THE CULTURE
ISSUE
STUDENT MEDIA

HOUSING FAIR

FALL - NOVEMBER 2-3, 2022
SPRING - MARCH 15-16, 2023

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State Press Magazine has published three Culture Issues in recent memory — in 2018, in 2020 and in 2022. The mag team interrogated ASU’s culture from many angles and perspectives, and we continue to do so in this Culture Issue. ASU’s culture is distinct, amorphous and vast. It resists definition, and all of ASU’s interwoven and constantly changing parts create hidden pockets of subcultures bustling just below the University’s surface.

In this issue, our writers tackled a wide array of cultures cultivated within ASU: growing gym anxiety amid new year’s resolutions prompt some students to reconsider how we relate to exercise spaces; a Barrett framework for addressing racial injustice has given The Honors College a pathway toward increasing diversity, but students say more needs to be done; the vibrant communities fostered within film and comedy spaces shockingly breed toxic masculinity and unfunny skits, one quippy writer finds; tattoos act as confluences of culture and identity for some students who wear reminders or memorializations of themselves on their skin; Greek Life, a staple of ASU’s culture, is less pervasive — and more toxic — than you think; students reflect on how ASU’s satellite campus model impacts the college experience and the disparate campus cultures found across the Valley; Tempe Barstool gets an exposé/evaluation of whether the content the wide-reaching Instagram account disseminates is contributing to the broader and ongoing theme of campus brain rot; students relay their horror stories with ASU’s infamous PTS, and experts give context to why ASU parking sucks so much. Lastly, the magazine’s managing editors offer a biting horoscope for SPM readers. Whether you’re an astrology skeptic or fanatic, this satirical piece is sure to make you feel seen.

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Weights slamming. Treadmills purring. EDM blaring from headphones. A man making intimate eye contact with himself in the mirror. And you, entering the Sun Devil Fitness Complex, promising yourself that this will be the year your exercise routine will finally stick.

Cut to now, a month later, and you’re back to inconsistency and that “I’ll do it tomorrow” mindset. When — and if — you do go to the gym, you stick to where you’re comfortable. You still hate running and you barely like walking, but you assure yourself cardio will suffice for the time being. That is, until you work up that impossible courage you’ve been chasing so you can try out the exercises seemingly reserved for the gym elite.

Bench press, squat rack, deadlift — anything requiring a conversion of kilograms to pounds is immediately out of the question. Even worse is the risk of emitting an involuntary grunt while actually attempting to lift the weight.

**A weighted culture**

Sarah Nelson, a junior studying public service and public policy, described the gym as an inherently vulnerable place, especially
for those who are just starting out.

“I do feel like the culture is very intimidating to get into because there is a learning curve to it,” Nelson said. “I wish that the SDFC did more for people who are unfamiliar with the gym.”

Nelson is native to downtown Phoenix and frequently attended the Lincoln Family Downtown YMCA before enrolling at ASU. The YMCA is connected to the Downtown SDFC. Nelson observed the SDFC and its patrons from the sidelines of the YMCA, feeling a sense of security despite being surrounded by people who weren’t her age nor her peers.

“It was me with a bunch of 70-year-olds watching The Bachelor, so I felt comfortable,” Nelson said. “If you’re around your peers, you’re wondering, ‘What are they going to think about me?’”

But Darya Abdollahzadeh, a sophomore majoring in medical studies, finds the SDFC to be a welcoming space for her to work out. For Abdollahzadeh, being surrounded by people her age has created a sense of community and belonging that she enjoys exercising in.

“There’s other students there who are in the same boat as me, so it’s really easy to make friends,” Abdollahzadeh said. “It’s definitely an encouraging environment.”

The SDFC has provided Abdollahzadeh with an opportunity to connect with other gym-goers who are “goal-oriented people focused on bettering themselves.” Abdollahzadeh said they feel empowered to uplift their peers at the gym.

“I’ll see a girl (at the gym) and I think she looks really good, I’ll let her know to encourage her. Having that kind of friendliness in the community is really great,” she said.

While some students find solace in a regular gym routine, for others, swiping into the SDFC isn’t so simple. Gym anxiety is deeply felt among some ASU students. For Marti Faltz, a junior studying elementary education, exercising at the SDFC meant facing a sort of competitiveness she didn’t want to experience while trying to get a workout in.

“I was scared I was going to run into people I knew, and they’re going to see me with my red face, sweaty, no makeup on,” Faltz said. “It’s hard to work out and work out to your best when you feel like everyone is looking at you.”

Nelson defined gym anxiety as “a nervousness about being judged and being watched.” This description resonated with Faltz, as her experiences at the SDFC were characterized by a fear of seeing people she knew. Due to her anxiety about going to the gym, Faltz does not go to the SDFC anymore.

But for Nelson, gym anxiety doesn’t only mean being hyper aware of using a machine correctly or lifting weights with proper form — it is also to protect herself and her service dog, Dublin, from unwanted stares and whispers from other gym-goers.

Nelson stopped going to the gym because of the stigma she said can come with bringing a service dog to the gym. As a disabled person, Nelson feels she “inherently doesn’t fit into” the gym culture at ASU.

“I’m not only worrying about myself, but I have to worry about my dog,” Nelson said. “How does he act? Will he be spooked? Will people try to mess with him? And then also, how will people view me as a disabled person working out? It adds another layer to things.”

Julie Schuldt, a graduate student pursuing a master’s in global management and a group wellness instructor for the SDFC, sees communication as one of the key steps the SDFC is taking to make the gym a more inclusive space to people with disabilities. She encourages people with disabilities to talk to someone at the front desk or a manager in order to make their workout fit their needs.

Students who need additional support shouldn’t have to feel like they have to navigate the gym all on their own, Schuldt said. The SDFC has equipment that can be used by individuals with a physical disability, Schuldt added.

In group wellness classes, for example, instructors are encouraged to meet people

“The reality is, people go to the gym to look at themselves in the mirror.”

— Julie Schuldt
where they are instead of applying one expectation to all participants. “In my Zumba classes, where there is no equipment, I make sure that there are different levels of choreography so that everyone (who) is there can feel included,” Schuldt said.

One month down

As the year progresses and crowds in gyms dwindle, Schuldt continues to reinforce the idea that the gym becomes less daunting with time and consistent effort. In both her cycle and Zumba classes, she emphasizes that even if the workout feels difficult now, “the more you come, the better it’s going to be.”

“I think there’s a big misconception of people going to the gym for the first time that it’s really obvious that it’s their first time and that they’re going to be judged,” Schuldt said. “The reality is, people go to the gym to look at themselves in the mirror.”

To alleviate gym anxiety, Schuldt suggests people tour the gym before their first exercise. Knowing where the equipment, bathrooms and water fountains are could play a factor in preparing for a workout, she said.

“Make sure you have music if you want music, make sure you bring your water, make sure you’ve eaten well during the day,” Schuldt said.

Abdollahzadeh said having a “gym buddy” could not only help to hold you accountable, but also help you both enjoy your time at the gym more.

Whether it be hitting the gym or making any range of routine changes in this new year, it’s never too late to dedicate time and space to your own well-being — even if that change happens over one month in.
Greeking out

The Greek Leadership Village is one of the most popular spots on campus — but diverging student experiences may challenge its overall integrity.

