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Editor's letter

When disaster strikes and the escape route is boarded up by systemic oppression, environmental destruction and personal loss, present reality becomes blinding. LGBTQ+ and low-income students are left without a place to call home, sports-related injuries derail an entire team’s plans and drug-related charges cling to an individual’s reputation. The historical constant is the motion sickness plaguing those at a disadvantage, those who are left to seek refuge within a fast-moving, cataclysmic cycle.
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The losing ticket

ASU Housing’s promise of a “supportive, close-knit environment” is not reflective of housing experiences from LGBTQ+ students and students with financial difficulties.

by Camila Pedrosa

Sakura Thomas emailed ASU Housing on Jan. 8, 2021 requesting gender inclusive accommodation for the upcoming school year, a dorming option for students who prefer to choose their roommate regardless of biological sex.

Thomas, a junior who uses she/they pronouns, had encountered negative housing arrangements before. She had lived with roommates and sensed apparent differences in gender identity, and in beliefs on identity and sexuality. Feelings of alienation and displacement clouded the school year as a result.

“To keep (my roommates) comfortable, I isolated myself,” Thomas said.

For Thomas, securing gender inclusive housing meant freedom. It meant finally finding a place where she could freely express herself.

But nearly a month went by — past the assigned housing lottery date Thomas was given — before the housing department email came, leaving her to cycle through the same housing system that had failed her before.

ASU’s gender inclusive housing process came under fire in the past year for scattered responses and failed arrangements for LGBTQ+ students, bringing further attention to consistent failures in communication across the entire housing department.

“Almost completely dysfunctional”

For students like Thomas without strong personal connections to the housing department or LGBTQ+ resources on campus, the entire process remained a mystery.

The seemingly endless wait, the lack of guarantee for gender inclusive accommodations and the absence of transparency on wait times and room choice left many LGBTQ+ students confused and endangered.

In September 2020, the Rainbow Coalition and the Barrett LGBTQ+ Club launched a petition demanding urgent gender inclusive housing reform. According to the petition, the clubs had been in contact with the ASU Housing department for months, but had yet to see any change to the process they deemed “almost completely dysfunctional.”

Before calls for reform, students would email housing, request an application, fill out the application and wait, sometimes months, for housing to randomly assign a dorm and roommate.

Some signatures on the petition included notes on personal experiences with ASU Housing and the gender inclusive housing process. One student remembered friends who never got a safe living experience. Another noted how vital inclusive housing was for those with unaccepting households.

The Rainbow Coalition and Barrett LGBTQ+ Club also shared an infographic on their social media pages, laying out the scope of the problem and detailing the process, which quickly went viral and led to a school-wide push for reform.

At the head of the movement was Beth Anne, a senior studying sustainability, and Gage Keranen, an alumnus who studied biological sciences.

Anne, the former president of Barrett LGBTQ+ Club, who uses they/them pronouns, began receiving emails in summer 2020 from incoming freshmen about housing struggles when they realized the need for immediate change.

“One of the principles of our organization, although it hadn’t come into play yet, was that we wanted to serve as an advocate for students,” Anne said.

The leaders heard back from ASU within 24 hours of sending their first email, thanks to the traction on social media and the organization efforts among the LGBTQ+ student organizations. The first response came from University Student Government, the first point of contact for student clubs. ASU Housing responded soon after to formally request a meeting with Anne and Keranen.

“I thought (that) was a really awesome response. It’s not easy to have someone come in and critique what you’re doing when you didn’t realize it’s an issue,” Anne said.

Across the fall 2020 semester and into spring 2021, Keranen and Anne met with ASU Housing several times to revise policies and design a more inclusive housing portal application.

Ruby, a sophomore majoring in museum studies, who requested their last name be omitted to avoid potential targeted harassment, applied for gender inclusive housing during the fall 2021 housing application season when the gender inclusive housing portal first launched.

While she was one of the few lucky students who surpassed ASU Housing’s obstacles to obtaining gender inclusive housing, she said the process was far from seamless.

ASU Housing failed to include the new portal on their website — Thomas noted as of January 2021, the housing website still requested
Anne stays hopeful more change is to come. “I have so much faith in those who took over the responsibility to carry that movement on,” Anne said. “There’s a lot of work still to be done to ensure the safety and fullness of life for LGBTQ+ students on campus.”

With the housing department’s failures in the gender inclusive housing process, many students who would otherwise apply settle for ASU’s default housing process.

ASU Housing has the capacity to house one fifth of ASU’s on-campus student body as of fall 2019. However, each campus’ capacity differs greatly from one another, ranging between 15.8% and 24.5% of their respective student bodies. This creates availability conflicts at some campuses more than others.

Despite opening a new residence hall in
downtown Phoenix in fall 2021, the number of students living on campus exceeded expectations, according to a statement put out by ASU. 458 students who applied to live on campus for the 2021-2022 academic year are temporarily housed in hotels due to lack of capacity on campus. The University is working to find spots in residence halls for these students.

