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Better Dirty Than Dusty: Inside Alexander Webster's LEGO Photography

The USask student behind one of the internet's fastest-growing LEGO accounts.

LEGO photography by Alexander Webster | @alex.projekt_v

Nammi Nguyen

Alexander Webster is the kind of guy that does it all: he keeps busy as a final-year mechanical-engineering student, Huskie Track and Field athlete and member of the Army Reserves.

But more recently, he has found himself gaining fame in a niche and creative part of the internet. Known by the username @alx.projekt_v, Webster has stumbled into a new hobby: LEGO photography.

His photos take advantage of the Saskatchewan climate and he initially gained traction with shots of expensive Star Wars LEGO sets buried in the snow, recreating famous scenes from the series. He's since expanded to all kinds of environments, with LEGO sets buried in sand, between trees in a forest, frozen in ice and more.

In just over a year, he's amassed over 300,000 followers across Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, with dozens of videos surpassing a million views. So how did a regular guy from Saskatoon become one of the fastest-rising LEGO creators online?

This endeavour started as a simple attempt to try and learn photography. His girlfriend's existing interest in nature photography inspired him to give it a shot as well. He bought a camera off Facebook Marketplace and around the same time, LEGO released a set based on a book he was reading: The Endurance — an iconic ship trapped in ice.

"When those three things kind of all came together at once, of me buying a LEGO set, it snowing outside and getting a used camera, I kind of thought, well, maybe I could just practice some of the fundamentals of photography on my LEGO because I could just do that in my backyard, and then people seemed to really like it, which kind of set me on the path of just doing LEGO."

Webster's love for the toy bricks dates back to childhood.

"I've loved LEGO since I was super young, and then over the past few years, I've just kind of gotten back into it, buying new sets on Facebook Marketplace … I've always played with it, and I liked making these kinds of scenes as a kid; I just never took photos of those scenes. So now I'm just doing the same thing that I used to, but hitting the shutter button on a camera. This specific hobby is a really nice creative outlet for those other aspects that are a little bit more serious."

His engineering background has served him well in his process.

"I like the statistics. I like seeing what works. I think a lot of that comes from the engineering side of things. A lot of people don't like the algorithm, but I like it. It's a fun challenge. I think of how I adapt my work to best fit with whatever the current environment is, and I feel like that's really helped me grow quickly, even if it comes to building a website quickly or making calendars. Just having the confidence that if you sit down and learn how to do it, you'll be able to do it."

Webster's process usually begins by picking the set he wants to work with, sketching a picture of what he envisions for his photo and then taking it outside and spending about 30 minutes taking photos. After that, he edits the photo and, from start to finish, says the process takes about 3.5 hours.

Part of Webster's rapid growth comes from the originality of his approach.

"I do feel like the niche that I found, and the reason why a lot of the growth has been so quick, is that at the end of the day, I'm the only one taking out a $1,000 LEGO set and just throwing it in the snow and taking photos. Because ultimately, I don't care if I miss a piece."

When he first started posting his photography, Webster recalls telling his parents about it after reaching 1,000 followers in just 17 days.

"I remember talking to them and being like, I think if I keep this up, I could get to 4000 [followers] by the end of the year. So that was my goal, but it was shifting every month as I hit the next [milestone]. 100k in one year was kind of like the unspoken 'could you imagine? That'd be insane?' So it was pretty cool to hit it, and I hit it with only three days [left in the year]."

A major turning point came when he adopted a new perspective on his content.

"I focused more on the process … I posted a video talking about how I think with AI art, people are going to start valuing the process of making art more … After posting that video and starting to post more behind-the-scenes content, [the] account just skyrocketed. I think that's kind of an indication that that sort of sentiment is right. People like to see the human part behind [art]."

He also sees his work as something AI can't replicate right now.

"LEGO, unironically, are probably one of the most difficult things for [AI] to replicate, just because there's so much geometry … all the little bumps that need to be perfect, but who knows, even if [AI] can in the future, they're not going to be able to make a video of taking the set out in the desert and talking about why, right?"

Despite the growth, authenticity remains his priority.

"I could really have no shame and get a lot of views … But everything that I've posted up till now has been something that if I have kids in the future, I'd be okay with them seeing … Sometimes tricks that work with the algorithm don't always vibe with who you are as a person, so it's just making sure that you stay authentic."

Webster's audience is primarily from North America, with a surprising amount in Germany, too.

"I've sent a decent amount of calendars to Germany. There's some interest there, so I've actually thought, 'Do I use German songs? Do I post at two in the morning so I can get them when they're all waking up?'"

For an entire year, Webster kept a journal tracking the analytics of his posts to try to find any patterns, such as whether the time of day he posted affected the success of his videos.

"Now I'm realizing that it's really the content of the video. If you have a video that is good, it will do good no matter what time you post."

He has embraced the ups and downs that come with the content creation and doesn't stress too much if things don't go as planned.

Continued on page 4.

Attempting to Measure Arts and Science Faculty

How faculty numbers have changed at USask's largest college, the effects it has on students, and

Colton Danneberg

Arts and Science is the largest college at USask, comprising over 10,459 students in the 2024/2025 year, according to the university. It offers dozens of degree programs and certificates, and has seen stable student enrollment each year.

Despite enrollment numbers remaining relatively stable for the past 10 years, class sizes in the faculty seem to feel bigger every year. This begs the question: are Arts and Science faculty numbers remaining proportional? And if they aren't, what does this mean for the quality of education USask students are receiving?

The Sheaf asked the university for compiled data on faculty headcount in the College from 2016 to 2026. The university did not provide any list or dataset of the college's faculty numbers by department; instead, it pointed to the Arts and Science website to count each department's faculty members individually.

The USask website shows that in 2016, there were 295 full-time equivalent (FTE) faculty, and in 2026, there were 348.7 FTE faculty. Full-time equivalent means the number of full-time employees based on total number of hours worked. For example, one 1.0 FTE typically means 40 hours per week, regardless of how many employees it takes to reach 40 hours cumulatively.

The Sheaf also received the total number of union members from the University of Saskatchewan Faculty Association, broken down by department. The total number of members from this dataset was 294 in 2016 and 292 in 2026, which further makes the total number of faculty hard to discern.

Regardless, it is important to note that neither figure necessarily reflects the actual teaching capacity of the college. It is important to note that every department's situation is different, and that hard numbers do not reflect actual teaching capacity.

To account for nuances and offer a chance for professors to offer personal takes on this issue, The Sheaf decided to contact all 18 departments in the college, as well as the three departments in the School of the Arts. Each department was contacted for information on faculty headcounts over the last ten years, and asked if they had seen a noticeable change.

Of the 12 department heads and program coordinators who replied, ten had confirmed a noticeable decline in faculty and teaching capacity since 2016.

For example, while Physics and Engineering Physics has seen an increase from 19 faculty members in 2016 to a total of 21 in 2026, this number doesn't reflect the department's actual teaching capacity. According to a message from the department, "Currently, one faculty member is projected to retire this year, one has 50 per cent appointment, one on 30 per cent appointment and one is seconded to the College of Engineering as Dean. So our actual teaching capacity has declined compared to 2016."

This point is further reinforced by a comment from the Department of Political Studies, which says that "In most academic years, one or more faculty members are on sabbatical, directly affecting course offerings. In 2026–27, the Department will have one faculty retiring, another on full sabbatical and another on a half sabbatical. In essence, although the nominal complement will be seven full-time faculty members, the effective teaching complement will be approximately five and one-half."

For some departments, new positions are being added, but they are the result of outside programs, rather than an increase in funds from the university. A comment from the Department of Psychology confirms that the provincial government's Ministry of Advanced Education is supporting its operations in the area of clinical psychology via the Health Human Resources Action Plan expansion initiative, as part of the province's Action Plan to Recruit, Train, Incentivize and Retain Health Professionals.

Professors noted that faculty loss is typically attributed to retirement, death or the move to administrative positions. There has been a general consensus among the responses that professors are indeed feeling the weight of these losses without their replacement.

For example, a comment from the Department of Computer Science noted the fact that "undergraduate enrolments [in Computer Science] have more than doubled over the past ten years and the number of faculty positions in our department has declined."

Another comment from the Department of Biology sees a similar story: "Over the last five years, enrolment has steadily increased from 400 undergrad majors and 60 graduate students to 540 undergrad majors and about 80 graduate students, while faculty complement has decreased from 24 regular faculty to the 18 plus one number … We definitely notice."

Although the faculty-to-student ratio may be the most noticeable obstacle, professors note that this decline impacts almost every area of teaching.

A comment from the Department of English says that it has "doubled the size of our first-year classes" since 2002. This leads to faculty having to teach "100-

The Arts buliding on the USask campus| Colton Danneberg

student first-year classes with the help of graduate students to lead smaller tutorial groups," which means less professor-student interaction.

The Department of Political Studies adds that it "lacks teaching and research capacity in several critical fields. Most notably, it no longer has expertise in Canadian studies — at the local, provincial, national or international levels — a field in which it once held a strong national reputation."

The department is also lacking critical resources for delivering its certificates, such as the Certificate in Indigenous Governance and Politics and the Politics and Law Certificate, and is now considering having to pause these programs due to the lack of courses and faculty.

Another implication of the loss of faculty is the effect it has on a department's graduate programs. A comment by the Department of Chemistry says that the decline of faculty "impacts our ability to supervise enough graduate students who also act as TAs in our undergraduate labs, which affects undergraduate student enrolments in those classes that have a lab component."

The Department of Political Studies sees a similar problem, saying that its graduate program has suffered from the decline in faculty. The department relies on split courses of the 400/800 level that contain both undergraduate and graduate students, "which limits the depth and uniqueness of graduate-level instruction. As well, undergraduate students who transition into the Political Studies Department's graduate program often have already completed the required graduate courses at the undergraduate level as a result of the cross-listing, thereby limiting the options available to them at the graduate level."

A lack of professors available to each department not only leads to an increased workload because of an abundance of undergrads, but also impacts the attention that graduate students are expected to receive from professors, as well as reduces the amount of faculty attention given to individual graduate students.

Student enrollment in graduate programs at USask has, in fact, declined in the college over time, going from a total of 1,002 graduate students in 2016/2017 to 907 in 2024/2025.

While further research would be needed to confirm whether a lack of attention and graduate-specific instruction is a potential causation for this decline, it can certainly be inferred that the lack of teaching capacity is not helping enrollment in grad programs.

The precariousness of faculty positions is also a major concern for departments in the coming years. Another concern raised by professors is the projected retirements in the near future. A comment from the Department of Geological Sciences says the department anticipates a loss of eight faculty members (44 per cent of their total) to retirement over the next seven years.

The Department of Political Studies, in addition, employs one Lecturer Without Term to offset the loss of available faculty, who teaches seven courses annually compared to the usual four courses for regular faculty. The department added that "the precarious nature of this position, however, renders the unit vulnerable and its operations unsustainable. It also places this highly valued colleague in a persistently precarious position."

Headcount Over the Last 10 Years

where it leaves professors.

The reliance on sessional lecturers is one strategy in helping to alleviate teaching load for departments, but this often isn't enough. A comment from the Department of Economics confirms that sessional support from the college has replaced some of the lost full-time faculty, but not completely, and the department has still seen a significant decline of 51 undergraduate classes being taught in 2018/19 to 38 classes being taught in the current 2025/26 year.