By Leah Mesquita

Illustration by Andrea Ramirez

The decision to attend a public university is more than choosing a major, roommate or meal plan — for some, it can mean choosing a family. Greek Life is integral to ASU’s culture, and every year a new swarm of eager students rush to snag a spot in one of the University’s myriad Greek organizations. After all, there’s no other space on campus where words like “big” and “little” act as terms of endearment, and finding the brother or sister you never had is just a few thousand dollars away.

According to ASU’s Fraternity and Sorority Life webpage, the branches of the Greek Life family tree are always extending. In the 2020-21 school year, 6% of ASU’s undergraduate population — more than 5,300 students — pledged to various FSL organizations on campus.

These days, it’s customary for sororities and fraternities to promote their so-called families on social media. Heavily filtered Instagram accounts constantly rack up likes and comments — ASU Delta Gamma, for example, currently sits at over 11,000 followers. Early in the semester, posts commemorating “preference round,” which is the last day of recruitment, and “bid day,” when potential members are invited to join a chapter, clog the feeds of hundreds of ASU students.

The comment sections are always overwhelmed with excitement for incoming members. Users express gratitude “for my sissies” and profess how they “can’t wait to squeeze all my new sisters tomorrow” in comments littered with pink heart emojis and sparkles.

Fraternities like ASU Acacia, on the other hand, often fill their feeds with group photos depicting strong brotherhood ties. Sorority girls who have gone above and beyond for their chapters can be upgraded to “sweetheart” status. With a following of just over 1,500, Acacia uses its Instagram bio to make the men’s values loud and clear: virtue, knowledge and truth.

Along with togetherness, FSL prides itself on being a community dedicated to
creating “values-based, impact-driven individuals” through philanthropic networking and community service events around Arizona. Over the years, the 70 active fraternities and sororities at ASU have accumulated a multitude of service and excellence awards from the FSL Honors program.

While FSL paints itself as a reputable institution where anyone can find a place to call home, instances of misconduct within fraternities and sororities continue to spread through multiple chapters at ASU, calling into question the supposed inclusivity of these organizations.

The rise and fall of Greek Row

In 2012, the last of the now-infamous Alpha Drive, also known as Greek Row, was demolished after years of financial struggle, maintenance and behavioral issues put ASU’s fraternities and sororities in a line of perpetual fire from media and University administration alike.

The development of the Greek Leadership Village was subject to heavy criticism by the Greek Life community when construction began in 2017. Many were concerned the new housing options for fraternities and sororities would be too expensive, force students into four year leasing contracts and have little to no privacy in the dorm rooms.

Deeply opposed to the new GLV complex, one student started a petition to halt ASU’s plans for the Greek Leadership Village, gathering support and plenty of comments that amplified the frustrations of other FSL members.

But despite the best efforts of FSL students, in February 2019, the GLV was officially opened. An extensive application process was offered to the chapters who wished to live in these new additions. Twelve sororities and 15 fraternities were chosen to be the first in a long line of many groups that would later inhabit the GLV.

Since the birth of the GLV, the percentage of students affiliated with FSL has slightly decreased. According to an annual report from the 2017-18 academic year, active members of fraternities and sororities at ASU made up 9% of the undergraduate population, indicating a decrease of three percentage points in three years.

On a national scale, an estimated 750,000 college students are a part of fraternities and sororities as of 2021, according to The Hechinger Report. While ASU may be strongly associated with the culture of Greek Life, today, it’s incomparable to some of the U.S. schools most prevalent in Greek Life. According to US News and World Report, at Texas Christian University, 43% of male undergraduates are in fraternities; at the University of Mississippi, 38%, and at the University of Alabama, it’s 28%.

‘They seem kind of cliquey’

With only 6% of all undergraduate students at ASU affiliated with FSL, there are a plethora of other opportunities for ASU students to be involved on campus and find a community that reflects their individual interests. Many ASU students discover that being involved in Greek Life on campus is not essential to experience ASU’s culture.

“Student clubs are more for students who want to bond over a shared interest, and Greek Life is for people who want to have lifelong friends,” said Jake Quenon, a junior studying biochemistry and current president of The Fashion Collective at ASU, an organization that supports students interested in pursuing fashion.

“I don’t necessarily feel excluded, but I know if I were to go to a frat party, they probably wouldn’t let me in, unless I was cool with one of the brothers or something.”

Fraternities, including those at ASU, have been known for excluding members who fail to meet certain standards related to social class. “Because of the financial barriers with fraternities, you’re going to end up
networking with people that have a higher income bracket, and it’s probably going to get you more connections,” Quenon said.

When asked if joining a fraternity was ever on the table, Quenon elaborated on the extra cost of living at the GLV. “I considered it a little bit because I started during COVID, so it was difficult to meet people. I knew it would give me strong connections, but I didn’t do it because I believe it to be somewhat artificial and prohibitively expensive.”

“I won’t judge someone for being in (Greek Life), because to each their own, right? But it’s just not for me,” said Daniel Rosen, a senior studying digital culture and current board member of Hillel at ASU. “Maybe I don’t understand it, but they’ve always kind of rubbed me the wrong way.”

Rosen said Greek Life never piqued his interest. “They seem a little cliquey. You pay money to get into the club. You do social stuff for them. You have rivalries between fraternities and sororities. It just never made sense to me.”

Although Rosen isn’t a member of a traditional FSL chapter, he has found a strong community through Hillel. “For me, Hillel has been what I imagine Greek Life is for most people,” he said.

Like Quenon, Rosen believes being a member of a fraternity or sorority is not essential to getting involved in ASU’s culture. “The school is so big,” he said. “There’s so many students involved in Greek Life, but there’s an equally high number of students that aren’t involved. At least what I’ve seen is Greek people stick to their own groups and

“If you just look at sororities, they’re very white. And there is a lot of conversation in Greek Life about that. People know.”

— Sarah Swanson
Meet the Greek

When Sarah Swanson, a member of ASU’s Alpha Omicron Pi sorority, started college during COVID, she saw joining a sorority as a good opportunity to connect with others around her. Despite getting rejected by multiple Greek organizations, Swanson persisted, believing that joining a sorority would offer her a sense of community.

“When you start, the sororities will drop you if they don’t like you,” Swanson said. “A lot of the top sororities dropped me just from my application, which is weird considering I had service hours and good grades.”

Although she enjoys being a part of Greek Life, Swanson acknowledges that inclusivity is still an ongoing issue. “If you just look at sororities, they’re very white. And there is a lot of conversation in Greek Life about that,” she said. “People know.”

Swanson, who is Hispanic, does wonder whether her rejection from previous sororities has something to do with her ethnicity. “That’s another thing me and my friends think about — is it because we’re not white? Or do we not fit the beauty standard they see for themselves in their sorority?”

Although being the right fit for a sorority can seem to boil down to physical appearance, meeting financial demands is also a necessity for those hoping to join the FSL. According to Swanson, the cost of being in a sorority includes your participation. “I pay about $1,000 extra a semester, which includes going to events and dances,” she said.