Administrative issues

Miscommunication and financial barriers still exist within the traditional application process.

Barrett sophomores, who are expected to live on campus during their second year, had no choice in their dorm for fall 2020, potentially causing financial strain for those who relied on more affordable housing options.

Lyndsey Anderson and Megan Mathews, sophomores studying kinesiology, and Emily Sargent, a sophomore studying nursing, are downtown Barrett students who thought they would have the opportunity to live with two other roommates at Roosevelt Point, an apartment complex blocks away from campus with cheaper housing options than the dorms.

Once housing application season came around, they were blindsided by changes ASU Housing made but failed to properly communicate.

Early on in the housing application process, the soon-to-be roommates learned Barrett sophomores were only allowed to live in Tower 2 at Taylor Place, the pricier layout at the freshman residence hall, which didn’t coincide with the information listed on the housing website. They called ASU Housing multiple times and received contradictory advice on their options, according to Anderson and Sargent.

Housing told them they would be reassigned to a non-Barrett student lottery time that would allow them to choose Roosevelt Point. They missed the Barrett lottery time, and after waiting weeks to get in contact with housing, they were told there was no other lottery time.

This left the group to live in second-year dorm rooms at Taylor Place where they had limited options and a higher price point.

The downtown campus does have apartment-style housing, though. Fusion on First is a new housing building just a couple blocks from Taylor Place, with availability for up to 550 students.

In a statement, ASU claimed that Fusion on First is accessible to sophomores, contrary to the information provided on their website in mid-August, which stated the housing would serve third-year students and beyond, as well as students in the Thunderbird School of Global Management.

The miscommunication within the housing department and constant changes to the information provided on their website led to more complaints from students. And the complaints keep coming.

“How are we supposed to be fulfilling ourselves as students and really pursuing our education if we can’t meet our very basic needs?” Anne said.
In June of 2021 I found a graphic t-shirt depicting Marsha P. Johnson, the now-celebrated gay rights movement leader, in a suburban Target. The image showed Johnson holding a protest sign that reads “power to the people.” The shirt sells for $15 plus tax.

We are undoubtedly living in a period of increased queer visibility and representation. Gay and transgender people occupy political office, star in primetime TV and make chart-topping music.

In this environment, as our media and public spaces slowly welcome queer imagery, it becomes alarmingly easy to adopt a positive and complacent attitude toward the present queer condition. A culture which actively celebrates queer iconography must also be a culture where LGBTQ+ individuals are thriving and free.

The reality queer people face in the United States, including at ASU, does not match this illusion.

In 2013, Monica Jones, a Black transgender woman and ASU student, was arrested for “walking while trans” by Phoenix police on suspicions of “manifesting prostitution.” Her arrest was the result of Project ROSE, a collaborative effort between Phoenix PD and the ASU School of Social Work to combat prostitution using coercive diversion programs.

This event alone represents the enduring presence of transphobia, misogynoir and anti-sex worker sentiments pervading our systems and culture today — the exact bigotries Marsha P. Johnson and her community fought against.

In fact, recent years saw a serious increase in violence against transgender people in particular. According to the Human Rights Campaign, at least 33 transgender and gender non-conforming people have been killed so far in 2021, and at least 44 were killed in 2020 — the deadliest year on record. The majority of victims were Black and Latinx women.

This reality is especially grim in Arizona. According to a 2019 report, Arizona ranked fifth in the nation for highest frequency of anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes, and the city of Phoenix ranked fourth in the nation for highest rate of anti-LGBTQ+ incidents.

The paradox in these conditions is obvious. If, as popular wisdom tells us, the key to creating a safe world for queer people is to foster acceptance and education, then why are queer people at large still facing extreme violence and discrimination?

The past and present of queer struggle

ASU, like many universities, prides itself on a commitment to inclusion of its LGBTQ+ community members. Its websites and handbooks include guidelines on proper pronoun etiquette, anti-bullying measures and inclusive housing practices. It offers classes on queer theory and seminars led by queer professors.

This approach to LGBTQ+ inclusion aligns with a general trend in recent decades: As queer people become more visible, many academic institutions are jumping to declare their advocacy for queer identities in these spaces. However, this advocacy typically starts and ends at the nexus of politeness, performance and respectability.

For many queer people, liberal advocacy is easily recognized as a facade. While liberal institutions explicitly affirm our identities,
they hardly ever support our needs, demands and desires. Liberal institutions support queer identities, queer imagery and queer theory, but not queer people.

Take Marsha P. Johnson's life work as an example. Increasingly a symbol of civil rights activism in liberal circles (and the Target Pride merch aisle, apparently), Johnson's contribution to queer politics is often oversimplified to her participation in the Stonewall riots and her unique trans identity.

In reality, Johnson and her accomplices, including New York queer icons such as Sylvia Rivera, were self-described revolutionaries. Johnson organized political action with the Gay Liberation Front, or GLF, and Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, or STAR, in New York City.