Why is it significant that Arts and Science faculty aren't being replaced? What about other colleges? While more research ought to be devoted to measuring faculty numbers across all colleges, Arts and Science is in a relatively unique position. Students from almost all colleges are required to take Arts and Science courses, while Arts and Science students are not required to take courses from other colleges. This means Arts and Science courses are in more demand university-wide, but it is difficult to keep up if faculty aren't being replaced.

Combined with the recent decrease in international student enrollment, as well as the growing concern among students and faculty of highly paid administrative positions, the college is put in a difficult position.

With fewer faculty, departments are usually forced to rely on sessional lecturers and larger class sizes to keep up. Studies on the effects of larger class sizes have generally shown that they negatively affect students. In a 2021 study of U.K. students in higher education from the Journal of Economic Education, researchers find that overall, "larger classes are associated with significantly lower grades" and "this impact would be more pronounced in STEM than in non-STEM subjects."

Alongside this, a 2023 article in The Sheaf pointed out the precarious and underpaid work that sessional lecturers have to do. The article estimated that teaching a load of four classes per academic year would only earn a sessional lecturer roughly $28,000 annually. The band-aid solution of over reliance on sessional lecturers to keep up with faculty decline thus doesn't help to fix the larger problem that departments are facing.

A note from the Department of English echoes what many departments have said about this issue, and it's worth quoting in full. "If there's one thing I'd like to tell your readers, it's that my colleagues in the English Department, faculty and sessionals alike, are very hard-working and care about our teaching. We all want to be able to give each student more individual attention, we all want to teach more engaging classes, we all want students to benefit from our expertise. We're not happy about shrinking faculty numbers and increasing workloads, either."

Listening to faculty experiences is critical in moving forward. Further studies should also inquire about the impact these numbers and experiences have on students' quality of education. If the university doesn't come up with a solution soon, it is likely to get worse.

Humanity First's Panel on Campus Advocacy and Amplifying Marginalized Voices

A brief overview and highlights of Humanity First's Panel held this March, with insights from panelists about international struggles and university advocacy.

Humanity First panelists| Humanity First

Colton Danneberg

On March 4, Humanity First's USask chapter hosted 'For Humanity,' a panel on global struggles, resistance and collective care that brought together a diverse set of voices to speak on international, political and local issues. Campus clubs focused on addressing global and local struggles were also in attendance and tabled after the panel discussion.

Humanity First is an international charity that focuses on humanitarian issues, volunteerism and education. The panel featured Ahmad Al-Dissi, a Palestinian associate professor and advocate; Bruce Sinclair, a Metis drama professor and artist; Martin Gaal, a political studies professor and founder of Global Café initiative; May Elsayed, president of Students for Justice and Peace, a Palestinian activist group at USask; Lubna Musa, a Sudanese activist and alumni from the University of Regional; and Nathaniel Desjarlais, an Indigenous student involved with the Indigenous Student Union at USask.

Some of the topics that were touched on during the panel include how political and historical factors shape human rights issues, as well as how art, storytelling and culture could be used as tools of resistance to amplify marginalized voices. Topics included challenging colonialism, racism and war, among others, with each panelist delivering a unique perspective to the conversation.

One of the first questions asked to the panel was "Although the contexts you're speaking from are different, what common patterns of injustice or marginalization do you see across these struggles?"

Desjarlais responded, "One pattern I see is the feeling of not being recognized when you're feeling injustice or marginalization. A lot of the time, it's easy to feel like nobody's listening … So when reconciliation happened, it taught me [that] if there's attention brought to these issues, we can make a difference."

Al-Dissi pointed to the way power operates within systems of colonization and violence. "[The violence] is becoming normal, unfortunately. So we need to have the conversation that the law is there to be abided by, and hold people responsible for what they have done."

Gaal added that "it's the structure itself that facilitates violence, that facilitates inequality, that wants us to make us feel small … [and] if we understand that together, we're able to be better, we're able to support each other, we're able to build community, [those acts] will be able to affect change."

Elsayed said that "one pattern I see across the board when it comes to conflicts is people basing the importance of a conflict on the proximity they feel to that country, or the proximity they feel to the people of that country, and how much they relate to them."

The panellists also discussed how the university and students specifically have a role in addressing political injustices.

Elsayed discussed how "I think our university should be admitting our agency and acknowledging their participation in injustices." She adds that "students should not be shy about speaking out and using their voice. If we don't speak out now, who's going to speak out?"

After a conversation from the panelists around the daily impacts of colonialism and racism towards marginalized peoples, Desjarlais wrapped up the panel by saying, "I know I talked about some negative things that are uncomfortable, but those are the truths, and that's the way I decided to live my life – tell the truth – no matter how uncomfortable it is."

He continues, "As far as the role universities have related to these issues, first of all, these are educational spaces. We should spread acknowledgement and awareness, and create safe, diverse environments that discuss these and educate people. And I think the University of Saskatchewan does a decent job at that."

Musa said that "we have so many people from different places going to university, and we don't realize how much we have in common with other people until we sit and talk to them. It's one thing to read about what's happening in the world, but to hear it [for the] first time really changes your perspective and deepens your understanding about what's happening."

Al-Dissi sees difficulty in addressing some issues in the university context. "Unfortunately, the moment you mention Palestine [here], you get events cancelled and security [called] … There is a one-sided story that's being told more and more, even in universities, and we have to break that to introduce the other side as well."

Gaal noted that "Administration is an institution of power. It's not the university. The university is us. [It's a] university of the students, faculty [and] student groups … It takes people to make change. It takes people who are really organized. It takes a community, and the university is a community. As soon as we understand [that], we can start to challenge it, we can start to work on issues that we share, and start to work on structural things and make a difference."

The panel included campus clubs such as UNICEF USask, the Students for Justice and Peace, Islamic Relief USask, an international charity focused on humanitarian causes; and the Indigenous Students' Union, which represents Indigenous people at USask.

Inside Alexander Webster's LEGO Photography

Continued from the front cover.

At the end of the day, the photos are still for him.

"It's so much easier to embrace the cycle rather than try and figure out why you're going through dips or rises, or if you're at a rise, you're like, 'Well, how do I sustain this always?' Well, you can't ... and then if you had a dip, you're like, 'Well, what if I'm like this forever?' You're not going to be."

He adds:

"I think I am fortunate in that what I like doing has worked. My photos that initially went viral to build my account, I was taking those photos for me. I wasn't taking those photos for the algorithm."

Looking ahead, Webster plans to expand into making longer-form content on YouTube.

"I think YouTube is super unique in the sense that it's the only platform that exists nowadays where people still have the attention span to watch a 20-minute video … I have lots of questions that come in [asking how I create content] and I want to make videos answering that and even videos just talking about what we talked about here."

He also wants to experiment with new media and tie his engineering background into his photography.

"Some ideas I have are working with water or fluids …We learn fluid dynamics in mechanical engineering, and turbulent flow. I think it'd be neat to find a way to tie my degree into photography."

Outside of LEGO, Webster continues to balance many commitments, including school, running, the Army Reserves and his future in engineering. He's lined up a job at Cameco's uranium mines and is looking forward to getting started after he graduates.

"If there comes a day when I can just do photography and have a little bit more serious work that comes with the Army Reserve, that's a great balance to me. I approach things optimistically but cautiously, so I'm not about to graduate university and try and go full-time content creator right off the bat; I'll work a couple of years at least until it becomes beyond obvious."

The journey up until this point has been rewarding in ways he never expected. Webster's favourite reaction to his photography is hearing that he inspired someone else to pick up a camera.

"When I would look at these LEGO photographers when I was in elementary school, some of these guys have been doing this for almost 10 years now. And then now I look at my account up there with them. I get people tagging me or messaging me saying, 'I did the shot inspired by your account' … I'm on the flip side of it now, which I never would have thought."

LEGO photographer Alexander Webster | @alex.projekt_v

One of his mantras is "Better dirty than dusty." It applies to his content, of course, but it can also be applied to all aspects of life.

What's the point of having something if you're just waiting for the perfect day to use it? Why not use something and get joy out of it, rather than let it collect dust?

Sometimes you have to get your hands (or LEGO) dirty to discover what you're capable of. And once you do, embrace it fully!

Find Alexander Webster's accounts on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube @alx.projekt_v!

LEGO photography by Alexander Webster | @alex.projekt_v

10 Things to Do in Vietnam: A Guide to Going Home

If you find yourself 20 years old without a sense of home, here are some bucket list items you shouldn't miss when back in the homeland.

Photo taken during the authors trip to Vietnam | Hannah Ha

Hannah Ha

1) Have breakfast

Step out in your honeycomb sandals, jetlagged. You'll only have to walk two houses down to the house selling pho. Ask the owner if they're open today. She'll be closed in a few days for Tết, the Lunar New Year. Yell out your order before you sit at the plastic stools and tables, and clean your chopsticks with lime wedges while you wait. A teenager will bring out your bowl, balancing it along with five others. Cilantro, bean sprouts, fish sauce. Once the metal spoon grazes your teeth, you'll know you're home.

2) Get a bad haircut

Get lost in chitchat at the salon down the block. You've never met, but you and the hairstylist will chat like old friends. She shampoos your hair and massages your scalp, a service that doesn't come along with a regular haircut at your home in the West. She asks you how much a haircut like this would cost you in Canada, comparing her life against yours. She jokes about swapping places with you for your return flight. You tell her about how cold and isolating it sometimes feels over there and insist that Vietnam wins by a mile. She and her assistant blow dry your hair. You'll hate how short it is and how the bangs get in your eyes. She'll tell you your new hair slims your face and how the white folks will love it. Hand her a few 100 thousand VND bills and do the conversion in your head: C$10.00.

3) **Visit the province**

Spend a week in the city and grow tired of it. Let the city smog break you out. Then take a car ride five hours south to take a breath of fresh air when the highway bends around the mountains. Lose cell service, then pull out your film camera to capture the rice patties rolling over each other, though you know a camera won't ever live up to your eyeballs. Watch your younger sister run around barefoot with the village kids and wonder what kind of childhood she could have if your family would have stayed.

4) Hug relatives you've gotten to know over FaceTime

Greet the swarm of family members. Line up their features with the ones you're used to seeing on screen. Notice how your uncles have a few more smile lines than on camera, and how your older cousin is shorter than you now. Hug them for the first time in years while they tell you how skinny you've gotten, have you been sick? They remind you to eat more; they'll make sure of it. Never break away from the hug first. They tease you about how you rarely call home these days, while you pick apart how much they look like you.

5) Visit your childhood home

Make sure to manage your expectations. Everything will be smaller than you remember. Pull open the green iron gate that's always been there, which is also lighter than you remember. The new owners will greet you and your family and invite you in for tea, wishing you a happy new year. Look at the walls and remember what used to hang there. Recall which side of the room the TV used to be on and how your parents used to keep the kitchen organized. Sit on the stairs and cry about how all the little details are exactly what you pictured every time you've imagined "going home".

6) Fake it 'til you make it

Lunar New Year means food, family and practicing obligatory tradition. You try your best to stay connected to New Year's traditions with the community you find abroad, but spend so many of them away from home that you lose touch with the mundane day-to-day traditions. Look around at how everyone else holds the incense, how long are they closing their eyes when they pray? Shake hands and wish your elderly health and prosperity, make sure to give them at least 500,000 VND in their envelopes to make up for all the years you missed. Pay attention to the way the elders serve tea. Pay attention to the way they serve liquor. The way they rinse their glasses, the way they clink their glasses. Accept cash with both hands and learn how to turn down a drink without offending. Learn so you might teach your little sister, whom your family members tease for being so "tây".