A passage from ASU’s Panhellenic Association Rush Booklet for the 2022-23 year says the first semester is typically the most financially straining for new pledges, but the contributions made throughout their time in a sorority gives them “organization membership for a lifetime.” The booklet also mentions scholarships and payment planning to make the rushing process more affordable and to “not be afraid to let financial considerations be your final deciding factor.” The costs for each student intending to rush covers everything from programming activities and national leadership opportunities to having the necessary merchandise.

When asked about the expectations of sorority girls in terms of attendance, Swanson said “if you don’t go to an event, they’ll usually fine you $50.” She added that you can’t get out of events by using work as an excuse and that requests to miss an event need to be made months in advance.

Despite paying extra for a space in the FSL, missing events can be enough to terminate your position. “If you miss too many, they can put you on probation,” Swanson said. “And if you miss more, they can take you out.”

Alt-life

In response to the exclusivity of Greek Life, students who would otherwise not fit in with FSL have created their own groups. While traditional frats and sororities have a long history of not accepting members who don’t fit a specific mold, a new space has emerged geared toward making Greek Life a more inclusive institution: Lambda Gamma Beta Tau, which has been operating since late October 2022, is centered around “spreading inclusivity, support and affirmations for the LGBTQ+ community and allies.”

“When I went through recruitment my freshman year, I was not ‘out,’” said Julia Rome, the current president and founder of Lambda Gamma Beta Tau. “It was really nerve-racking for me to come out to so many people at once, but my sorority was really supportive.” Rome, a Barrett senior, plans to do her honors thesis on the experience of LGBTQ+ individuals in Greek Life. “My second committee member for my thesis gave me a lot of resources about LGBTQ+ students in Greek Life, so she really inspired me to start the club,” Rome said.
Rome started by reaching out to every gay student she knew who was involved in Greek Life, and in the span of a few months, Rome held meetings, formed a constitution, placed eight executive officers and got Lambda Gamma Beta Tau approved on SunDevilSync.

When students think of ASU Greek Life, the more popular chapters tend to come to mind. ASU Pi Beta Phi, ASU Delta Gamma, ASU Acacia, are a few examples, all of which have accumulated thousands of Instagram followers and pledges throughout the years. But among these masses are a few FSL chapters specified to include underrepresented pledges.

“I never thought I would’ve joined a sorority just because of how the media portrayed it,” said Honey Palacios, a member of the multicultural sorority Gamma Alpha Omega. “My older cousin told me to do research and see if I liked it, so when I learned the values of Gamma Alpha Omega, I got more interested in it. They value the same things I do, like encouraging Hispanic women to pursue education throughout college.”

There are currently several chapters under the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations, which has promoted the growth of interfraternal relationships among Latino students at ASU since 1998. Palacios has only been with Gamma Alpha Omega for one semester, but believes their decision to rush was the right one. “Going to the recruitment events for Gamma it felt natural being around them and I felt connected with them.”

Palacios, who hopes to pursue pharmacology, believes choosing Gamma Alpha Omega would keep them on track for the future. “I felt being with Gamma would encourage me more to be on my studies and maintain a good GPA so I can get accepted to a good grad school.”

“I think having more representation for LGBTQ+ students will raise awareness, especially with nonbinary people, because fraternities and sororities are considered single-gendered organizations,” Rome said. “So I wanted this club to be somewhere everyone in ASU Greek Life can join.”
Dick jokes, faux feminism and misogynistic men. Oh my!

Art forms dominated by men are bound to have their fair share of crude jokes, but come on, man

_Are you a creative, feminine-presenting performer residing in the Valley? Are you craving the utter ecstasy of being talked over by men in their 20s? Do you need someone in a watermelon-patterned button-up to explain what you did wrong in your performance? Do you reminisce about the good old days, when caveman-esque sex jokes immortalized sixth-graders as gods? If your answer to any of these questions is yes, boy do I have a couple'az niches for you: film production and sketch comedy! I've got one thing to say to any so-called comedians reading this — please stop joking about ejaculation. Nobody wants to imagine you hunched over naked, breathing like a gorilla in your bedroom. It's really not funny. Have you ever seen four grown men get up on a stage one after another and each mimic fellatio on a microphone? I have. You'd think after the first guy did it, the other three would be discouraged. But no.

For those who are sick of seeing microphones desecrated for the sake of mediocre-at-best comedy, improv may be more your style. If none of the performers can plan their jokes in advance, there's no possible way they can all think to violate the microphone's personal space.

Unfortunately, the advantages of zero preparation can't fix the fact that the bar for young men in comedy is literally in hell. Have you ever tried to do an improv scene with a 20-year-old dudebro whose brain hasn't fully developed? It's a very specific kind of torture. And unfortunately, it's a well-known feeling to any feminine comedians reading this.

In grade school, it seems like whenever teachers get the chance to, they create a group of monstrous idiots and plop one quiet girl into the center of it all to keep the boys "under control." This all-too-common dynamic can be observed in nearly every room in every public school across America, from science labs to gymnasiums.

Girls are forced to wrangle rowdy teen boys to semi-successfully create a lemon battery in a 50-minute class period and bear the weight of a potentially poor grade thanks to their goldfish attention span.

It's reminiscent of my least favorite novel: "Lord of the Flies." I've always had one specific gripe with the supposedly legendary author of the book, William Golding. The allegedly poignant thesis of the novel — "an attempt to trace the defects of society to the defects of human nature," per Golding's own description — misses one very key point. Golding was talking about the nature of man. Put just one girl on the island. You could've avoided all the arson and murders and stuff, I guarantee it.

#Comedyisoverparty

If you thought Saturday Night Live produced some duds and flops, imagine what people who possess far less talent could do with the medium. I can't blame them, really. There are really only four viable ways to end a scene in sketch comedy:
Divorce, Gay, Loud and Child Abuse. Then, once enough straight men kiss each other, there’s really nothing left to do. Isn’t homosexuality such a funny punchline?

Folks, I’m sorry to break it to you, but there are other, funnier ways to end a sketch. Like at least six. But these require nuance — something no sketch comedy group ever manages to have.

To their credit, it’s not easy to perform comedy delicately. Besides, isn’t the point to ruffle some feathers?

If the rough-and-tumble comedy scene doesn’t appeal to you, you may find solace in its sister scene: film production. These sensitive boys aren’t anything like the brutes of comedy. They’re creative, thoughtful, and critical, and they’re all for female empowerment — whatever that may be.

They loved A24’s “Lady Bird,” especially the part when Timotheé Chalamet’s character tricked Lady Bird into having sex with him. And every “alternative” white man thought “Mid90s” was revolutionary. No way! Skate culture from 30 years ago! I’ve like, totally, never seen that before.

A24? More like A2ForgetYourInternalizedMisogyny. I mean, if I had zero media literacy, I sure would love watching these allegedly poignant feminist movies too. So many colors!

I’m sure we’d all like to think every script passes the Bechdel test nowadays. But in local productions, you’re lucky to get a role bigger than ”Mom” or, god forbid, “Barista.”

It seems small, but little by little we teach people to write women into positions society approves of and avoid developing complex female characters. We’re using the misogyny ingrained into society to teach others. And when you’re building a house from ancient blueprints, of course it’s going to be a terrible house. If only Mom and Barista had a scene together.