These groups — STAR in particular — organized in response to the material injustices so many queer people faced: food insecurity, housing insecurity and police violence. Rooted in the informal practice of mutual aid, they worked to shelter homeless queer youth and protect gender non-conforming people, especially sex workers, from targeted police harassment and the threat of incarceration.

Decades later, despite liberal acceptance and inclusion messaging, these are still the central struggles queer communities face.

Today in the United States, about 1 in 5 transgender people experience homelessness and 1 in 10 have been evicted because of their gender identity. The poverty rate for straight cisgender individuals is 15.7%, in comparison to 21.6% of the general LGBTQ+ community and 29.4% of the transgender community — nearly a third of all transgender people.

According to a 2015 survey, 27% of transgender people in Arizona specifically have reported “being fired, being denied a promotion or not being hired for a job because of their gender identity or expression.”

14% of transgender Arizonans reported experiencing homelessness within the past year, and according to azcentral, potentially half of homeless youth in Arizona are LGBTQ+.

How might the famously unapologetic Marsha P. Johnson react to learning, though her image became widely canonized, her queer community still intensely experiences the same material injustices she dedicated her life to fighting?

Contemporary queer activism

On its transgender resource webpage, among a series of documents on name-change protocol and “fostering trans inclusive learning environments,” ASU lists Trans Queer Pueblo as a Phoenix-area resource.

Trans Queer Pueblo is an “LGBT migrant POC organization creating cycles of mutual support to build leadership to create a safer Phoenix,” said organizer Dagoberto Bailon.

According to Bailon, more than 400 transgender migrants currently participate in Trans Queer Pueblo’s work in some capacity. Bailon said data regarding undocumented and migrant LGBTQ+ people is hard to come by, due to the nature of systemic discrimination and invisibilizing of migrant communities.

In many ways, Trans Queer Pueblo carries on Marsha P. Johnson’s work and legacy today. Much of their organizing centers immigration justice, including frequent demands to defund the police and abolish U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE. These government bodies have a violent history of targeted harassment toward transgender people of color.

Latinx transgender people in particular face discrimination from the police and border enforcement. In 2015, 59% of Latinx transgender and gender non-conforming

“Liberal institutions support queer identities, queer imagery and queer theory, but not queer people.”
people said they would feel somewhat or very uncomfortable asking the police for help. In jails, prisons, and detention centers, 18% had been physically assaulted and 27% had been sexually assaulted by staff or other inmates.

According to a report by the Prison Policy Initiative, 1 in 6 transgender people have been incarcerated and 47%, or nearly half, of Black transgender people have spent time behind bars. In 2019, gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals were 2.25 times more likely to be arrested than straight individuals, with lesbian and bisexual women in particular being arrested at four times the rate of straight women.

Bailon said violence and criminalization are the most pressing issues queer and transgender people face today. “The criminalization of trans people, and the mistreatment inside either jails or detention centers, is incredible,” he said. “I think [they] really paint the picture of how broken our systems are.”

Despite choosing to redirect transgender students to Trans Queer Pueblo’s migrant and queer-led resources, ASU’s policies remain diametrically opposed to the organization’s political demands.

ASU is not a sanctuary campus. In 2019, after students protested the presence of Customs and Border Patrol agents at a campus career fair, ASU promised it would “not preclude their participation” in employment opportunity events in a quote from azcentral.

In September 2020, in a letter on racial justice, President Michael Crow promised to “further supplement the ASU police force with enhanced services.” This announcement came after Undergraduate Student Government Tempe passed a resolution to defund the ASU Police Department.

“I think that [Michael Crow’s] statement about the police really puts a lot of trans and queer people in danger,” said Bailon. “We’ve seen that both Tempe police and Phoenix police are not the nicest.”

However, to Bailon, police harassment is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to ASU’s relationship to the queer community. “There have been so many instances where we have seen ASU abuse the community or not take care of the community,” he said.

**Defending queer futures**

The cognitive dissonance present in ASU’s LGBTQ+ advocacy may seem offensive to some, but it’s also exploitative. The University benefits from outsourcing labor to regional queer support groups while simultaneously taking credit for fostering an “inclusive atmosphere.”

These contradictions remind us liberal politics are fundamentally about symbolism and aesthetic rather than material change.

In predictable patterns of liberal co-option, those with power in the status quo hijack the imagery and language of radical movements with a counterrevolutionary agenda. In this liberal utopia of acceptance and inclusion, you are allowed to “love who you love” and “be your truest self” only as long as your existence doesn’t challenge material hierarchies, such as cis-heteropatriarchy, white supremacy and capitalism.

“I think that the role of the University is to continue to feed moderate people into the city and into these jobs, so that the status quo continues,” Bailon said. “Whoever is in charge will always hold a sort of middle ground.”

It is undeniable that queer politics have often been anesthetized by an upper echelon of white, wealthy queers who embraced liberal co-option. Too often, the least marginalized of us encourage a political agenda that prioritizes assimilation into cisgender heterosexual society rather than liberation from the oppressive status quo.