7) Accidentally refer to Canada as "home" to your Bà Ngoại

Oops.

8) Go on a moped ride with your cousin

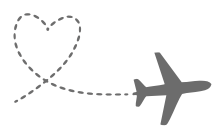
You're close in age; she's in university now. Congratulate her on passing her driving test and realize how much time has passed since you wore matching dresses and had the same haircut. Your conversations will be different than they were a few years ago. You'll talk about exes and your careers. You'll piece together how similar your parents are, and how you've learned to maneuver in the same way. She'll hand you a helmet for her moped and take you to the spots that she and her friends frequent in the city. You'll be in awe of how much there is to do after 10 p.m.; it's not like that in Saskatoon. Notice the fashion of the people your age. Notice their slang. Realize you could fit in here.

9) Receive your Bà Nội's jewelry as heirlooms

When your grandma calls you into her room, go without question. Watch her as she rifles through her armoire, follow her gaze when she reaches for the velvet jewelry boxes. You've always known her as an adorned woman, even at 90. Your uncles and aunts haven't stopped talking about how much your piercings and bangles make you resemble her, especially when you have your hair up. She'll have bangles for you and your sister that she's saved all these years. She'll polish them up before she hands them over. The solid silver bangles will wink at you while she lets you pick which hand to wear them on. Listen closely while she tells you of how she used to wear them herself, shift your gaze to her dainty wrists. You'll show your mom and aunts, who will all gawk at how she managed to hide this vintage jewelry from the rest of the kids. You'll fidget with these bangles on the plane as you leave.

10) Set off fireworks on the street, Happy Lunar New Year

Help your aunt and grandma clean up after the New Year's feast. Switch into your outdoor sandals and make sure there are telephone lines in the way. Your uncle won't wait for you to start recording or wait for traffic to stop before he lights the fireworks. The noise will draw out the neighbors and before you know it, there will be a crowd, and the little kids will hug your legs as they watch. Motorcycles will drive right around it. You'll watch the videos long after the florets burn out and swear to come home more often.



I Show The World — How IShowSpeed's International

The gap between perception and reality is shrinking, live on YouTube.

Laila Haider

There is something unexpectedly revealing about watching infamous online personality Darren Watkins Jr — better known as IShowSpeed — sprint through markets and down crowded streets all around the world, phone in hand, reacting in real time to the world around him. No script, no carefully designed political narrative, just a YouTube stream that keeps going and a boy that never seems to stop, either.

While his work may seem abrasive and obnoxious to some at first glance, the longer you watch, the harder it becomes to designate what he does as senseless noise. You're forced to look harder and think about what that noise is actually doing.

Over the past year, Speed's travel streams, particularly his marathon tours across parts of Africa, China and Europe, have pulled millions of viewers into places they might otherwise only encounter through headlines, documentaries or not at all. In one stretch, he visited around 20 African countries in under a month, livestreaming almost continuously. It sounds excessive, and it is. But it's also, in its own strange way, the kind of documentation that's closest to how people actually experience the world, as opposed to most polished travel content.

The part of his streams that stands out isn't just where he is, but what he's doing in those places and how the world around him shows up on screen. Crowds forming instantly, people laughing, shouting, guiding him, correcting him, welcoming him. Moments of confusion and culture shock. Moments of connection despite language barriers. Long stretches where nothing particularly dramatic happens at all. Everyday life, across the world, unfolding on screen without a filter.

For many viewers, especially younger ones, these streams aren't just entertainment. They are a primary point of contact with places they have never been and may never visit. And for a long time, those points of contact were shaped by something very different.

Global perception has historically been filtered and mediated through formal institutions. State media, major broadcasters, legacy newsrooms. These sources aren't inherently unreliable, but they are heavily structured. They tend to filter out things they deem unnecessary or counteractive to their agendas before presenting information to their audiences. They select, frame and condense. They decide what's newsworthy. This can result in entire regions becoming defined by a narrow set of narratives pushed by foreign media.

Conflict. Poverty. Crisis. Political tension. These elements exist, but they aren't the totality of any place, despite what the media might try to tell you.

Speed's streams cut through all of the unnecessary framing. When he walks through a city, the camera doesn't turn off when nothing "important" is happening. It lingers. It captures how people talk, how they joke, how they respond to him. It captures all of the natural human environments and interactions that don't fit neatly into pre-existing narratives.

Photo via Instagram | @ishowspeed

During his Africa tour, much of the response, both online and in reporting, focused on how audiences were reacting to seeing cities and communities that didn't match the stereotypes they had internalized. Viewers saw modern infrastructure, busy streets, ordinary routines. They saw people who weren't passive subjects of a story, but active participants in it. At the same time, commentary from African viewers pointed out that while the exposure was welcome, it also risked simplifying diverse cultures into a single experience. Both reactions can be true.

That tension is part of what makes these streams significant. They're less definitive portraits of a country, and more fragmented insights into the diversity of the human experience. But these fragments aren't just trivial little moments. These are clips that reach millions of people around the world and complicate everyday assumptions that might otherwise go unchallenged.

A similar dynamic played out during Speed's streams in China. Western coverage of China often emphasizes geopolitics, surveillance and state control. Those issues are real and important, but they aren't what dominates a live interaction with people on the street. In Speed's streams, what viewers saw instead were spontaneous conversations, humour, curiosity and a level of everyday normalcy that does not often make it into international reporting.

Some analysts described the streams as a form of soft power, arguing that they presented a favourable image of China without explicitly trying to. Others noted that the lack of overt commentary made the content feel more authentic, even if it was still shaped by what could and could not be shown. On platforms like Reddit, discussions ranged from genuine appreciation for the glimpse into daily life to skepticism about how representative those moments were.

What matters is not that the streams provided a complete or perfectly balanced view. They did not. What matters is that they introduced a different kind of visibility. One that is less about explaining a place and more about experiencing it, however briefly, alongside someone else.

There is an argument to be made that this kind of content risks flattening complexity. Speed is not a journalist. He is not offering historical context or political analysis. His understanding of the places he visits is limited, and sometimes that shows. There are moments where the streams feel surface-level, where deeper issues go unaddressed.

But that critique assumes that the value of exposure lies primarily in depth. For many viewers, especially those who have had little prior engagement with a place, the first step is not analysis. It is recognition. Seeing people who look, speak and live in ways that feel familiar, even across significant cultural differences. Realizing that the distance between "here" and "there" is not as vast as it might have seemed.

Speed's approach is not unique in the sense that he is the first to travel with a camera. But the scale and immediacy of livestreaming change the dynamic. The audience is not watching something that has already been processed and edited. They are watching something unfold. They are reacting in real time, alongside the person on screen. That creates a different kind of engagement, one that feels less like being told about a place and more like being there, even if only virtually.

It also shifts where authority comes from. In traditional media, authority is tied to expertise, to institutions, to editorial processes. In this space, authority is often tied to perceived authenticity. To the sense that what you are seeing has not been overly shaped or filtered. That does not make it more accurate, but it does make it more immediate, and for many viewers, more trustworthy.

This is particularly true for younger audiences, who have grown up with constant access to user-generated content. They are used to navigating a landscape where information comes from a wide range of sources, each with its own perspective and limitations. They are also more likely to question centralized narratives, not necessarily out of cynicism, but because they have access to a diverse array of alternatives.

Speed's streams fit into that landscape. They aren't positioned as definitive accounts. They are one perspective among many. But they are a perspective that feels direct, unscripted and, at times, disarmingly honest.

There is a precedent for this kind of work, however, even if it took a very different form. Long before livestreaming, Anthony Bourdain built a career on showing audiences parts of the world they might never otherwise encounter. Through shows like Parts Unknown, he moved across countries that were often totally ignored or reduced in Western media, to political conflict or instability. But instead of centring those narratives, he sat down at tables. He ate. He listened. He let conversations unfold.

What Bourdain understood was that geopolitics can flatten people. Entire nations can become shorthand for a single issue. But when you watch someone share a meal, joke, argue or tell a story, that

Streaming Marathons Have Undone Global Stereotypes

flattening becomes harder to sustain. Food became his entry point, but the real focus was always the people behind it, the ordinary realities that exist alongside, and often despite, the headlines.

Bourdain's work was built on the idea that food and conversation could bridge cultural divides, that spending time with people in their own environments could challenge preconceived notions. Speed's streams operate on a different wavelength, faster, less reflective in the moment, but they tap into a similar instinct. Show the place, show the people and let the audience decide for themselves.

Speed is not operating with that same level of reflection or intent as Bourdain. His streams are louder, faster, less curated. The media environment he exists within is more fragmented and audience-participation heavy. His audience is not just watching. They are commenting, reacting, shaping the experience as it unfolds. That does not always lead to thoughtful engagement, but it does mean that the line between observer and participant is less clear than it's ever been before.

Despite this, he taps into a dynamic similar to Bourdain's. Instead of connecting over a meal, it might be a pickup soccer game, an impromptu race, a street performance, a spontaneous conversation with someone who recognized him. Instead of a carefully framed interview, it is a chaotic exchange that sometimes barely holds together. But the effect can be similar. Viewers aren't just hearing about a place. They are watching people live in it.

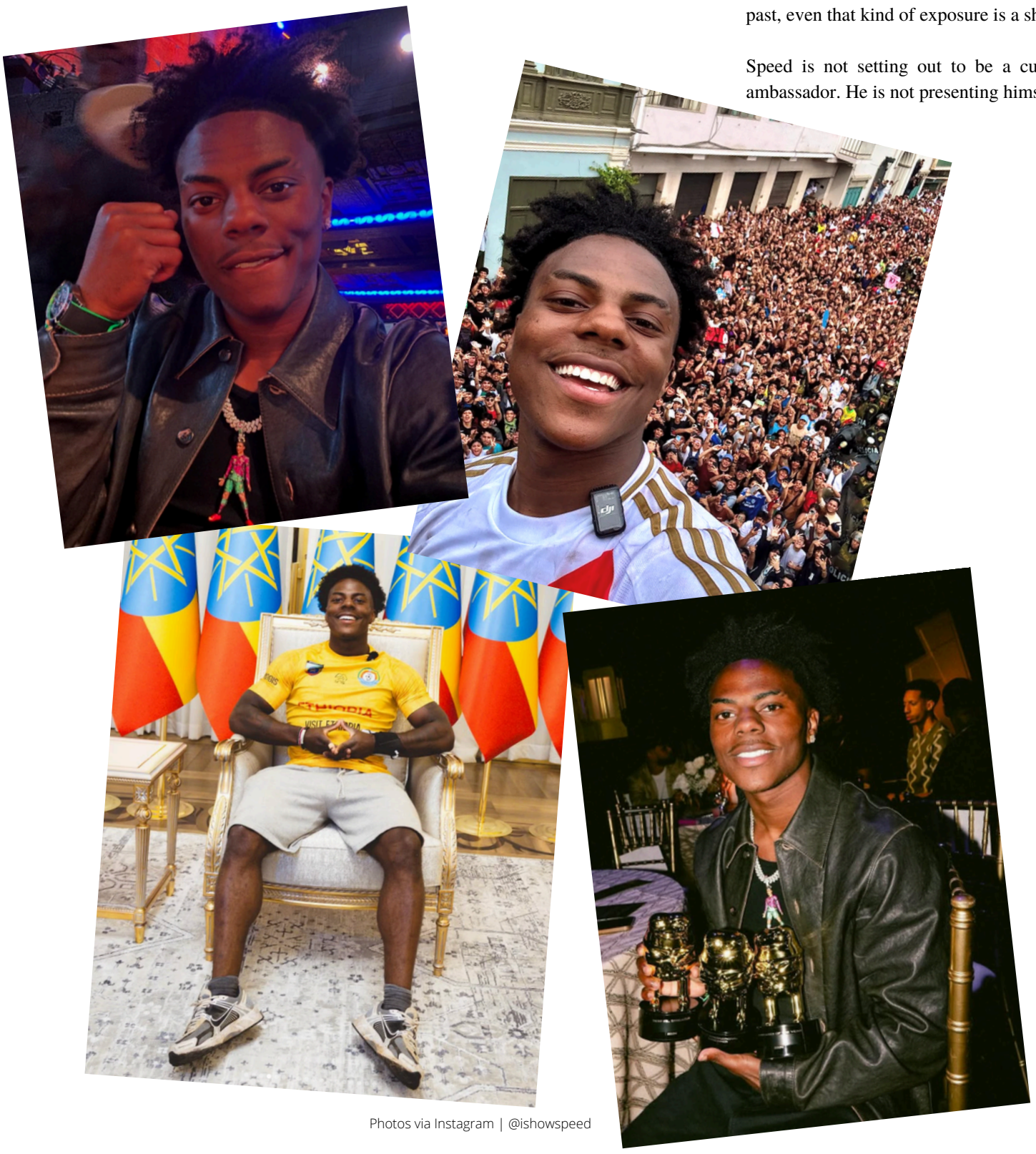
And that matters because the media environment has changed. Younger audiences are less likely to rely solely on large institutions to tell them what the world looks like. They are used to assembling their own understanding from a range of sources, many of which are unfiltered, immediate and participatory. They are skeptical of narratives that feel too polished, too complete.