I’m not saying that every film student across the globe is some monster, but I am saying each and every one has the capacity to be. We live in the digital age, where all of the worst people you know have a podcast. And thanks to ASU, soon they’ll also have a short film!

Look out NYU, here comes Michael Crow’s latest project: the Media and Immersive eXperience — or MIX — Center. In his most daring collaboration yet, ol’ Mike and the city of Mesa have built a 118,000 square foot film production studio. Just what the doctor ordered: a giant waste of money smack dab in the middle of the metro area.

I can only think one thing: we need a $75 million movie studio!

Personally, I’m thrilled. The more money ASU dumps into its film program, the more male feminists the school can spawn. Media literacy is already low in the U.S., so we’re treading in dangerous waters by even having a film school.

I’m not even saying it’s entirely the University’s fault. It’s simply hard to pride yourself on whom you include when so many of them are idiots.

I sincerely hope that ASU’s attempt to usurp California’s film-laden culture is a success, and I don’t want to mock what could be the makings of a good film school. I have a confession to make. I’m … a freshman. I came from the very spawn point I’m criticizing just five months ago! I’m not going to pretend I’m the expert on all things ASU. But I do know what I’ve seen during my time in the Arizona comedy scene — and it’s not pretty.

It happens to all of us

I don’t mean to rake an entire gender through the coals. And if you’re angry, this probably reads like a cheap top-ten article for men’s worst moments in these fields. I’m not calling out every man, just the culture
that every man before now created. There are plenty of supportive and kind people of any gender in the theatrical arts.

But, something to consider: Misogyny plagues us all.

We may think misogyny is confined to frat bros and football players, but even “sensitive” boys have it pounded into their skulls from birth. It’s subtle. It shows in the way these guys buddy up, in how they don’t listen to others, in how they portray gender in their sets and in who they cast in their films.

I’m not even blaming each individual man. Not to sound like The Joker, but it’s society. I hope my masculine readers can absorb this and consider how they treat their feminine scene partners. Or maybe everyone in comedy has to be nonbinary. I think that would ultimately be best.

I really shouldn’t be the one to speak on this. I am the problem. The mirror image of my described watermelon button-up-wearing misogynists. And really I’ve painted the scarlet letter on my ironic Gildan T-shirt I plucked from Goodwill.

That’s right, the women of comedy deserve some hate too. I see you, lesbian mullet pixie dream girl.

I have a bone to pick with the idea of “female comedians.” From Chelsea Handler’s Netflix special “Hello, Privilege. It’s Me, Chelsea” to Amy Schumer’s encyclopedia of tired sex jokes, it seems the only women in comedy anybody remembers are the cringey ones.

Why is Amy Schumer the only female comedian men talk about? There are no working comedians who think she’s funny. She steals material from well-known comics, clearly prefers cash grabs over art, and lacks any restraint in her delivery. So, stop talking about her now. I have officially ended the discourse. Instead, we can talk about the extremely talented working comics Jenny Slate, Maria Bamford, Mitra Jouhari, Hannah Gadsby, Sarah Sherman, Catherine Cohen, Rachel Sennott, Meg Stalter — you get the point.

But why do we have to call such attention to gender anyway? Believe me, I’d like to live in a genderless world as much as any young queer — but we don’t … yet.

Despite the comedic work of the women I’ve just mentioned — and the work of countless more — the image of a comedian or filmmaker in people’s minds is still male. We all picture a man in a suit on that stage. So, I think that when people see a female performer, they see a female performer.

Maybe they don’t necessarily see that as a negative, but they see it as a difference. They can’t help but watch the performance through misogyny-tinted glasses, making implicit assumptions about what womanhood is. Unknowingly, their expectations have changed.

So when male comics are bad, it’s because they’re just not funny. When female comics are bad, it’s because they’re women.

The worst part is, even I can’t help but see the performance that way. I’ve talked a lot about other people’s biases thus far, but the only reason I’m writing this is that I’ve spent so much time thinking about it. It’s really hard to unlearn a masculine existence. I’ve hated myself since birth, and men have hated me since birth too. It’s nobody’s fault in particular. So when I’m on stage, I’m not only performing but watching myself perform through the lens of my gender.

Some crumble under the pressure, playing into the shock value of a woman on stage by saying “unfeminine” things to a gawking crowd. Well, boy, she sure isn’t ladylike! She’s performing the opposite of womanhood and thus it is funny! I think, however, in a subtle way, that attitude is largely reductive. Women are funny. There’s no need to play into what men’s image of a woman is.
Inked in identity

Three ASU community members roll up their sleeves to talk tattoos and culture

by Savannah Dagupion
Photography by Hajin Lee

State Press Magazine spoke to three University students compelled to wear aspects of their culture on their skin every day. Sophia Crevelt, a junior studying journalism and mass communication, shares a tattoo stemming from a trip to Italy that reconnected her to her Italian heritage. Allison Hawn graduated from ASU in 2022 with a Ph.D. in communication and is a tattoo art historian. She bears traditional tattoos from the Indigenous people of northern Scotland and perpetuates what it means to be Pict. Sasha Park is a senior studying biological sciences, conservation and ecology. She describes how her tattoos helped her come to terms with her body as a trans woman and explains her interest in a niche culture.

The following conversations have been edited for brevity and clarity.

Sophia Crevelt

When did you get your tattoo?

I got it the second I came back from my first trip to Italy with my mom because my mom is from Naples. I went on vacation last summer with her. I saw where she grew up, and I finally met my family in Italy for the first time. It was a thing of connecting with my culture and opening my eyes to what travel can really do for somebody, so it’s very meaningful.

Where is your tattoo and what does it depict?

It’s on my arm. It’s actually the same thing as the necklace I wear all the time. It’s called a cornetto or cornicello, but it just translates to “horn.” It’s like a little horn pendant. It’s an Italian talisman, similar to how in Greek and Turkish culture there’s the Evil Eye. It’s like a spiritual protectant.

People say it looks like a red chili pepper. People are always like, “I love your chili tattoo,” and I’m like “thanks.” I got it as a little postage stamp because I was traveling for the first time, so there’s a plane and then there’s the number 22 because that was the year that I went.

What does it mean or represent to you?

It definitely represents my mom, my tie to her culture and my overall heritage, and meeting my family in Italy for the first time, so there’s pride in that. There’s a lot of learning that comes with it because I am Italian American, and I’ve been here my whole life in Arizona, so it’s just like a dedication to wanting to know more and continuing to delve into my family’s culture.

Why did your mom immigrate from Naples?

It’s an interesting story. She is an Italian immigrant. She came when she was 27. It was before she had my brother who was born in ’99. She was born and raised in Naples, and she was studying law — she was a law student and she worked in the law offices there. Then her mother, my grandma, traveled to Arizona or Las Vegas — somewhere in America — on vacation, and met someone and decided that she was gonna get married.

Then, when my mom visited her mother in America, she also met someone, who was my father, and they decided to get married. So my mom traveled over here and started a new life. And that was the first time that she had gone back, was our trip together recently.

When did you know that you wanted to get the tattoo after the trip?