For me, being queer is not just an identity to be validated or accepted, but a way of existing that seeks to undermine the power structures that have pathologized, marginalized and killed people like me. I understand queer people were never meant to exist in safety and comfort under these oppressive systems, and they must be dismantled in order for queer people — and all people — to be liberated.

To that end, it is essential that queer politics reject liberal co-option and instead organize around the needs, demands and desires of the most marginalized of us.

This is not to suggest abandoning spaces like ASU altogether. As Bailon said, “If we’re not there, someone else is going to be there. You cannot create change if you’re not present.”

Rather, it is to consistently remind that material change is still necessary and to resist liberal complacency. If we don’t, then we risk creating a culture that considers itself free of explicit homophobia and transphobia while still maintaining the very systems that oppress us.
THE DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

Arizona launched an opt-in program to expunge marijuana convictions in light of legalization, but the process rehashes disparities and obstacles

by Kiera Riley

photography by Alex Gould
Carlos Diaz was watching the news when the solution to a problem that's haunted him for a decade happened to air in the evening broadcast.

About 10 years prior, an officer pulled Diaz over for a broken headlight. What started as a routine traffic stop escalated to two sobriety tests — both of which Diaz passed.

Then, officers asked to search his vehicle. Diaz obliged, certain he had nothing to hide. But unbeknownst to Diaz, the butt-end of a burnt joint sat silently under his passenger seat.

It didn’t take much searching in his two-door Mazda Miata for the officers to find the remains of the marijuana cigarette. And soon after, he was escorted to the nearest police station and charged with a misdemeanor for possession of paraphernalia.

The charge clung to Diaz for a decade, pervading every job interview and new opportunity he dove into during this time.

But in April, as the anchor clearly dictated on the TV screen, a dispensary in Phoenix was hosting a free legal clinic for those with expungeable marijuana convictions, and Diaz was among the eligible.

Six months after recreational marijuana sales took effect in January, the courts rolled out a process allowing for those with pending or past marijuana charges a pathway to complete expungement.

The courts started accepting petitions in early July, and advocacy groups moved to help eligible people navigate the process.

But despite their best efforts, advocates say the opt-in format makes it difficult to reach the people who need expungement most, and differences in legal opinion across county lines still pose significant barriers to a clean record.

**Basics of marijuana expungement**

Voters passed the Smart and Safe Arizona Act, a law legalizing recreational marijuana, in November 2020. The initiative, commonly known as Prop 207, included a provision allowing anyone with a charge for possessing, consuming or transporting under 2.5 ounces of marijuana, six marijuana plants or any related paraphernalia the chance to start anew.

Applicants can provide their information, petition the court and, if successful, see the charge disappear completely, a type of expungement previously unseen in the Arizona legal system. Before the passage of Prop 207, convictions could only be set aside. Those charged could see a reinstatement of their civil rights but still carried the charge on their record.

Expungement guaranteed by the passage of Prop 207 reinstates civil rights, such as voting, serving on a jury and owning a firearm, and dispels many of the burdens a misdemeanor or felony marijuana conviction brings.

May Tiwamangkala, a criminal justice organizer for Puente Human Rights Movement, an advocacy organization and member of the Arizona Marijuana Expungement Coalition, was pulled over while on probation in 2015.

Officers reserved the right to search the car, and once they did, found a small amount of marijuana. The charge extended Tiwamangkala’s probation by four years and resulted in additional fines and penalties.

For most, a marijuana charge complicates securing employment, quality housing, financial aid and citizenship.

And marijuana convictions consistently hit underserved communities hardest and statistically skew based on race.

Marijuana possession charges historically show up in the top reasons for deportation. And even with full-fledged expungements, charges still hold weight in immigration court and can be weaponized against non-citizens.

Black and Hispanic people prosecuted by the Maricopa County Attorney’s Office face longer sentences for marijuana possession than their white counterparts, a report by the American Civil Liberties Union found.

Tiwamangkala and other advocates expect the same disparities to carry over into expungements. And through work with Puente, Tiwamangkala hopes to expunge their own record and help others impacted by marijuana criminalization.

Diaz went to one of the first free legal help clinics hosted by the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws and Minorities for Medical Marijuana in April. When the court started accepting petitions in early July, Diaz among the first to send his in.

And the process was relatively straightforward, Diaz said. He filled out his petition form and included his name, address, date of birth, email address, name of the law enforcement agency involved in his arrest and his case number.

Then he sent the petition off to the court. And on Aug. 8, 28 business days later, he received an email notifying him of his expungement.

“I was beside myself,” Diaz said. “I had been carrying this thing around with me for 10 years.”
Complications with expungement

Diaz saw a textbook turnaround on his petition, others are not so lucky.

Splintering interpretations of the expungement statute have started to complicate what was intended to be a quick, easy process.