In that context, Speed's lack of polish becomes part of the appeal. The streams feel unscripted because they are. They feel unpredictable because they are. That does not make them more accurate, but it does make them harder to dismiss as purely constructed to push ulterior narratives.

What emerges from all of this, the live stream marathons and reliance on social media for information, is not a replacement for traditional forms of reporting or storytelling. Living in a world where misinformation can be spread like wildfire at the click of a button, and anyone can say whatever they'd like, makes many hesitant to trust just anyone for credible news and information. Traditional forms of news reporting still have a crucial role in people's perceptions of the world, especially when it comes to context, accountability and depth.

But there has been a distinct shift in how people encounter and interact with the world, one that favours the voice of the average person more than it ever has before.

There's also something to be said for the way Speed himself moves through these spaces. He isn't detached. He reacts loudly, sometimes awkwardly, often impulsively. He mispronounces things. He gets things wrong. But he's also open. He engages with people without much hesitation, and that openness is usually met with a similar energy in return.



Photos via Instagram | @ishowspeed

That exchange, however imperfect, is part of what viewers are responding to. It isn't just the location that matters, but the humanity at the heart of the interaction. The sense that connection is possible without a shared language or background. That curiosity is universal.

Where Bourdain often slowed things down, giving his audience space for reflection, Speed — a testament to his name — makes everything go much faster. Both approaches, in different ways, push against the tendency of traditional media to reduce the world to simplified narratives.

Bourdain did it by lingering on things that would otherwise be ignored. Speed does it by showing everything all at once.

Neither approach is complete. Neither replaces the need for deeper reporting, for context, for analysis. But both create entry points. They make distant places feel closer, less abstract, less alien, less defined by secondhand descriptions.

Speed's streams are messy, inconsistent and at times superficial. But they're also, reaching audiences at a scale that few other forms of international coverage can match scales that are almost unprecedented. Within that reach, his streams are introducing viewers to places and people in ways that feel both immediate and human.

There's an irrevocable value in Speed's streams. Not because they solve the problem of misrepresentation or eliminate bias altogether, but because they make the stereotypes proposed by traditional media harder to sustain unchallenged. When millions of people can see something for themselves, even for just a brief moment, it becomes difficult to reduce entire regions to a single story.

There's no guarantee that viewers will come away with a deeper understanding. A large portion of them won't. But others will notice small things. The way people joke. The way they welcome a stranger who doesn't speak their language, let alone understand their customs. The way everyday life looks in a place they had only heard about in abstract terms. Those details will linger.

In a media landscape that has often relied on distance and summarizing entire cultures into digestible narratives for audiences that read headlines and scroll past, even that kind of exposure is a shift.

Speed is not setting out to be a cultural ambassador. He is not presenting himself as an expert or a guide. But in moving through the world as he does, camera on, reactions unfiltered, he is opening a window that did not exist in the same way before.

The window doesn't give its audience the perfect view. It never will. But it gives them a view that is wide enough and immediate enough to make them look a little closer. For a generation already inclined to question and criticize what it is told, rather than accepting facts at face value, that might be enough to start seeing things differently.

Ramadan Reset: Exploring Mindfulness During the Islamic Holy Month

Suhoor, Self-reflection and Self-improvement.

Laila Haider

Muslim dinner table during Ramadan | Sumali Ibnu Chamid | Canva Pro

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is considered to be the holiest time of the year. It marks the period when the first verses of the Qur'an were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

Because the Islamic calendar follows the cycles of the moon, Ramadan moves earlier each year in the Gregorian calendar. But wherever it falls — winter, summer, spring or fall — the feeling is always the same. It's a yearly reminder to pause, reflect on your place in the world and try to become a better version of yourself.

For many Muslims, Ramadan also feels like something of a reset. In following the religious guidelines of fasting, you become more aware of yourself, your actions and how you move through the world while maintaining your fast. You pay more attention to even the smallest, most innocuous habits in an attempt to better yourself for the future.

The most integral part of Ramadan — and the feature most non-Muslims are familiar with — is fasting from dawn until sunset. During the day, Muslims don't eat or drink anything at all. They also try to avoid negative behaviours like arguing, gossiping or losing their temper. For their fasting to be accepted, they have to complete all five of the daily prayers.

At first glance, you might think that fasting is a mostly physical ordeal, with the restrictions on food and drink seeming to be insurmountable. But ask anyone who has ever fasted for Ramadan, and they'll tell you that hunger and thirst actually force you to slow down and think about what you're doing throughout the day — something that can be just as difficult as abstaining from a cold glass of water or a protein bar.

You become more aware of what you say, how you treat people and the mindset you carry throughout the day, in a way you'd never consider any other month of the year. In that sense, the practice of fasting is less about food and more about practicing discipline and conscientiousness.

The purpose of fasting in Islam is to build taqwa, which is commonly translated as mindfulness of God. But it can also be understood as a greater awareness of your actions and intentions. Ramadan acts as a reminder to pay attention to the small things: how you speak to people, how patient you are when you're frustrated and whether you are acting with kindness or selfishness.

When you're fasting, the smallest moments become so much more noticeable. Something like holding back an angry response or choosing patience over irritation becomes a conscious decision that you have to make.

One of the things that makes Ramadan powerful is that it changes the rhythm of everyday life. The day usually starts before sunrise with a small meal known as suhoor or sehri, followed by the morning prayer, fajr. After that, the fast continues throughout the day until sunset, when it is broken with the evening meal called iftar.

That first sip of water or first bite of food after a long day can feel surprisingly meaningful, the flavours and feelings associated totally enhanced. It reminds you how easily basic things are taken for granted on a daily basis.

Breaking the fast is also rarely a solitary moment for most Muslims. Families gather together at dinner tables, friends meet at local restaurants and communities organize meals together on a nightly basis. Mosques often host large iftars where people from different backgrounds sit together, complete their evening prayers and share food.

There's something really special about knowing that millions of people around the world are following the same customs and routines at the same time. Even though the practice of fasting is personal, it fosters a strong sense of community amongst all Muslims during Ramadan.

Despite our many differences — race, nationality, ethnicity, language — we all gather to break our fasts when the sun sets and give thanks for the blessings we've been given, every night.

Another important aspect of Ramadan is charity. Giving is encouraged throughout the year in Islam, but during this month it becomes even more central and rewarded. Muslims give zakat, one of the five pillars of Islam and a mandatory obligation in which they donate a portion of their wealth to those in need. The act is meant to symbolize purification and encourage people to act selflessly and support those around them.

Charity during Ramadan isn't just about formal donations, however. People often cook extra food to share with neighbours, invite others to join them for iftar or privately donate to people who need help. Communities organize food drives, fundraisers and meal programs so that no one has to break their fast alone.

Ramadan also encourages people to put their worldly habits to rest and reconnect with their spiritual lives. Many Muslims spend more time reading the Qur'an and praying during the holy month, hoping to reconnect with their faith in a way that feels different from the rest of the year. For some people, Ramadan is one of the few times in the year when they are able to put their other responsibilities to the side and really reflect on faith and personal growth.
But even beyond prayer, Ramadan invites everyone who practices a deeper kind of personal reflection. It asks them to think honestly about who they are and how they interact with the world around them. Are you patient with others? Are you generous? Do you treat people with respect?
The month becomes an opportunity to check in with yourself and notice the habits you've developed. Sometimes that reflection is uncomfortable, but it's also what makes the experience meaningful.

Toward the end of the month, many people become even more focused on reflection and prayer. One of the most important nights of Ramadan is Laylat al-Qadr, also known as the Night of Power. It commemorates the moment when the first revelation of the Qur'an occurred. It's considered to be an especially auspicious night, where faithful prayers will be accepted. Many Muslims spend this night praying and reflecting, hoping to reconnect with their purpose and ask for forgiveness and guidance.

Eventually, Ramadan ends with the celebration of Eid al-Fitr. After a month of fasting, Muslims around the world join together to celebrate and bask in the joy of the holy month. People gather for prayers, share meals and spend time with family and friends.

Before the celebration begins, Muslims give a special charity called zakat al-fitr, which helps ensure that everyone, including those who may be struggling financially, can participate in the festivities.

In the end, Ramadan is not really about enduring hunger for thirty days. It's not about the huge iftar feasts posted all over TikTok or the fact that people are abstaining from all food and beverage — yes, even water. It's about awareness. It reminds people to be more conscious of their behaviour, their intentions and their impact on others. It encourages patience, generosity and humility, and most importantly, it creates space to reflect on how you want to live the rest of the year.

For many Muslims, the hope is that the lessons of Ramadan don't disappear once the month ends. The patience practiced during fasting, the generosity shown through charity and the reflection encouraged through prayer are meant to continue afterward.

Ramadan reminds us that improving ourselves is an ongoing process, and that even small changes in how we treat others can have a meaningful impact on the world around us.

Ramadan Mubarak to all that observe!

The Ending Was Never Going to Be Good Enough

Our frustration with the endings of shows and movies reveals more about our expectations and imagination than about the stories themselves.

Hajra Ghuman

Why do people hate endings?

It seems like such a small question, but it speaks to a broader phenomenon about how we experience stories, expectations and even life itself.

Every time a television show ends, a movie concludes or a long-running series wraps up, the same reaction follows: People are mad, disappointed or both. Many say the ending ruined everything. Discussions online are filled with arguments about how the writers failed, how the characters were betrayed or how the show should have stopped seasons earlier.

Underneath all that frustration is a deeper discomfort with endings themselves.

There is an old phrase people like to repeat that we all have heard many times in our lives: “All good things must come to an end.” Is that true? What does that even mean?

The phrase sounds comforting, yet it is strangely vague. Why must good things end? Why do we accept that idea as inevitable? A different way to think about it might be that for things to begin, some things must end. Stories begin when situations change. Characters move forward because a previous chapter of their life has closed. The same pattern appears in real life as well. Transitions happen because something before them has finished.