I knew long before that I wanted to get it, but I didn’t know what. I knew I wanted something to commemorate my first vacation with my mom to Italy, and then when
I got there, I noticed how prevalent [the symbol] was. I’ve had this [necklace] for a few years, but it was like every street corner had somebody selling them — every jewelry shop had somebody selling them.

Everyone had them on their cars — my cousin herself had four hanging from her neck. I think she was working on school stuff, so she wanted extra good luck. But it was very much always around in Naples specifically. So, I was like, “this seems like a good icon of the whole trip and the whole city.”

Allison Hawn

Can you share some of your cultural tattoos?

My family is Pict, which is the Indigenous people of northern Scotland, and we’ve been getting tattooed for centuries. The inside of my ear is tattooed, and if you know how to read that, it tells you roughly how old I am.

On this arm I have a family crest. The wording up here basically translates to “success nurtures hope.” Because of the area that we lived in, because of who we are, we resisted British repression for a very long time, so it’s nice to have that connection back to that.

This one is a Z-rod. We’ve got two circles that represent the interchange between air and water. This at the top is a tree with a sphere at the bottom pointing downwards, so this is actually the sign that you’re in a friendly or safe territory because the spear is planted in the dirt and the tree is growing up. A lot of the tattoos and designs that were done by my ancestors and by us today have to do with our relationship to nature. They have a lot to do with our relationship to what we were seeing in the world and specifically the ways that things interact.

That is a boar. Boars are considered dangerous. There’s a lot of people who would much rather face up against a bear than they would a boar. So, I got this one when I completed my PhD because I decided I was going to be a force to be reckoned with.

I’ve got my grandmother’s favorite tea cup with a slight variation of a Wadsworth poem. I got that poem because she had such an impact on my life. We are a matrilineal culture, in that we get a lot of our understanding of who we are through the females in our lives, which is kind of counterintuitive to a lot of American culture.

Is there a certain name for this style of tattooing?

Traditionally, it was called woading, and that’s because of the blue color that it comes from. It was made out of a certain kind of plant. Traditionally, they would have been stick-and-poke tattoos, but it’s very hard to find a tattoo artist these days who wants to do a stick-and-poke tattoo, and frankly, I don’t want to sit through it.

Why was it important to you to get these tattoos?

My family is Pict on both sides, so there’s a strong cultural identity there. I grew up in America but with a lot of influence from culture because we’re a very insular group. It’s also vitally important to keep the traditions alive because much of our land — we were removed from our lands by colonizers. There was a lot of destruction of our history, and in fact, a large majority of our cultural artifacts can only be seen behind glass in British museums, which is unfortunately the state of a lot of cultures around. So, [these tattoos are] a way for me to respect my heritage, respect my ancestors, respect people who came before me and also keep a piece of that with me because I can’t actually experience that culture on the same daily basis that I would have prior to all of that.

Sasha Park

Can you share some of your cultural tattoos?

This is a fish person down here, and then this is a mushroom person up here, and it’s designed to be androgynous. It focuses on themes of duality, as well as masculine and feminine. It’s inspired by salmon in the Pacific Ocean. When salmon spawn, they go upstream, and it represents a connection between land and sea. When the salmon run, it’s a huge feeding event for a bunch of different organisms out in the forest. Obviously, the forest is the habitat where the salmon babies started to grow and make their way to the ocean, and so it was designed to represent those sorts of connections in ecology.

This one has fungi on it — I just love fungi. I have another one, it has a frog with mushrooms growing out of the back. I just thought that was cool, and I’m interested in mycology. Most of my tattoos are nature-related. But this one I got when I was questioning my gender identity, and it was important for me to have stuff that appeared more feminine and delicate. Tattoos were a big part of me coming to terms with my body.

Was there a certain point in your life when you got these tattoos?

This one right here — I got this in 2021. My dad’s Korean and my mom’s Indian. This is a dude that I saw in a sketch from Korea, and the flowers are native to the part of India that my family’s from. This one, it’s
way of trying to regain that a little bit.

What function or purpose do your tattoos serve?

Honestly, I love showing them off and the attention that I get from them. I don’t go out of my way to seek it, but if someone sees my tattoos and asks me about them, I love talking about them. It’s like a fun, starter conversation piece. But also, going back to my relationship with my body, I got some of these when I was really depressed and the act of tattooing releases all these endorphins and adrenaline and it makes you feel really good for a little bit. But I talked about getting in touch with my body. And I guess the reason I’m not opposed to getting tattoos, especially being young, is that I figure as I get older, even if I don’t necessarily feel like the tattoos represent me, they still are a reminder of who I was at one point.

How do your tattoos represent culture? What does culture mean to you?

With the trans community, there’s a sort of different culture there. Being trans you have to deal with things a lot of people aren’t familiar with. And so once you find a community that can understand that, it’s really nice, and it’s like you’re finally running into an identity when you realize that you’re trans.

Before I came out, I would always ask myself, “what is my identity?” Like, I don’t really feel like I had an identity. But as soon as I realized, it’s like it makes sense. Now this is it. And I feel like culture is tied so closely to identity. I guess these tattoos have helped me form my identity, and have been important in that way to me. So I guess that’s the connection to culture for me.
Problems, progress and posters

As Barrett strives to be more diverse and inclusive, some students think The Honors College isn't doing enough to achieve its goals

by Keetra Bippus
Illustrations by Biplove Baral
“What is Barrett?” Aaliyah Herndon asked their friend when the two of them were first applying to ASU.

“I did honors classes all throughout high school so, it was like, you know, I’m up for a challenge.”

Herndon, a sophomore studying psychology, decided to apply to Barrett, The Honors College because they felt it would help keep them more engaged academically. Once they enrolled as a first-year student in 2021, Herndon found that there were few other Black students in their classes and in the Barrett complex.

“Even within my Human Event class, most of the time I was the only Black person in my class. And then my second semester in that class, I was one of two,” Herndon said. “I was like, I know that there are other Black honors students out there, but there’s not really a lot that brings us together.”

In response, Herndon decided to create a club, the Black Student Association at Barrett, to serve as a support group and a space to foster community among other Black honors students that they felt was lacking. The BSA was officially established in September 2022.

Creating the club wasn’t straightforward or easy, said BSA Vice President Anna-Marie Agyepong, a sophomore studying biochemistry. “When (Aaliyah) was starting the club, there was a lot of pushback, a lot of stalling to get the club off the ground,” Agyepong said. While Agyepong said The Honors College as an institution was slow to support the BSA, individual students and faculty helped get it to where it is today.

A six-step framework

In fall 2020, Barrett created a framework to address racial injustice within The Honors College. The six-step framework included goals including recruiting more Black faculty and students, establishing an ombudsman system — a term for officials investigating complaints — diversifying the honors curriculum and establishing more scholarships for underrepresented students.

The percentage of Barrett’s student body identifying as African American has increased from 2.1% in 2020 to 3% in 2021, according to demographic figures pulled from Barrett’s site.

Comparing Barrett’s demographics to University-wide numbers shows the proportion of Hispanic and Black students in Barrett is lower in comparison to that of the general ASU student body.

Herndon said seeing few students with a similar background as theirs added to an existing feeling of imposter syndrome.