Under the expungement law, people with charges under 2.5 ounces are eligible. But the amount of marijuana in a person’s possession at the time of each arrest is rarely listed on the police report.

This leaves county attorneys and courts to rule on a number of cases where eligibility is a gray area.

In Maricopa County, the courts granted over 3,500 expungements so far and objected to 20. Lawyers and advocates assisting in the expungement process say many did not include the amount on the report, but were approved anyway, making the law more lenient.

But in July, Pima County ruled that without the amount listed, or proof the charge involved less than 2.5 ounces, the court must issue an objection and send the petition to a hearing, posing increased difficulty in the expungement process.

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According to Julie Gunnigle, director of politics at NORML and former candidate for Maricopa County attorney, this was a “nightmare ruling” further complicating a process she believes to be problematic in the first place.

Gunnigle is of the opinion that the expungement process shouldn’t have been a process at all. It instead should have been universal and automatic, which she emphasized in her bid for county attorney.

She believes the opt-in system poses unnecessary barriers to a clean slate.

Coalitions + legal help groups

Free legal clinics are trying to bridge the gap. And as they gain more traction across the state, advocates hope to augment access, education and legal help when it comes to the petition process.

It’s free to submit a petition. And under a provision in Prop 207, the state allocated a $4 million grant later awarded to the Arizona Marijuana Expungement Coalition, a collection of eight legal, advocacy and education groups, to provide free, accessible legal services.

Among the eight is the Post-Conviction Clinic at the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law at ASU. Students involved in the program typically investigate claims of wrongful convictions, but this year, the focus is on marijuana expungements.

Randal McDonald, supervising attorney for the program, said the clinic plans to help get the word out, assist with expungements and tackle more complicated cases as they arise.

McDonald expects some cases like Gunnigle mentioned — where the amount of marijuana is not listed, or cases where the charge happened decades ago. But some cases, he thinks, may lay beyond the bounds of expectation.

“I anticipate that we will come across some issues that we have never imagined,” McDonald said.

And when the unimaginable comes into play, students will be responsible for communicating with clients, researching their case and appearing in court under Ariz. R. Sup. Ct. 39 to provide pro bono litigation.

“There’s a lot of gray area,” McDonald said. “So I think there are going to be a lot of arguable issues where we can step in.”

ASU is part of a larger partnership with sects covering the state.

Other members of the coalition include the Arizona Justice Project, D.N.A People’s Legal Services, Southern Arizona Legal Aid, Puente Human Rights Movement, the Arizona American Friends Service Committee, Community Legal Services and the UA James E. Rogers College of Law Civil Rights Restoration Clinic.

The coalition launched in full force on Sept. 1, and the joint hope is to spread the word about expungements and get as many records cleared as possible.

Diaz adopted a similar personal mission.

Since his expungement, Diaz talked to a handful of journalists across TV, radio and print to spread the word about the process and the benefits it can bring.

“Luckily, I heard the message that day, I saw the program,” Diaz said, referring to the segment on the evening news, “It’s just kind of one of those things where it’s going to take exposure for people to realize.”

To listen to an in-depth interview on Diaz’s story, listen to the podcast here:
Report

Brave face

ASU baseball’s Conor Davis steps up through adversity

by Ike Everard

The scoreboard shows a 6-6 tie at the bottom of the ninth inning. While most of the crowd’s attention is focused on home plate where ASU freshman Ethan Long prepares to face Oregon State University pitcher Jake Mulholland, Long knows the Devils’ secret weapon is just to his right in the home dugout.

Graduate transfer Conor Davis, who hung up his cleats after a severe preseason injury, stands cheering and supporting louder than anyone.

Just four innings earlier, after a particularly tough at-bat, Long came into the dugout upset. Davis pulled the freshman to the side, giving him a few words of encouragement.

On the steps of the dugout at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, Davis told Long, “Bro, you’re going to have a chance to win us this game, make sure you stay locked in.”

With those words in mind, Long hit the towering walk-off home run and brought the Devils one of their most dramatic wins of the season. That quick moment in the dugout between the then-freshman and the fifth-year senior, though, was emblematic of more than just a made-for-Hollywood night in May.

Davis joined the Sun Devil program last fall as a transfer from Auburn. Davis started most of his games during his sophomore, junior and senior years, helping the SEC powerhouse Tigers to three NCAA tournament appearances and regional championships in both 2018 and 2019. However, after graduating, he was ready for a new challenge and took his talents to Tempe in order to fill the shoes of graduate Spencer Torkelson, the No. 1 pick in the 2020 MLB draft.

His plan took a disastrous turn, however, when a leap for a bouncing ground ball ended with him yelling in agony on the infield clay with a torn ACL.

“When he came in, we all had a lot of respect for him just because of where he’s been and what kind of a person he was,” Sean McLain, a sophomore infielder, said. “He did a lot for us in a leadership role even though he couldn’t play.”