This discomfort with endings may change if people view them not as conclusions, but as conditions for beginnings to occur.

Watching a show or movie highlights this relationship with endings differently. When watching a show, you know that the ending is near. A sense of expectedness appears in the experience.

Sometimes, that expectedness can be a letdown when it does not live up to what it is supposed to be.

The same dynamic exists in real life. People often imagine how certain moments should conclude. A job should end with a promotion or a celebration. A relationship should end with clarity. A chapter of life should close with some kind of meaningful resolution. Reality rarely cooperates with those expectations. Life moves in uneven directions. Some endings arrive suddenly, while others fade slowly without any clear conclusion.

Yet endings are exactly what make life a unique experience for us all.

An ending signals that time has passed and that something meaningful occurred during that time. Fear surrounding endings makes sense. A story closing its final chapter can feel like losing something familiar.

The next time you feel mad about an ending, it might help to think about the chapters in your own life that have ended. Did they always go as planned? Most people would probably say no.

That lack of perfect closure does not mean those chapters lacked value. In many cases, the imperfections are exactly what make them memorable.

Frustration with endings often comes from how stories are structured. A common complaint appears when people believe the ending ruins the foundation of the show or movie. Years of character development and storytelling lead viewers to expect a conclusion that feels earned. When the ending contradicts those expectations, disappointment quickly follows.

Characters represent another major reason people become upset about endings. Growth and change are natural parts of storytelling. Characters evolve through the events they experience. Problems arise when characters suddenly behave in ways that feel out of character. Viewers spend years understanding who a character is and what motivates them. A sudden decision that contradicts that history can make the entire story feel unstable.

The result is a strange cultural habit where people begin recommending only parts of a show. For instance, someone might say to watch the early seasons of Grey’s Anatomy but stop before the later ones. Another person might suggest skipping out on the last season of New Girl. The message behind these recommendations is that the story eventually lost its way.

There are practical reasons why this happens.

Writers change. Show runners move on to different projects. Producers shift creative directions. Networks cancel or renew shows with little warning. Many creators do not know whether a show will receive another season while they are writing the current one.

These circumstances create a difficult situation for storytelling.

A balancing act should exist in how a show or movie is structured. If creators do not know whether a show or movie will be renewed, or whether another installment will come out, the story should still feel complete while allowing space for continuation. A season finale should not feel like a dead end, yet it should not rely entirely on another season that might never happen.

Leaving some things up in the air can actually strengthen a story. Not every character needs a definitive ending because life does not work that way. People disappear from each other’s lives without explanation. Questions remain unanswered, making uncertainty a part of the experience.

Audiences often struggle with this, with people tending to fill in gaps themselves. Fan fiction grows from those gaps. YouTube videos attempt to explain how directors really should have gone about a certain plot. Entire communities on Reddit form around interpreting hidden meanings or alternative possibilities.

Those interpretations can become so detailed that they reshape expectations about the ending.

When the actual ending arrives, it must compete with every imagined version created by the audience. Disappointment becomes likely when those imagined endings feel more satisfying than the real one.

The beauty of storytelling lies in the fact that it could have panned out differently with a different perspective or interpretation of the characters. Every viewer brings a unique understanding to the story. A decision that feels wrong to one viewer might feel perfectly logical to another.

Time also shapes expectations in powerful ways. Years can pass between seasons or movies. Fans spend that time developing theories and predictions. Small details become clues in elaborate explanations about what will happen next. Anticipation builds slowly during those waiting periods.

The actual ending eventually arrives and must confront years of imagination.

The reality of the ending rarely matches every expectation that formed during that time. Theories never live up to what was always going to happen.

People become mad about endings partly because those endings reveal the limits of imagination. The story reaches a conclusion that closes the possibilities viewers had constructed in their minds.

This realization may explain why endings feel so emotional, since they force people to accept that a narrative has stopped evolving. The possibilities that existed during the middle of the story shrink into nothing.

At the same time, endings also create meaning. A story without an ending would simply continue without structure.

These stories mirror life in that way. Chapters close, even when the closure is imperfect. New chapters begin, even when people are not fully ready for them.

Endings are uncomfortable, yet they are also what make stories memorable.

Perhaps the frustration people feel toward endings reflects something deeper about how individuals experience their own lives. People hope that conclusions will make sense, but reality often offers something less tidy.

This imperfection may be the most authentic part of any story, whether it is fictional or not.

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The Grace of Knowing When to Step Aside

Sometimes the hardest part of growth isn't starting something new – it's letting go. From kitchens in India to the newsroom at USask, learning when to leave a position can open space for others to shine and for ourselves to grow in unexpected ways.

Darshana Lanke

There's a particular kind of grace in knowing when to leave.

Not because you hate where you are. Not because you've failed. Not even because you're bored. But because you understand that staying forever — even in something you love — might prevent the next thing from beginning.

I started thinking about this on a recent trip to India. One afternoon, sitting cross-legged on the cool tile floor of my great-aunt's home, she told me something that has not left me since. We were talking about family dynamics, specifically the often-infamous relationship between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. She laughed at the stereotype — the hovering matriarch who stands in the kitchen doorway saying, "No, not like that. Do it this way."

Her secret, she said, was simple: she no longer runs the kitchen.

That role now belongs to her daughter-in-law, who now manages the household. She doesn't loom. She doesn't micromanage. She doesn't insist that her way is the only way. Instead, she has stepped back. She has made space.

The most surprising part is she is enjoying this new role.

She spoke about freedom and how she no longer carries the weight of daily household responsibility. She gets to participate without controlling. She gets to guide without overshadowing. In her words, every generation deserves the chance to lead, experiment, make mistakes and redefine what came before them.

Listening to her, I realized how rarely we talk about the grace of stepping aside.

We glorify ambition. We glorify holding onto positions, climbing higher, staying relevant. However, we don't often celebrate the wisdom of saying, "It's your turn now."

Over the past three years, I've grown up inside *The Sheaf*. I started as a staff writer. I became the News Section Head Editor. And now, I serve as Editor-in-Chief at *The Sheaf*.

I have loved every second of it.

I love writing. I love editing. I love chasing stories and having people share parts of themselves with me. I love connecting with students through journalism — watching a byline turn into a conversation. This year, as Editor-in-Chief, I've discovered how deeply I love leadership. I love building a team around a shared vision. I love watching someone submit their first shaky draft and then, months later, file a piece that makes me sit back in awe.

Hands passing a red baton under a clear sky | Aflo Images | Canva Pro

I even love the administrative side — the emails, the meetings, the spreadsheets, the bylaws. (Yes, really. The boring stuff is exciting to me!)

So when I realized I only have three months left in this position, it hit me harder than I expected. I don't want to leave. Quite frankly, I am having too much fun. I have a thousand more ideas. I want another year.

Before *The Sheaf* I wasn't even sure I wanted journalism as a career. I liked reading the news. I liked watching it. But as a profession? I didn't know. Then I joined, and now I can actually see myself doing this long term.

The pattern, I'm realizing, is familiar.

Before *The Sheaf*, I worked at Staples as a print and marketing associate. I loved that job too. I loved helping customers bring their ideas to life. I loved the rhythm of service work, the camaraderie of good coworkers and the simple satisfaction of solving someone's problem. Leaving was hard.

Just a few weeks ago, I found myself in a spiral over job applications. A summer camp I've worked at for the past two summers posted an assistant director position. My first thought was: I would love this. I adore working with kids. They are some of the purest souls I know. Being around them forces you to grow — to explain concepts clearly, to examine the holes in your own understanding, to become the kind of adult you wish you had growing up.

The job would have been a safety net, too. A steady income. Familiar faces. A chance to keep building leadership skills while I figure out what happens after graduation.

At the same time, I saw a posting for a journalism internship. A long shot. Uncertain. Potentially transformative.

I went back and forth.

The question wasn't, "Which job would I enjoy?" I knew I would enjoy both. The question was: What am I willing to leave in order to grow?

If you never leave a position, you'll never reach the next one. The next one might bring you just as much joy, if not more.

I think about my time as the News Editor last year. The person who stepped into that role after me transformed it completely. He brought a sharper lens to institutional critique. He asked harder questions of university administration. He wrote about events in departments I had barely paid attention to. He redefined what the news section could be.

If I had stayed in that position — if I had hovered over his shoulder saying, "Well, this is how I used to do it" — *The Sheaf* would have missed out on that growth.
Leadership is not about imprinting yourself permanently onto a role. It's about strengthening it enough that someone else can take it further.

The same is true now.

Over the past year as Editor-in-Chief our team has grown the paper significantly. Our physical edition is three times the size it was when I first joined. We have committed volunteers. We publish daily online content. We have an active social media presence. We are covering stories students genuinely care about.

I am incredibly proud of that and deeply grateful to the staff team who made it possible, because none of this was a solo effort.

However, here's the truth: if my predecessors hadn't stepped down when their terms ended, I would never have had the chance to push the paper in this direction. The growth we've seen exists because someone else made space.

Do I want to keep being Editor-in-Chief? Absolutely. A thousand percent. I have ideas every single day. Just recently, I decided we should redecorate the office, a dusty space with a microwave that hasn't been cleaned in years. Some might call it unnecessary this late in my term. I call it finishing strong.

Stepping down does not mean coasting.

You better believe I will push myself and this team until my very last contracted day. I don't want to leave with "I should have" or "I wish we had."

I will leave though.

Not because I'm ready. Not because I'm done loving this. But because it will be someone else's turn.

There is something beautiful about imagining next year's Editor-in-Chief sitting in this chair, seeing possibilities I can't yet see. They will have their own vision. Their own priorities. Their own blind spots and breakthroughs. The Sheaf will change again.

That's not a threat to what we've built. It's proof that it's alive.

My great-aunt doesn't run the kitchen anymore. This has allowed her daughter-in-law to discover her own rhythm, her own recipes, her own way of hosting a home.

Leadership, at its best, understands when to loosen its grip.

So here's to leaving well, making space and trusting that what you've built is strong enough to evolve without you.

Here's to the next team at The Sheaf. I cannot wait to read every single article.

Can We Please Stop Judging Students by Their Majors?

The idea that major choice equals academic merit is a fallacy and it's rotting the university community from inside out.

Annie Liu

During office hours, a professor once called my major — political science — a "dumb major."

I knew he didn't mean any disrespect. He was a kind, helpful person and the comment was just a joke that slipped out. However, his Freudian slip pointed to something larger: an unspoken hierarchy of majors that exists across higher education.

This hierarchy is everywhere, though no one admits it. It lives in the questions relatives ask at dinner, "what are you going to do with that degree?". It lurks on TikTok, where STEM students mock other majors — comparing their workloads to "colouring within the lines." It shapes who gets respect and who gets dismissed before they've even spoken.

At the top sit the STEM majors: engineering, physics, chemistry, math. They are the apex predators of academia, fawned over for their rigorous workload and difficult course material. People's faces light up as soon as they hear someone is in math or science, majors seen as embodying academic excellence itself.

Just below them are the softer sciences: biology, psychology, geology. Still respectable, but not quite royalty.

Business and economics majors land in the middle. While they are the butt of jokes, they also enjoy considerable privilege, namely the freedom to look down on the lowermost majors on the hierarchy — the liberal arts.

The stereotypes are relentless. Liberal arts majors are lazy. They're dumb. They can't handle real academic work. For conservatives, the indictment goes further: they are all the above, as well as brainwashed "communists" pursuing basket-weaving degrees of no value to society. The message is clear: you are what you study, and if you study the wrong thing, you are worth less.