“He doesn’t feel unrepresented in the student makeup of Barrett, but also in the texts studied in their Human Event class — a required course for all first-year Barrett students.

“The majority were Eurocentric, and then there were a few texts that spanned into Asia, but there weren’t a lot of texts that were spanning into the African continent,” they said. “In the second half of that class, we read Obama’s inauguration speech, but outside of that there wasn’t much diversity in the texts that were there.”

Herndon didn’t only feel unrepresented in Barrett’s makeup and in the texts studied in their Human Event class, but also in their Human Event class — a required course for all first-year Barrett students.

The lack of diversity within the Barrett student body also impacted Agyepong’s experience within her Human Event class. While she said her professor did include a diverse set of texts, she felt that a lack of diversity within the class itself impacted the discussions occurring within it.

“It’s very hard to bring in that inclusion when you don’t have people with those experiences,” Agyepong said. “I was very lucky for my second semester to have another Black person in my class, so when I said something they could back me up or give their perspective.”
Nonso Okonkwo, a member of BSA who is studying informatics, said class discussions in Human Event were always very respectful, but wished that some of her professors would branch out into texts from a wider range of cultures. When she brought up some of her concerns to her professor, she said the professor was open to her feedback and willing to change.

Anthony Pratcher, an assistant teaching professor at Barrett who is teaching three sections of Human Event in the spring semester, said faculty often take it upon themselves to use a wide variety of texts and primary sources from across the globe for Human Event classes.

“All of us have ample resources at hand that we’ve gone out of our way to cultivate so that we can try to give students as much breadth to the diversity of the human experience as possible,” Pratcher said.

Scholarships and signage

As part of Barrett’s 2020 framework, The Honors College said it would create more student programming “in support of racial justice and cultural competency.”

In February 2022, Barrett faculty hosted a teach-in celebrating Black History Month. Unlike many other Barrett events hosted that semester, this event was held virtually over Zoom, rather than in person.

“For Black History Month they did a Zoom in the middle of the week and some Barrett professors canceled their Human Event classes, but not all of them,” Herndon recalled. “It didn’t also account for the fact that people had other classes too.”

Herndon noted that a lot of the time, even outside of Black History Month and including Hispanic Heritage Month and Trans Awareness Week, there seemed to be little done by Barrett to support racial justice other than putting up posters, which they called “the bare minimum.”

“I would also see them decorate the Barrett courtyard and they’d have a bunch of tables and have a whole event outdoors. I was like, you did an in-person event that was outdoors but for (Black History Month) in particular you only did a Zoom in the middle of the week?”

A list of “steps taken to date” for its racial justice framework is active on Barrett’s website. Under commitment area six, which involves developing more programming in support of racial justice, the accomplishment “We created more visible signage in Barrett locations on all four ASU campuses in support of our racial justice programming and dedication to inclusion efforts” is listed.
Another of Barrett’s commitments was to establish more scholarships available for “underrepresented minority students.” So far, Barrett has one scholarship for students identifying as LGBTQ, two scholarships for first-generation students and one for students in the National Pan-Hellenic Council — a council of historically African American sororities and fraternities.

Barrett’s Justice and Equity Honors Network class began in 2021. According to the JEHN website, the program will “inform and empower (students) to achieve personal growth and goals, but more than that, to equip them to see and identify changes in society and to bring them about.”

“The events and crises of 2020 … prompted us to think about ways we could form a coalition of students to learn about and analyze these issues and work toward solutions. This was the genesis of the JEHN,” said Barrett Downtown Associate Dean, Olga Davis, in an email.

Davis cited the Barrett Legends Scholars Program, among other programs, as helping The Honors College move toward racial diversity and inclusivity. The program is a partnership between the National Football League, Sports Metric and Barrett to support minority groups at underserved schools in the Phoenix area through scholarships and mentorship.

The Barrett Summer Scholars program, “designed for academically talented and motivated” high school students, allows for students to engage with college-level coursework. Davis said this program has been expanded in order to support more students from Title I schools — schools that serve high numbers of low-income students.

The ombudsperson listed in Barrett’s commitment to racial justice currently does not exist. Ombudspersons for general ASU faculty and students can be found online, but the ombudsperson for Barrett is not currently listed.

Barrett Dean Tara Williams said Barrett’s “planned ombudsperson moved to a new leadership position in another unit at ASU,” in an email. “With the leadership transition from Dean Jacobs to me, we’ve been working with the University Design Institute and the Barrett community to assess our current operations and future opportunities, and determining how to most effectively fulfill this commitment to the ombuds system is one of the top priorities in that process,” Williams said.

‘Understandable critique’

Williams became the dean of Barrett in fall 2022. When asked about how she sees Barrett working toward diversifying its institution and classes, she mentioned JEHN, clubs and establishing a “test-blind” admissions process, and said the school is continuing to reach out to students, faculty and staff about ways to further improve.

The lack of inclusion in honors colleges is “an understandable critique,” Williams said, adding that “the work of racial justice at Barrett is ongoing work and all such calls to accountability are important.”

Given that Barrett is housed “within a university that is deeply committed to access and inclusion,” Williams said The Honors College strives to center those same values.

Herndon feels optimistic about Barrett making lasting changes toward becoming more diverse and inclusive.

“At the very least, compared to last year, I’ve definitely seen a lot more changes and a lot more activeness within Barrett to make these changes. And the fact that there are so many faculty and staff within Barrett that are helping and wanting to support me — it gives me hope,” they said.

“Do I fit in here? I don’t see a lot of people who look like me.”

— Aaliyah Herndon
Agyepong thinks the efforts made toward diversity and inclusion have largely come from individual staff rather than the institution of Barrett itself.

“I don’t think that they’re putting that much of an effort,” she said. “I think the most they’re doing is really adding Black faculty and staff and basically putting them in charge of it and saying, ‘Here, go ahead. Do something about the Black demographic, the Black experience.’”

She would like to see The Honors College put more effort into diversity and inclusivity outside of where it’s “required,” as well as having more open conversations about the topic of diversity in the classrooms.

Okonkwo said she wouldn’t know about the resources available to give feedback about concerns she had at Barrett if she wasn’t a peer mentor for the school. Both Herndon and Agyepong said they would like to see Barrett more actively educate its students about what it’s doing in regards to diversity and inclusion. Neither student knew about the efforts Barrett was making toward increasing its diversity until they became more active within the school.

“I think that another thing is making sure that they actually put it out there that (the Barrett diversity framework) is a thing,” Herndon said. “You can say it, but if you don’t let other people know, can you be held accountable?”
Lost in orbit
ASU students reflect on how a ‘one university in many places’ model spurs disparate and far-ranging campus cultures beyond Tempe, the school’s original home

Growing up, Arizona native Leila Ruterman bled maroon and gold. The daughter of proud ASU alumni, Ruterman spent her childhood gradually falling in love with the University’s culture through countless tailgates and raucous football games at Tempe’s Sun Devil Stadium, where the cheers of over 50,000 spectators rattled through her bones. To Ruterman, attending ASU was a rite of passage, a badge that would cement her as a permanent part of the community she came to love.