McLain was at second base the day that Davis’ season ended before it began. The Devils were playing their final scrimmage of the fall season, a maroon and gold showdown pitting teammates against each other, when disaster struck.

“We were just out there talking to each other, and then all the sudden he goes up for a high chopper and comes down on his knee wrong and he starts screaming,” McLain said.

McLain and others helped Davis to the locker room, where he was met by more teammates and a concerned Tracy Smith, then-head coach of the team. They grouped around Davis as he began to reckon with the long road in front of him.

“Right when it happened I felt something I’d never felt before,” Davis said. “Guys were leaving the practice to come over and hug me and love on me and make sure I knew that everything was going to be alright and they were still in my corner.”

The moments after the injury, were still difficult to process. As Davis and some of his teammates sat absorbing the long recovery ahead, he had to deliver the news to his family.

“I remember going into the training room and calling my family and letting them know that something had happened,” Davis said. “That was pretty tough to go through.”

The Comeback

For the team, the injury meant losing their star transfer before the season started and confronting the hole left by both Torkelson and Davis.

For Davis, it meant all his preparation and hard work had suddenly been washed away. For a few moments, he wasn’t even sure he wanted to continue playing the sport he had practiced his entire life.

“Being a fifth-year, I’m pretty sure he was kinda done,” senior pitcher Will Levine said. “I think being around the team made him want to come back and give it one more try.”

Davis credits his teammates as crucial to his mental health during that stretch, looking to players like Drew Swift and Boyd Vander Kooi for the emotional support he claimed helped more than he initially realized. Levine, who is also Davis’ roommate, said the first baseman put on a brave face for the rest of the team.

“When he first had surgery, he was messed up. You could tell he was hurting mentally more than physically, but he didn’t show it in front of the whole team. He didn’t want anyone to see him hurt that bad,” Levine said. “We had a lot of injuries last year, and I’d say Conor probably handled his the best.”

Davis didn’t miss a practice or game he was eligible to attend, bringing his trademark positivity and leadership to the dugout. His commitment inspired those around him, but it wasn’t always as easy as he made it look.

“It was hard to be around for a couple weeks just because I wanted to be out there so bad,” Davis said. “I definitely had a couple tough moments at the start of the season just having to sit and watch and not be able to contribute.”

Despite the inability to join his teammates on the field, Davis continued to push himself to be a presence around them. Eventually, he worked through his feelings and
embraced his position as a leader and a role model to younger players. As a team, the Devils featured 31 underclassmen, and only three seniors including Davis. That youth sparked opportunity for victory and created the space for Davis to thrive in his new role.

“You couldn’t tell he was hurt,” McLain said. “His attitude and energy was always great. When Conor says something, everyone listens.”

McLain credits Davis with showing him how to be a leader and inspiring him to take on a larger role within the team. He says having someone like Davis around to answer questions and be an example of hard work and dedication is crucial to his and other’s development.

“I had so many questions for him, just about the season and how demanding it is on your body,” McLain said. “He mentored me into feeling comfortable and ready to go. If someone like him isn’t there it makes the season almost uncomfortable.”

Levine also felt the profound impact of Davis’ example.

“I’ve never really had a leadership role up until last year, so I was kind of just watching him and how he was with people and I would try to mirror that,” Levine said.

The mentorship role was, and still is, something Davis took seriously. As a player expected to fill the shoes of a Sun Devil great like Torkelson, he was consistently able to refocus his energies into supporting those around him.

“I think a lot of the guys look at me as their stability and their motivator,” Davis said. “I would go out every day and help first basemen Jack Moss and Ethan Long, who were freshman, and just try to give them as many tips as I could so they wouldn’t be on their own.”

The benefits of Davis’ actions were felt not just by his position-mates, but across the team. He provided a consistent presence in a season which was constantly changing due to injuries, COVID-19 protocols and coaching rumors as head coach Tracy Smith would be fired after the season. His consistent positivity brought another level of life to the locker room.

“Even though he was hurt, he brought so much value to the team,” Levine said. “He’s always in a great mood. He’s positive with everything and there’s always a way to make the most of a situation.”

That optimism boosted the team to a 33-22 record in a season that ended with a regional round exit from the NCAA tournament. But while the Sun Devils were
“Even though he was hurt, he brought so much value to the team. He’s always in a great mood. He’s positive with everything and there’s always a way to make the most of a situation.” — Will Levine

making noise on the field, Davis was also hard at work in the training room rehabbing his knee.

“The athletic training staff has been really good at taking care of me emotionally and physically,” Davis said. “It’s been a little bit longer of a process because of the way my body has reacted, but the staff has been making sure that I wasn’t rushing anything.”

Davis also took the opportunity to work on his body in general. Since the injury, he said he cut down weight and focused on nutrition and healthy habits. The work is being noticed by those around him, who say he is just as inspirational in his recovery as he is in the dugout.

“It shows the commitment of somebody to a sport. Conor loves baseball more than anybody,” Levine said. He added it was good for the younger players to see the dedication and to know that even when things don’t go according to plan it’s still possible to have a positive impact.