I hear these judgments constantly. Sometimes, when I tell someone I'm a political science major, I watch their face shrivel in disgust — before their social awareness kicks in and the expression dissolves. They catch themselves, but the damage is already done. I have seen that look too many times to mistake it.

I have learned to ignore these reactions. I know my major is not a measure of my abilities. It is a mental shortcut people use to size me up — and a flawed one at that.

I know plenty of students in STEM fields who fail to live up to the "smart and hard-working" stereotypes with their degree. They fail classes, skip lectures and put in zero effort.

Meanwhile, some of the smartest people I know chose to study fields considered "lesser than" — the arts. They are high-achieving, well-rounded students, with as many awards in academics and extracurriculars as the "average STEM major." They chose the liberal arts out of genuine interest, not prestige or employment prospects — a fact that some people simply cannot fathom.

I study political science because I find it deeply enriching. It gives me a fuller understanding of issues like climate change and immigration. It teaches me how to think about governance, justice and what we owe one another. These are not abstract distractions. They are the questions that determine how we live together.

College student studying | Jacob Lund | Canva Pro

While engineers learn to build bridges and run complex code, liberal arts majors explore the normative questions that science often bypasses. Whether we should develop AI, what kind of future we're building and who gets left behind. These fields are equally valuable — dare I say, indispensable. A society composed only of STEM majors risks becoming the dystopian techno-fascist states imagined in Brave New World or 1984.

Yet, despite their value, many liberal arts students carry a quiet shame. They hesitate before answering the "what's your major" question. They brace themselves for the pause, the smirk, the well-meaning but cutting "Oh, what are you going to do with that?" They have internalized the hierarchy, even as they know it is built on shaky ground.

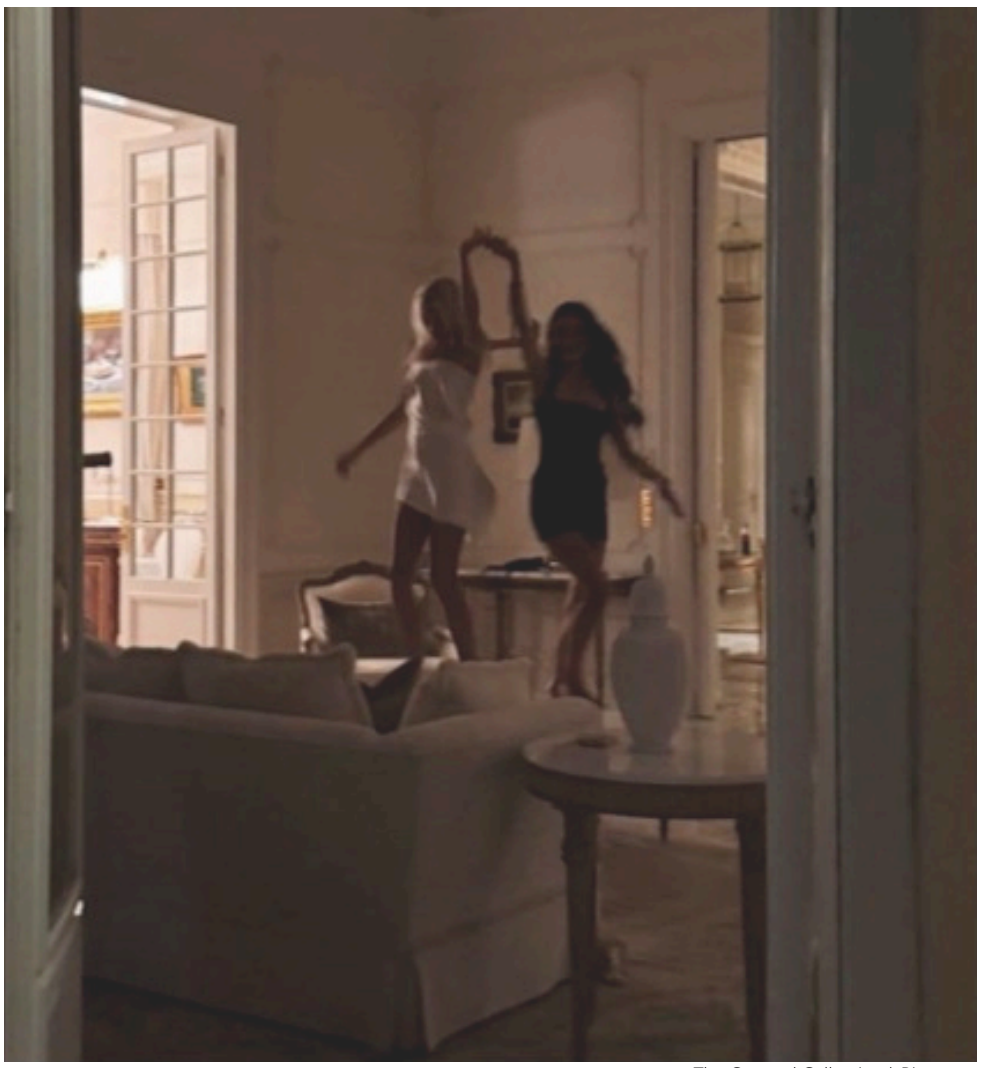
That is the real cost of judging students by their majors. It doesn't just shape funding or fuel TikTok jokes. It seeps into people's sense of themselves. It makes them doubt their own minds. It convinces them they are not enough.

We can do better. A major is just a category — not a metric on anyone's abilities. Intellectual diversity isn't a ranking system; it's a sign that there are many ways to be smart, many ways to contribute, many ways to matter.

Until then, I will keep watching faces shrivel and dissolve. I will keep watching people catch themselves mid-sneer. I will keep reminding myself — and anyone who will listen — that a degree does not define a person. The person defines the degree.
We are not our majors. We are what we do with them.

Somewhere between Girlhood and Womanhood

This is the year I trusted myself



The Curated Collective | Pinterest

Katherine Walcer

There's something about turning 24 on March 28 that feels cinematic, but not in a fireworks way. More like a slow zoom in. A soft focus realization. No confetti. No dramatic reinvention. Just a quiet awareness that something inside me has shifted.

When I was younger, I thought becoming a woman would be obvious. I assumed there would be a moment, an outfit, a job offer, a lease with only my name on it that would announce it. I thought it would feel loud and definitive.

Instead, it feels calm.

Maybe that's the point.

24 isn't a milestone birthday. No one writes songs about it. It doesn't unblock anything legally or socially. However for me, it feels like the first year I'm not performing adulthood, I am actually inhabiting it.

At 18, everything felt urgent. I had to pick the right path immediately. The right major. The right friends. The right version of myself. Every decision at that time felt permanent, like one wrong move would derail everything.

At 24, I understand that life bends.

I've changed my mind, I've had to pivot. I've faced setbacks that forced me to sit with myself longer than I wanted to. I've learned that plans fall apart, and that doesn't mean you do.

That's what makes this age feel important.

It feels earned.

Not because I have everything figured out, but because I've survived long enough uncertainty to trust myself more. I don't spiral the way I used to. I don't assume one bad week means a bad life. I don't feel like I'm racing invisible deadlines anymore.

There's a steadiness that wasn't there before.

Steadiness, I think, is part of becoming a woman.

Being 24 and still in university feels different from it would have been at 18 or 19. Back then, I was unsure what I wanted to do and didn't even think I would be here. Now, I'm here intentionally and passionately.

I understand the weight of tuition. The sacrifice of time. The emotional cost of late nights and early mornings. Every class feels less like a requirement and more like an investment. I'm not here because it's expected of me. I'm here because I've chosen this path.

That shift from “I guess this is what I'm supposed to do” to “I am building something for myself” is everything. At 23, I'm not just trying to get through university. I am trying to grow through it.

I care more deeply. I think more critically. I ask harder questions, not just in class but about life. What kind of career do I want? What kind of impact do I want to have? Who do I want to be when no one is watching?

These questions used to scare me. Now they energize me.

The biggest change at 24 isn't visible; it's internal. It's the way I talk to myself.

At 19, my inner voice was sharp. Critical. Impatient. I compared myself constantly to others’ grades, internships, relationships and appearances. I thought being confident meant never doubting myself.

Now I understand confidence differently.

Confidence is quieter. It's showing up even when I'm unsure. It's applying for things even if I don’t meet the perfect requirements. It's letting myself rest without spiralling into guilt. It's trusting that I can handle discomfort without running from it.

There's a softness in me now that I used to resist. I thought I needed to work harder to survive adulthood. More detached. Less emotional. But 23 has taught me something else: strength doesn't have to look sharp.

Being a woman, at least for me right now, means holding both ambition and gentleness. Drive and grace. Structure and emotion. It means allowing myself to care deeply without apologizing for it.

This year, I bought myself a Coach Ella bag. Not because I needed a new bag, but because it felt symbolic.

Growing up, I always noticed women who had staple pieces like timeless coats, structured handbags, watches they wore every day. Those pieces seemed to represent something steady. Something rooted. I used to think those items made them women, in some way.

Now I understand the opposite. They become meaningful because the woman carrying them had already grown into herself.

Buying that bag wasn't just about fashion. It was about marking a moment for me. A quiet acknowledgement that I am no longer waiting to feel grown, I already am.

It sits on my shoulder differently than the bags I carried at 19. Not because it's more expensive or more structured, but because I am.

I’ve also had to let go of the imaginary timelines. Life doesn't move in straight lines. It loops. It pauses. It reroutes. Turning 24 has forced me to let go of that imaginary checklist. I'm not behind. I'm not ahead. I'm exactly where I am supposed to be. It is this realization that feels powerful.

There's something deeply freeing about no longer measuring my life against someone else's pace. Friends are graduating. Moving cities. Starting careers. Getting engaged. Traveling. Pivoting. Restarting. I have stopped seeing that as comparison material.

Instead, I see it as proof that there is no single right timeline.

If I had to describe 24 in one word, it would be grounded.

I feel more grounded in my values. In my ambitions. In my relationships. I'm more selective with my energy. I'm less interested in chaos for the sake of excitement. I care more about alignment than appearance.

That doesn't mean I have everything figured out. I don't. I still overthink, I still question myself, I still have days where I feel small. However, I recover faster.

Maybe that's what growing up really is about. Not eliminating doubt, but learning how to move through it.

On March 28th, I won't wake up transformed. There won't be a dramatic soundtrack. I'll probably have a coffee. Maybe text my friends. Maybe sit quietly for a moment and think about the year behind me.

HoweverI know 24 feels different because I feel different. I'm not chasing an identity anymore. I am shaping one.

Somewhere between the late-night study sessions, the difficult conversations, the pivots, the small wins, the quiet resilience … I became a woman.

Not all at once.

Slowly. Intentionally. On my own timeline.

For the first time, that feels more than enough.

If We Can Correct Words, We Can Correct Names

Why mispronouncing someone's name should not be treated as a minor mistake, and why correcting it is a simple act of respect.

Hajra Ghuman

Over the years, I have noticed something interesting about how people say my name. Most of the time, people get it right. I would say about 90 percent of the time. After hearing it once or twice, people usually remember how to pronounce it, and it becomes second nature. My name is not one that causes a lot of confusion once someone hears it said aloud.

Even though the issue rarely comes up in my daily life, every now and then, I notice someone saying it wrong, even though I have known them for a while.

When that happens, I pause for a moment. I wonder whether I should step in and correct them, or whether it would be easier to just let it go. I tell myself it is not a big deal, that the conversation will only last a few minutes or that correcting them might make the situation awkward. That hesitation that comes about is interesting to me.