When it came time to apply for colleges, she only submitted one application — for her, it was ASU or nothing. But now that she’s enrolled at the University’s Downtown Phoenix campus as a freshman studying sports journalism, Ruterman takes every opportunity she can to escape campus. She flees her dorm every other weekend to make the 40-minute drive back home, where she’ll stay until Monday when classes inevitably force her to return.

“I grew up wanting to be a Sun Devil,” Ruterman said. “Then I came here to downtown, but it doesn’t feel like I’m really even a part of that culture that I wanted to be a part of because Tempe literally feels like a distant land, even though I know it’s only 20 minutes away.”

Although Ruterman spent her childhood enamored with the frenetic collegiate culture of the Tempe campus, attending the school’s Downtown Phoenix campus has made her realize there’s more than one ASU. With a student population of over 10,000, the downtown campus is much smaller than ASU Tempe, by far the school’s largest campus and its original home.

“Culture doesn’t seem to exist here,” Ruterman said of ASU downtown. “It’s like we’re all going to school here, but it doesn’t feel like we share that same common ideal of, ‘Oh, we’re all Sun Devils.’”

Like many freshmen, Ruterman was drawn to the University for the massive state-school feel of its nearly 140-year-old Tempe campus. In fall 2021, almost 55,000 ASU students dotted downtown Tempe, frequenting local landmarks like Mill Avenue, the Memorial Union, Sun Devil Stadium and the Greek Leadership Village.

Under ASU President Michael Crow’s “one university in many places” model, the school has cultivated four main campuses spread across the Valley: Tempe, Downtown Phoenix, Polytechnic and West.

“Each of the campus locations has its own unique physical character, setting, personality and set of programs,” said Joanne Vogel, vice president of student services, in an email. “They are not carbon copies of one another. So, the distinctiveness of our locations helps to meet the varying needs and desires of our students and potential students.”

But students are divided over the success of ASU’s many campuses and their impact on the University’s broader culture. While some have found a small, quaint home on a non-Tempe campus, others — like Ruterman — have criticized the University for failing to elevate the
non-Tempe ASU experience to the classic collegiate lifestyle of its original campus.

Crow initially proposed the multi-campus model in 2004, partly to cope with the physical constraints of future growth on the original Tempe campus. Since then, ASU has continued to expand at record-breaking rates, even as student enrollment at many universities has fallen recently. With an on-campus student population of nearly 78,000, the University now dwarfs a small town.

Today, a majority of ASU students attend the University from outside Tempe’s borders, with online enrollment alone accounting for nearly 43% of the school’s total population.

But next year, Ruterman won’t be one of them. Determined not to spend her sophomore year feeling shut out of the ASU experience she’s chased her entire life, she’s already signed a lease for a Tempe apartment with several other students also looking to move.

“Downtown shouldn’t stay this way,” she said. “I wouldn’t want anyone else to have the freshman experience that I’ve had.”

One university in many, many places

Before Crow took over as University president in 2002, there was no “one university in many places” model, the signature name he gave to his multi-campus vision in a 2004 presentation. Before then, the University’s home largely lay in Tempe.

West had been the University’s second active campus since the spring semester in 1989, but up until the point of Crow’s multi-campus model, the two campuses essentially operated as their own separate colleges. Today, West is integrated as a satellite site within the larger ASU ecosystem.

Envisioning ASU as “the next great university of America,” Crow conceived of ASU’s multi-campus model as a part of his vision to remake the school into a New American University. The University president crafted a proposal to absorb West under the ASU banner and to launch a new campus in downtown Phoenix and rebrand its Mesa campus, then called ASU East, as the Polytechnic campus.

Since then, the school’s in-person enrollment has increased by over 35%, and it continues to shatter its own records year after year. Nearly two decades later, the school is still looking for ways to accommodate its endless growth.

“First, we don’t see limits on growth because we take responsibility for the abundant and unmet need for access to quality education in order to transform society,” Vogel said in the email.

Many times, this has meant the expansion of the “one university in many places” model — even outside of Arizona, into other states and online into the digital realm.

Numerous public universities nationwide boast multiple campuses, but unlike ASU, they rarely venture outside of their home states. Last October, the University announced the opening of a campus location in California — a rare decision for a public university, The State Press reported.

“I couldn’t imagine going to ASU and not even living in Arizona,” said Riley Kanoza, a sophomore studying community health who attends the Downtown Phoenix campus. “Then what’s the point of going to ASU?”

While students may attend the newly opened California Center on campus, the University’s burgeoning and expansive online program also allows thousands more Sun Devils to attend ASU without ever stepping foot into the Valley of the Sun.

West

When Jack Leeman first applied to ASU, he didn’t know where the West campus was. In fact, he didn’t even know it existed. Anticipating the raucous party atmosphere associated with the massive state school, he instead found himself on the smallest of the University’s main campuses — a quaint liberal arts-style site modeled after Oxford University.

Leeman, a junior studying forensic psychology, said West’s campus, located in northwest Phoenix, is a far cry from Tempe’s maze of malls and crowds of unfamiliar faces.

“We’re such a small campus that it does feel like a family,” Leeman said. “It seems like everyone gets involved and connected somehow.”
Now, Leeman is going on his third year living at West, and his enthusiasm for the small, yet close-knit, community of the campus has yet to wane.

He first fell in love with its sunbathed lawns and intimate student community as a freshman, when he made a point to attend every single event put on by West’s Programming and Activities Board, Undergraduate Student Government and Residence Hall Association to escape the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At those events, he found a sense of belonging as a member of a dynamic community — as a member of something bigger than himself. Eventually, he decided to take the helm of fostering community by becoming the president of PAB West, an event planning organization that works to nurture on-campus school spirit.

“We have one of the strongest communities throughout ASU — and I even put that on top of the Poly and Downtown campuses — because everyone gets connected somehow through going to events,” Leeman said. “People are so eager to just help, or they’re just so friendly with open arms.”

Downtown

Back at her small high school, all Kanoza, the sophomore studying community health, wanted was to be invisible — for everyone to mind their business and keep out of hers. When it came to choosing a college, she passed on UA — a staple institution of her hometown of Tucson — in favor of the relative anonymity that ASU, one of the largest universities in the nation, had to offer.

When she first moved to ASU’s Downtown Phoenix campus last year, she found that Taylor Mall and its surrounding environment reminded her a bit too much of the small, tight-knit community she sought to leave behind.

“It kind of felt like I was continuing in high school,” Kanoza said. “It just feels like you’re staying stagnant rather than moving forward.”

Planning for her sophomore year, Kanoza knew she had to make a change. She decided to move to Tempe to find the traditional collegiate experience she had chosen ASU for.

For Kanoza, spending a few hours a week commuting between campuses from her apartment to class downtown was a reasonable sacrifice if it meant getting out of the small-scale environments she’d grown tired of. In the months since she moved to Tempe, she’s seen a completely different side of the University — and herself.

“It just felt too small in downtown for such a big school,” she said. “Just the experience of actually going to college in Tempe, this is more of what I actually signed up for coming here, especially when they’re going to force us on separate campuses and it’s the same tuition cost, but you’re not getting the same experience.”

