_\_ Navy  
50. Pigpen  
51. Canada’s smallest prov.  
52. Rose who sings “Sweet Child o’Mine”  
53. One of many in Ott.  
55. Bee: prefix  
Cabbage salad without any watermelon?

Answers will be posted at thesheaf.com next week

POETRY CORNER

Ghosts

Poem by Iza Plamondon

*Content Warning: This poem contains themes of death and self-harm*

grief is sweet, tastes sharp  
like a cut tongue  
thoughts hide in the dark mud  
hopes hung on  
a tree or a hook

look back at the body  
once or maybe two times  
the casket isn’t what took  
them anyway, it was  
a rope or a cigarette or something

start to cry, taste salt, smell soap  
bite down on your hope  
most of the time  
it’s easy to say goodbye  
because you leave the funeral, after all

ghosts grieve the whole world at once



Burnt Tethers

Poem by Iza Plamondon

We are all held together by  
sunbeams  
So we tend to fall apart at night  
And start fights over  
Our dreams of being greater  
Shining brighter in golden weather  
Hold together burnt tethers  
Picking pieces, whole but never  
Finished giving reasons  
To stay here forever

Strap the light to your chest  
Close your eyes and hold your  
breath  
Jump if you’re ready  
I can push you if you’re not  
Free fall  
Just you  
Something heavy  
Weighing down your mind  
Like you never forgot



# USSU BACKPAGE

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