When someone mispronounces an ordinary word in conversation, people often jump in to correct them without thinking twice. If someone says a word incorrectly in class, during a presentation or even casually in conversation, it is common for someone to step in and say, "Actually, it's pronounced like this."

Most of the time, no one sees that correction as rude. In fact, it can be interpreted as helpful. It allows the person to adjust their pronunciation and move forward without continuing the mistake.
However, when it comes to names, the situation suddenly feels different.

Correcting someone on how they say your name can feel uncomfortable. It can feel like you are interrupting the flow of the conversation or putting the other person on the spot. In some situations, it can even feel like you are being overly particular about something that others might view as minor.

I have always wondered why that is. If anything, your name is probably the one word that should matter the most.

It is the word people use to identify you. It is the word professors say when calling attendance, the word colleagues use when introducing you and the word friends use when addressing you. It is the first piece of information someone learns about you and often the first way you are remembered.

Unlike other words in conversation, your name is not interchangeable. It belongs to you. Yet, many people hesitate to correct others when it is said incorrectly.

Canva Pro

Part of that hesitation may come from a desire to avoid making someone else feel embarrassed. No one wants to create an uncomfortable moment in an otherwise normal interaction. However, most mispronunciations are not intentional acts of disrespect. They happen because someone simply does not know the correct pronunciation. Without being told, they may never learn.

Personally, I never take offence when someone corrects me on how to pronounce their name. If anything, I appreciate it. I would much rather know immediately than continue saying it wrong without realizing. Being corrected allows me to show that person the respect they deserve by saying their name properly moving forward.

Most people feel the same way.

A quick correction rarely creates the awkwardness we imagine in our heads. More often, it leads to a simple response such as, "Oh, thank you for telling me." The conversation continues, and the moment passes quickly.

The impact of that small correction lasts far longer than the moment itself.

Over the course of my time in law school, I have become increasingly aware of how precise language can be. Law school teaches students that words matter in ways we might not have fully appreciated before entering the field. Two words that appear to be synonyms can carry completely different legal outcomes. A comma placed in the wrong spot can alter the interpretation of a clause. A single word in a statute can determine how an entire legal rule is applied.

We spend hours carefully reading cases and statutes, paying close attention to the nuances within the language. Entire arguments can revolve around the interpretation of specific terms. In many ways, legal education trains us to treat language with a high level of care and attention.

Which is why it sometimes feels strange that something as simple as pronouncing a person's name correctly can feel like an afterthought in everyday interactions.

If we are taught to value precision in language, should we not have that same level of care apply to how we address one another?

When someone makes the effort to learn how to pronounce a name correctly, they are acknowledging that identity. It is a small gesture, but it communicates something important, which is that the person in front of you matters enough for you to get it right.

This is why correcting someone when they mispronounce your name should not feel like an unreasonable request. It is not about demanding perfection or creating unnecessary tension in a conversation. It is about ensuring that the most basic form of personal recognition is respected.

Allowing a name to be mispronounced repeatedly might seem harmless in the moment, but over time, it can send an unintended message that accuracy is not important. A simple correction at the beginning of an interaction prevents that pattern from developing.

Most people genuinely want to say someone's name correctly. Once they know the proper pronunciation, they will often try to remember it. The only way they can do that, however, is if someone takes the time to let them know.

Correcting someone on the pronunciation of your name should not be viewed as confrontational or unnecessary. Instead, it should be seen as part of normal conversation, where a small adjustment helps ensure mutual respect.

In a world where people regularly interact with individuals from different backgrounds, cultures and communities, learning how to pronounce names correctly is one of the simplest ways to show consideration.

That moment might feel small, but it carries meaning. It reinforces the idea that names matter, identities matter and the people behind those names matter too.
If there is any word worth getting right, it is someone's name.

P.S. The way you pronounce my name is Huh-jh-rah Gu-men.

Teens by Default

Why Discord Decided to Consider Everybody a 13-Year-Old.

Nicolas Rock

In the ten years that I have used the communication software Discord, my personal data has been exposed to at least two major security breaches. The first was when hackers accessed the personal data of 760,000 users in 2024, and the second was when a different group of hackers accessed the personal data of 5.5 million unique users in October 2025.

The second hack was especially notable because an alleged 70,000 users had their government IDs accessed.

The reason Discord had these IDs in the first place was that they sometimes required users to submit an ID and a face scan for age verification. However, there's something that doesn't completely line up here. Before the hack, Discord claimed that face scans and IDs would be deleted from their servers once age verification was confirmed. This, it turns out, was a lie.

As far as I know, my data was not compromised in either of the major Discord hacks. If my data had been compromised, it would amount to my location, my passwords, my age, my communication habits — nothing that Apple doesn't already have. I never sent Discord my ID because I had never needed to verify my age. That could change as of March 2026.

On Feb. 9, Discord announced it would roll out a new "teen-by-default" setting for all new and existing users. In short, this means that users will not be able to access content on Discord that has been deemed "adult" — certain settings, servers, videos, direct messages — without confirming their age via face scan and government-issued ID.

They have reiterated that the face scans and ID will only be used to verify age and will be deleted immediately after. Why they should be believed this time around is anybody's guess.

Discord has unveiled its new age verification policy as pressure mounts for the company to do something about the rampant child abuse that has been enabled by the platform. In recent years, a spotlight has been turned on ideologically motivated violent extremism (IMVE). These networks associated with IMVE use Discord as a platform to coordinate the grooming, extortion, abuse, assault and murder of children.

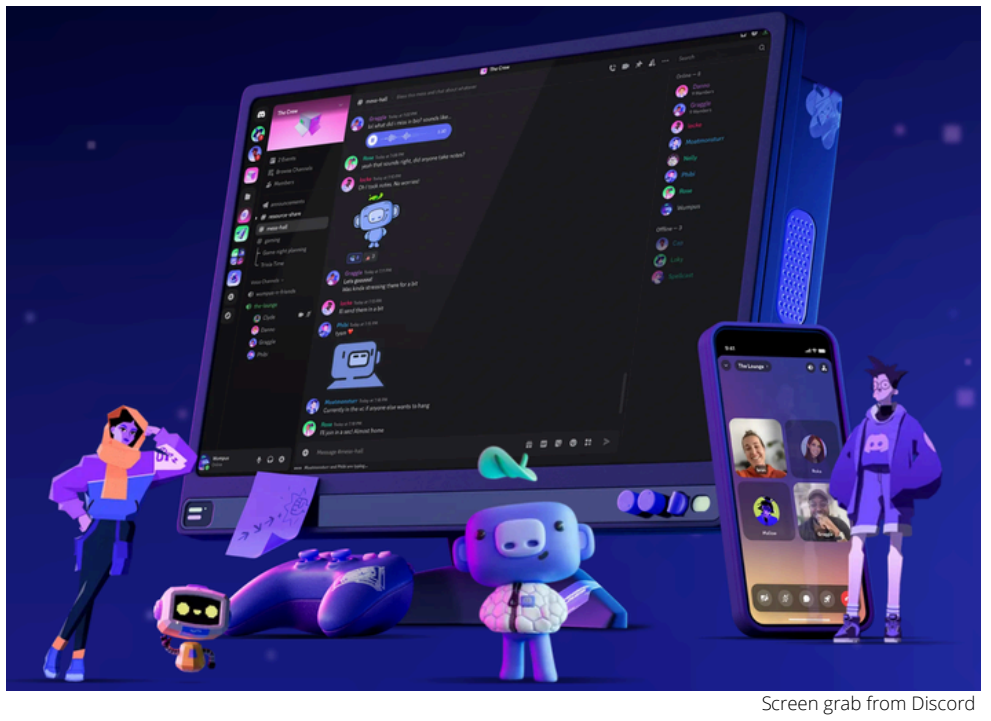
Granted, these IMVE groups do not use Discord in isolation. They operate using a combination of encrypted messaging platforms like Discord and Telegram, as well as video games like Roblox and Minecraft, to commit acts of child abuse. These groups have no physical gathering places and are made up of members from all over the world, which has made them difficult to pin down or even quantify. That said, Discord has been aware of the major IMVE groups as far back as 2021, maybe even earlier, and has been, at best, slow to act.

Discord has passed the buck of dealing with this problem to its userbase. I don't plan on accessing any "adult" content on Discord, but normalizing face scans and government-issued ID upload for all will not stop at simply regulating who can share or watch pornographic material on the platform.

Here's a logical jump. Discord already has an internal structure for universities to facilitate class-specific servers. USaskhas several Discord servers for various colleges, clubs and classes. I am a part of a few myself. It would not surprise me if, going forward, Discord would start to require scans and ID to access university-specific content, on the basis of wanting to verify that every user is genuinely a university student. After all, not everybody in university is an adult.

Since Discord doesn't specify how they will determine if something (or if someone's entire account) qualifies as adult content, they get to set the parameters of when and why they'll require users to upload their private data. If you don't engage with adult content on Discord but somebody in one of your servers does, who's to say Discord won't require every server member to verify their age? The alternative goes against what Discord says they are trying to curtail with this new policy: teenage users interacting with adult content.

So, what then is Discord to do? If you weigh the implementation of wholesale age verification against the prospective abuse of children, isn't it a no-brainer? Maybe, but there was an alternative option. If you ask me, if a company is having a hard time getting rid of a rampant child abuse situation on their digital platform, they are entitled to nuclear options in rectifying the problem. However,if the software has been historically vulnerable to data breaches affecting millions of users, the nuclear option doesn't lie in requiring more people to upload sensitive documents and biometrics. It lies in banning adult content entirely.



Screen grab from Discord

This will never happen, and the precedent for why it will never happen was set in 2017. When blogging platform Tumblr's parent company, Yahoo, was bought out by wireless giant Verizon in 2017, Verizon banned all adult content on the platform. This came after Apple forced their hand by pulling the Tumblr app from the App Store, citing that the website hosted child pornography.

Tumblr had already been experiencing a drop in users for the four years since it was acquired by Yahoo in 2013 for US$1.1 billion. By 2015, its value had been marked down to US$230 million.

With the change in restrictions after the Verizon buyout in 2017, it experienced a mass exodus of users, many of whom cited the adult content ban as the reason. Verizon sold Tumblr two years later for US$3 million, and the blogging platform never again reached the traffic-highs of the pre-NSFW-ban era. Sex still sells.

There were two clear options for Discord. One would potentially risk their users' data, the other the company's bottom line. Since Discord is a for-profit organization, the choice was clear. It's the 560 million users that will be shouldering the responsibility of making Discord a "safer and more inclusive experience for users over the age of 13", not the company itself.

It's not even worth considering the possibility that Discord isn't as forthcoming with what they do with their users' personal data as they seem. The going rate for black market personal data is about US$4000 on the high side. With a user base of 560 million (and counting), all being forced to upload their data, I'll let you do the math on what kind of payday that looks like. However, that's silly, because big tech doesn't lie about how our data is managed. Right?

As tech giants become more brazen in the amount of data they ask of their users, it is our responsibility as users to call a spade a spade and identify when alternative measures can be taken, and ask why they weren't. In this case, I believe Discord prioritized profit over taking real action to solve a horrifying and rapidly proliferating problem. Let's just hope that some of those dollars they're holding on to are dedicated to better cybersecurity going forward.