Academically, too, Davis was able to thrive during his recovery period. He says Zoom classes helped him attend class without relying on crutches, and his teachers were helpful and accommodating.

“They realized I was going through a trau-
brought so much value to great mood. He’s positive always a way to make the — Will Levine

matic event, and after my surgery it took a couple weeks to get back into the swing of things,” Davis said. “Everyone’s been great and trying to help me move forward.”

Now, with the 2022 season approaching and fall practices set to begin, Davis is ready to get back on the field with the sport and team he loves.

“There’s been a little hesitation as I’ve gone through rehab just to be able to trust that my knee is healthy, but at the same time I have no fear of coming back,” Davis said.

“I know I’m going to be better than I was before.”
Bear the burden

Historical inequities act as barriers to climate justice in Phoenix

by Sam Ellefson

“It just feels like one thing after another,” state Sen. Jamescita Peshlakai said, her tone soaked in anguish as she described the painful realities of her constituents in northeast Arizona. She told stories she says her colleagues in the legislature can’t fathom. Families living on the Native American reservation are experiencing consequences of climate change unique to the region, including the loss of medicinal plants, the destruction of vital agriculture and the smokey remnants of fires slithering into the arid desert.

The heat turns workers nocturnal, forcing them to work through the night and rest during the day to avoid deadly fatigue, and leaves Indigenous Arizonans living without electricity or running water.

“The only thing you can do is get a bucket of water, which you have to be very frugal with, and just keep dabbing yourself, and not move around too much as to raise your body temperature,” Peshlakai said. “People are getting sick from heat exhaustion, but they can’t go to the hospital because they’re afraid of the COVID-19.”

After violent displacement and colonization, Indigenous Arizonans are made to build and lead lives in the harshest regions of the state, with little rainfall, unforgiving heat and rampant food insecurity.

Although the adverse effects of climate change in Phoenix and across the state has remained in the policy spotlight for some time, communities of color are habitually neglected when it comes to mitigation efforts. Academics and dignitaries alike crafted ways for municipalities to counteract extreme heat and pollution, keeping in mind the pervasive presence of racial and economic inequities. But some say more needs to be done.

If they have access to them, utility costs for Indigenous Arizonans are extraordinarily expensive, said Wanda Dalla Costa, an associate professor in the School of Sustainable Engineering and the Built Environment. There remains a dire need in Indigenous communities for sustainable housing to save money and lives, she said.

Trying to find an attainable solution led her to Phoenix’s Heat Vulnerability Index, a city resource that measures which communities are more perceptible to the effects of extreme heat. Dalla Costa found that Indigenous communities are considered highly vulnerable to severe heat because of the barren landscape of reservations, low levels of income, and physical isolation between households, whereas wealthier, white communities are better equipped to live comfortably.

Lethal consequences

The Phoenix heat has become increasingly deadlier over time, said Dalla Costa. There were 323 heat-associated deaths in Maricopa County last year, up from 82 a decade prior according to an annual heat surveillance report released by the county. Additionally, the impact of the lethal Arizona heat is disproportionate along racial lines; Black and Indigenous individuals have the highest rates of heat-associated deaths per 100,000 residents. As average annual temperatures continue to increase across the Grand Canyon state, the scramble for climate relief and the number of heat-related deaths will only proliferate.

It may seem obvious why Phoenix is so hot, given that the metropolis is nestled in the Northern crook of the Sonoran Desert, but the vast city is also considered an urban heat island. In the metro area, asphalt, buildings and other infrastructure absorb heat throughout the blistering day and release it at night, leading to significantly higher temperatures for urban areas compared to neighboring rural areas. Given that Phoenix contains nearly 5,000 miles of asphalted roads ripe for heat absorption and inevitable release, the city lives up to its status as a severe urban heat island. This effect is not unique to Phoenix, said Caitlin Moore, a junior studying sustainability, but Phoenix’s location in the heart of the desert amplifies the consequences of urban planning executed with little environmental foresight.

David Sailor, a professor at ASU’s School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning and the director of the University’s Urban Climate Research Center, explained how moisture in Phoenix from human-made bodies of water and the limited use of flood irrigation in a largely arid climate are anomalies. Cities experiencing a heat bubble tend to lack the vegetation and water to sufficiently offset rising temperatures by way of evaporation, Sailor said. Human activity, such as driving cars and increasing household energy consumption to combat rising
nighttime temperatures, is another major contributor to Phoenix’s heat island effect.

“There is a positive feedback mechanism between air conditioning and the environment,” Sailor said. He described a cyclical relationship between heat and energy use; the excessive energy use required to find relief from the outside environment increases heat levels, creating an even higher demand for energy use.

This relationship between dire heat and the means for offsetting it amplifies the overall effects of global warming, Sailor said, resulting in seemingly minor increases in temperature with a high impact on the energy used to cope.

**An ambitious plan**

These compounded environmental woes, along with fumbling and myopic public transit across the sprawl of the Valley, led residents and outsiders alike to repeatedly dub Phoenix “the least sustainable city.” Some have even begun to bleakly argue that the city serves as a dystopic vision of the future. However, the city government is implementing various measures to quell the effects of this phenomenon, including executing a tree canopy initiative, increasing the amount of cooling shelters and piloting a heat-reflective pavement program.

An urban forest, a body of vegetation intended to coexist with a city, has the capability to not only cool surrounding areas but help soil retain rainwater and improve overall air condition. The city’s ambitious plan has failed to come to fruition, nor is it on track to meet its 2030 goal of providing canopy coverage to 25% of the city, according to reporting by Phoenix magazine in 2020.

Additionally, canopy coverage in Phoenix is largely inequitable along racial and economic lines, with affluent, white regions of the city reaping the majority of shaded benefits as poorer neighborhoods, composed primarily of people of color, face higher temperatures with little to no refuge. Although it hasn’t been fully studied, the allocation of urban flood irrigation, similar to vegetation levels across the city,
could have subliminal links to race and class. Moore reiterated that this issue of prioritization of wealth and whiteness is not exclusive to Phoenix, that the pervasive pervasive “not in my backyard” ethos exacerbates inequities to a severe degree.

Reducing emissions from electricity use and transportation is one of the top priorities for Sandy Bahr, the director of the Sierra Club Grand Canyon Chapter, a grassroots environmental group engaged in work ranging from federal lobbying to educational programs. Bahr lists resilient communities, where social connection and adaptable infrastructure help those most at risk to withstand environmental issues like extreme heat, as an immediate necessity.

Environmental inequity is woven into Phoenix’s city maps. Redlining, the discriminatory practice of denying a loan to someone who lives in an area deemed to be a financial risk, has resulted in disparities in air quality and heat levels across the city. Historically redlined communities are largely comprised of people of color and households of lower economic status — groups of people habitually designated to bear the burden of environmental volatility. Mackenzie Boyer, a lecturer in the School of Sustainable Engineering and the Built Environment, explained that, in her Introduction to Environmental Engineering course, she has students analyze air quality levels and temperatures in a redlined compared to non-redlined areas to see how they fare. Highlighting how engineers have an opportunity to rectify the wrongs of the past through learning about how racial and economic disparities persist over time is critical, Boyer said.

Boyer said many are coming to terms with the racist history of this practice, pointing to the increased visibility of recent civil rights movements as a call to action on all fronts.

“But there’s still so much work to be done, and so much to learn from this. And until we can fully learn from history, we put ourselves at risk of repeating some of these inequities.”

This assignment, along with similar ones using varying locations across the nation, demonstrate how redlined districts tend to have higher temperatures and more dangerous levels of air quality. “Redlining allowed home owners in the green zones to own a home and invest in their property, which includes planting trees,” Boyer said in regards to the canopy tree initiative. “Whereas in the redlined neighborhoods, you don’t have that level of homeownership because the people living in those communities couldn’t get the loans. So then you have higher rental percentages.” Landlords don’t have the economic incentive to plant trees, which would in turn reduce temperatures and improve air quality.

**Growth and abandonment**

The need for resiliency extends beyond the debilitating heat, Bahr said, noting that persistent drought and worsening wildfires take a disproportionate toll on marginalized factions of the population. Bahr said she sees present-day Phoenix as a city failing to adjust its behaviors to fit its desert environment in ways it should: a metropolis that favors what Bahr calls “growth for growth’s sake.” Phoenix’s “continued push for excessive growth” inevitably makes the sprawling city less sustainable, Bahr said, although she notes that city officials are taking steps toward addressing the issue.

Recent reporting showed that Phoenix has grown at a faster rate than any other major city over the past decade. Many wonder how environmental initiatives will continue to play a role as households flock to the state. Bahr pointed out the “striking” affordable housing crisis in these development areas in a city that has continuously boasted about the abundance of inexpensive housing.

“We see, each year, more deaths from heat, people both inside and outside. People who are unhoused, people with limited incomes, a lot of communities that are predominately people of color, they’re definitely most at risk.” In addition, research from the National Climate Assessment demonstrated Indigenous communities across the country live in particularly precarious environmental conditions, Bahr said.

Displacement into desolate environments, rampant racism combined with the fight for water, electricity and a healthy environment left Indigenous communities abandoned and forced to survive despite the persistence of American colonialism, Peshlakai said. She stressed the need for political representatives who are intimately acquainted with the most vulnerable Arizonans. Of the 90 individuals in the legislature, only four are tribal members and six are members of the Indigenous Peoples Caucus, Peshlakai said.

Many of her colleagues are blind to the precariousness of her constituents’ lives even though they are among the most vulnerable to extreme heat, water scarcity, crop destruction and food insecurity, she said.

“Our challenge is always to educate our fellow legislators, but it always comes down to the bottom line, and that’s money.”
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