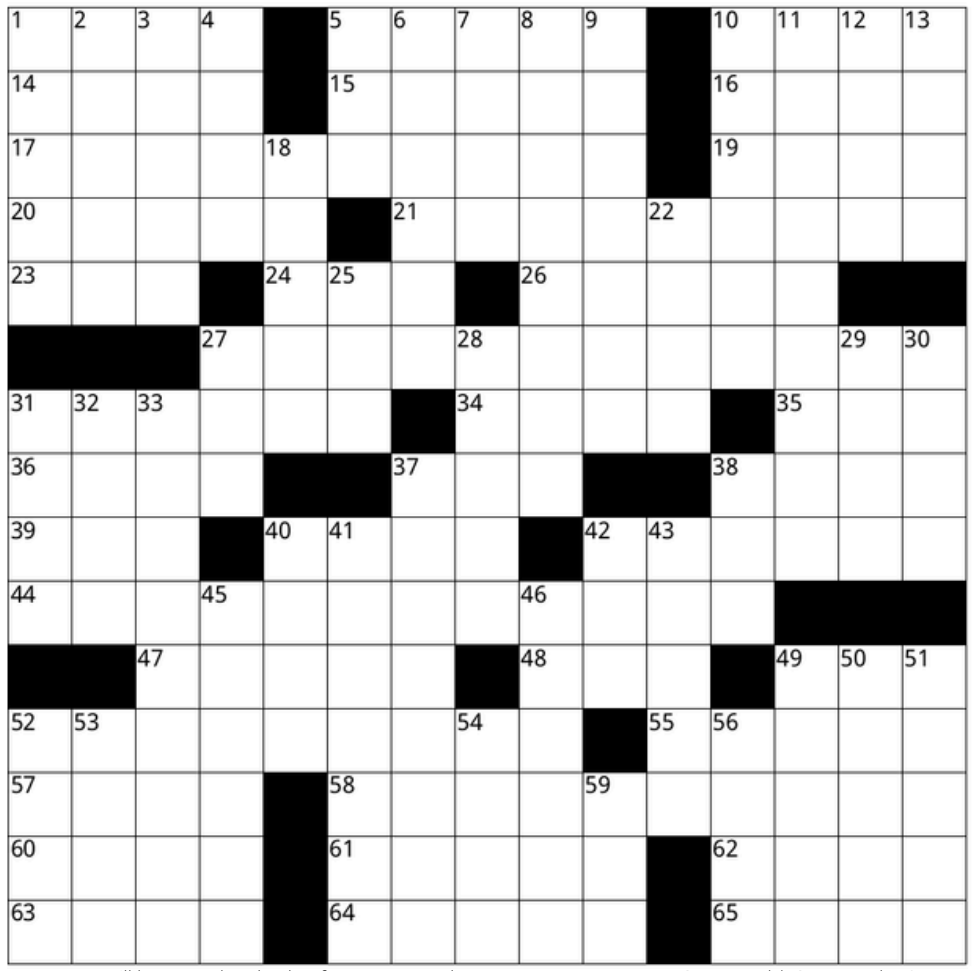
CROSSWORD

Across

1. Residents: Suffix
5. Easy two-pointer used in 44 across
10. See 51 down
14. Tidy
15. Lisa Bonet _____ ___ basil: palindrome
16. Cathedral area
17. Justification for conflict (2 words)
19. Provide with a roof - or add an “ing”?
20. Spelling variation of a tiny creature
21. Where you can swim laps alone in a pool (2 words)
23. Ukr., once
24. Big Apple sch.
26. “There is __ ____ in the affairs of men”: Brutus
27. Sales taxes, e.g. that fund education in U.S. (2 words)
31. Noisy sleeper
34. Professor ‘iggins
35. Roman’s 650
36. MXXX ÷ V
37. Counterpart of “thx”
38. Emmy winner Ward
39. Dubai’s fed.
40. Marketing leader?
42. Iraq’s Hussein
44. Big basketball tournament for U.S. colleges (2 words)
47. Like melted ice cream
48. Celebrity chef Garten
49. Pal 4 life
52. Like a stop sign
55. New Zealand native
57. “To __ __ not to be ...”
58. NBA player Zion, who played for 63 across
60. Fundamentals
61. Brilliance
62. Crossword makers favourite actress Rae
63. University in 44 across with the Blue Devils
64. Witherspoon of “Legally Blonde”
65. Lentil stew

Down

1. Natives of Peru
2. 44 across has 68 of them
3. Reliever
4. Ticket remnant
5. Chemist’s workplace
6. Went to a restaurant (2 words)
7. Cry of pain
8. Lets go of harmful teachings
9. Three- ____: type of shot used in 44 across
10. False front
11. Like some questions (2 words)
12. Group selfie
13. Fam. members
18. Health in Toulouse
22. Nickname for Olivia, perhaps
25. Pirate’s cry
27. ____ Lanka
28. Looked for morays
29. California university with the most wins in 44 across
30. Jack of old Westerns
31. Pond gunk
32. Athletic org. that runs 44 across
33. Excess inventory
37. “Share your toys and no more fighting (2 words)
38. Important part of WHMIS
40. “Go Crazy”: hit by Young ____
41. Make stronger, in a way
42. Ott. figure
43. Mount _____: most active stratovolcano in Japan
45. Like some sandpaper
46. Nabisco wafer cookies
49. ____ nova
50. College newbie
51. With 10 across, survivors of the East, South, Midwest and West regions in 44 across
52. Shortest book in the Old Testament
53. Philippine island
54. Everyone, in Essen
56. In the center of
59. Suffix with meteor



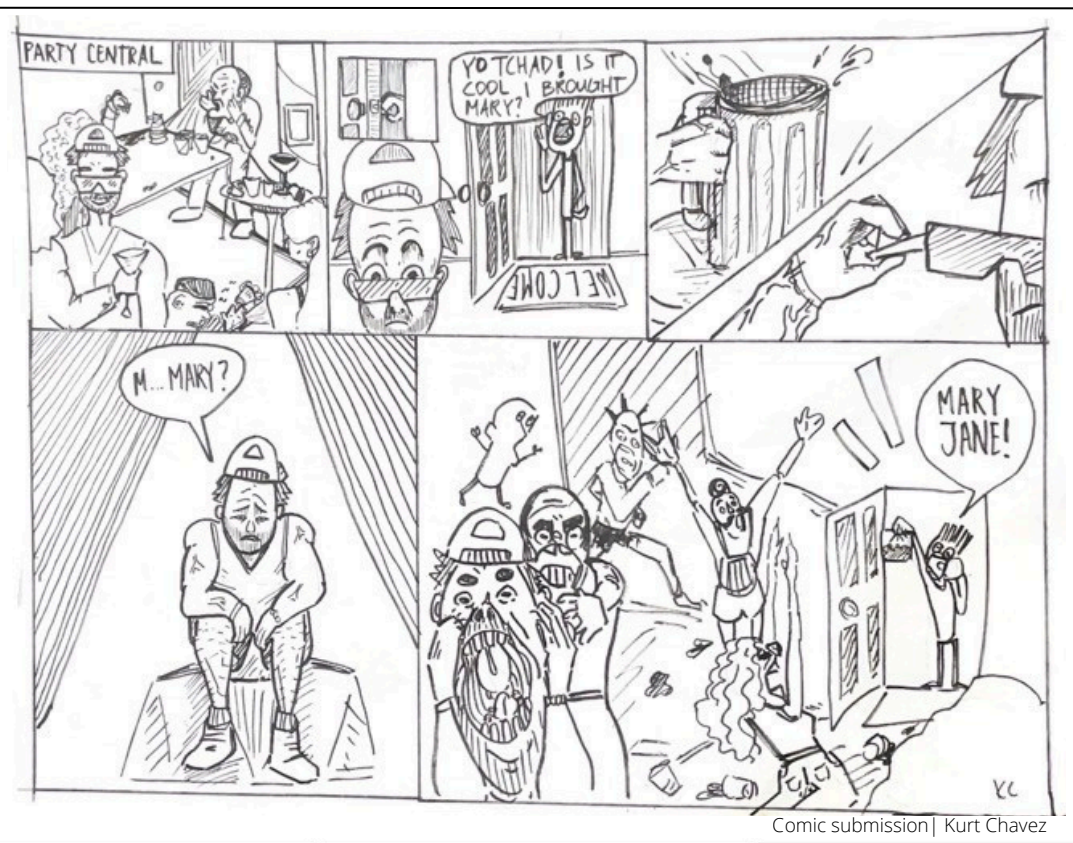
Answers will be posted at thesheaf.com next week

Crossword | Greta Mader Stevens

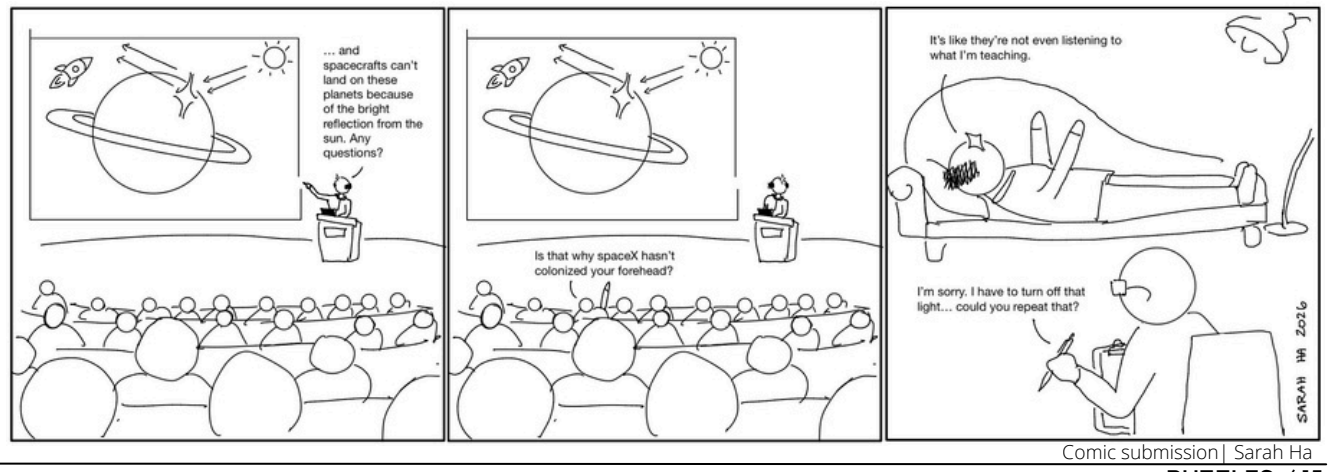
STUDENT COMICS WANTED!

HAVE A COMIC THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE?

SUBMIT YOUR WORK TO EDITOR@THESHEAF.COM



Comic submission| Kurt Chavez



Comic submission| Sarah Ha

USSU BACKPAGE

USSU Elections

Executive Candidate Forums

Campaigning starts **March 16**

Candidates Meet & Greet
March 18 | 11AM - 1PM in the Place Riel North Concourse

Online Forum
March 20 | 2PM on Zoom. Visit ussu.ca/elections to register.

Louis' Forum
March 24 | 4PM at Louis'

USSU

CCR

DROP-IN SESSIONS

Mar 24 & 26 | 11am - 12pm

Campus Club Space, 2nd Floor Place Riel

Applying for CCR one last time? We're hosting Q&A sessions to help campus groups navigate the process of submiting their final Co-Curricular Record (CCR) applications.

USSU LOUIS'

YEAR END PARTY

MAR 28 @ 7:30PM

LOUIS' PUB, 93 CAMPUS DR • 19+

BLU BEACH BAND & THE BROTHERS G

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