Polytechnic

While Kanoza and Ruterman agree that the University may be spreading itself too thin by devoting itself to so many campuses, Tanner Russell, a sophomore studying manufacturing engineering at the Polytechnic campus, applauds the University’s growth. To him, the University’s diverse range of campuses opens the door up for students like him — who shun the traditional college experience of cavernous lecture halls and massive crowds — to also enjoy life at ASU.

Russell initially opted for Poly, the University’s largely STEM-oriented campus in Mesa, after hearing of its project-based courses, small class sizes and hordes of like-minded engineering students. But he doesn’t relegate himself to Poly. As a member of ASU’s men’s volleyball team, Russell regularly takes the shuttle back and forth between Tempe and Poly, allowing him to savor the unique identities of each community.

“Having the campuses in different areas allows the opportunity for more people to go to college,” he said. “That’s one of the great things about having the different campuses: They fit in different students’ needs.”

As students attending campuses outside of Tempe, Kanoza and Ruterman agreed that they’re used to living in the shadow of the original campus, despite downtown, West and Polytechnic being “main campuses” in name. But as the University continues to expand its reach
Beyond Arizona into other states and the digital realm, they’re concerned that their needs will fall even further down the list. “If ASU’s going to keep moving forward, they can’t forget about the other campuses too, because I don’t feel like they’re completely done,” Ruterman said. “There’s a lot of potential in these other campuses, but I’m not sure that they’ve reached their full potential.”

Online

In stark contrast to a traditional in-person campus, over 60,000 students interact with professors and peers, attend class and obtain their degrees through ASU Online, a cyberspace so expansive that it dwarfs the entire student population of the Tempe campus. U.S. News and World Report ranked ASU Online as the second-largest online school in the nation in 2019.

Although the University experienced overall record-breaking enrollment this year, ASU Online’s student population grew at over double the rate of its in-person cohort. But for Madalyn Wright, an ASU Online student studying journalism, the sheer size and sprawl of the online community has served as a roadblock to the development of a cohesive student culture. “We have a community space for online students, but there isn’t an authentic cultural identity,” they said. “It’s like, ‘Yes, you are a Sun Devil. Technically.’ But it feels more like I’m just an ASU student.”

Wright is aware that their online college experience at ASU probably shouldn’t feel identical to the “core memories” they made when they attended a physical university campus in Alaska. Pursuing ASU Online out of necessity as a parent and working journalist, Wright said the University’s online program can feel like swimming through a sea of discussion boards as they scroll through their laptop alone, only ever accessing their professors and peers through a screen.

While the University’s online program continues to expand at a faster rate than its in-person enrollment, Wright highlighted the disconnect between online students and ASU culture as a glaring missing link in the online experience. To bring ASU Online students into the wider University ecosystem, they said the school should help foster meaningful connections between online students and professors — beyond the ASU-sponsored social media sites and Discord groups, which in their experience have only resulted in superficial, online friendships.

“I just know that I’m not going to sports games and I’m not making these lifelong friends that are going to be at my wedding one day that most students get,” Wright said. “For me, my identity with ASU is more (about) knowing that I’m somewhere where I’m getting a really quality education. For online students, that’s where it stops with us.”

As ASU continues to grow and sprawl far beyond the Valley, the days when Tempe stood as the University’s only home are long gone. But for many students who know the University as something other than its original campus, it’s been difficult to shed Tempe’s legacy and to stake their claim as Sun Devils in their own right.
Chaos on tap
The rise of Tempe Barstool

You’re scrolling through Instagram. A candid catches your eye. Two boys in black cowboy attire attending an ASU football game hold a sign that says “Show Me Your TD’s!!”

The comment section is flooded.
“Icons”
“Legends”
“Gross”
“Never seen so many guys flash till last night”

The cowboys bask in the horizon of maroon and gold, captivating the crowd’s attention after ASU’s Sept. 24 loss to the Utah Utes.

You decide to click the account handle and navigate to its main page — the point of no return.

Students are kicking exit signs until they fall. Ceiling tiles coat the floor in the hallways of the Hassayampa Academic Village dorms. Three guys are lugging a Barrett sign around campus. A plethora of students give their kudos to those daring enough to send in their content.

With one click, you have come across Tempe Barstool, a direct affiliate of Barstool Sports, the digital media company known for reporting on sports and pop culture for a national audience of college students.

Neither Barstool Sports or Tempe Barstool has responded to State Press Magazine’s request for comment at the time of publication.

When Tempe Barstool made its first Instagram posts in 2015, it was known for its ASU-related sports content. Since then, the brand has surpassed over 300,000 followers on Instagram, TikTok and Twitter combined. In seven years’ time, over 2,000 posts have been shared through the affiliate’s Instagram account, putting everything from dorm vandalism and drunken stunts to cringe-worthy “Tinder Tuesday” messages and niche sports memes on display.

Tempe Barstool’s content is slowly moving away from athletics, establishing itself as a media hub where students can share a wide range of raucous entertainment. The account has most notably gained traction for sharing what could be considered common college shenanigans — if serious injuries and felonies can be noted as such.

Calling itself “ASU’s private story,” Tempe Barstool aggregates content made by and for the ASU community, asking Instagram followers to send in their “funniest videos, drunk moments, and ASU highlights” for a chance to be featured on the infamous page.

Setting the bar

In 2003, Dave Portnoy created Barstool as a print publication specific to sports betting advertisements. The publication became accessible online in 2007.

In 2016, Portnoy gave up a majority of his ownership over Barstool after accepting an investment from The Chernin Group, an entertainment investing firm, but he kept 100% oversight over the company’s projects, Forbes reported in 2017.

Although this deal caused many to doubt Barstool’s future, Portnoy saw the partnership crucial to thriving in the digital era. Since then, Barstool has ventured into other projects, including a sports bar chain, podcasts, merchandising and, of course, social media.

While Barstool is among some of the most popular sports media outlets — competing with ESPN, The Chive and Bowl America — both Portnoy and the company have faced backlash in recent years for creating content that platforms hypermasculinity, hypersexualizes women and diverges from its
purported original subject matter: sports.

In August 2022, Barstool Sports had an estimated value of $450 million, with Portnoy's net worth reaching around $100 million. According to Legal Sports Report, a site that reports on fantasy sports, Barstool gathers over 54 million monthly visitors (as of May 2022) across its website, app, social media pages and video content alone, raking in upward of $178 million in revenue through venture capital funding, reported by CrunchBase in 2020.

**Barstool’s audience**

“There’s not really another place on social media that can do what Tempe Barstool does,” said Blake Warner, a civil engineering student. “They have a very unique outlet, and have a huge following that helps bring everyone together as a community.”

Warner is a fan of Tempe Barstool’s content, but believes some of the videos shared are up for debate in terms of entertainment. “Sometimes they post stuff that’s a little questionable, but for the most part, it’s pretty funny stuff,” he said.

When asked about specific posts he considers to be “questionable,” Warner responded with several examples. “Posting dumb stuff, like people who break the exit signs, or stuff like that where there isn’t any humor to it and doing more harm than good. But it’s only a small percentage of their posts,” he said.

In October, residents of Tooker House racked up over $10,000 in collective damages to 11 exit signs, 125 light covers and 13 resident door signs. An email detailing this information was sent to ASU parents, saying the entire building must pay if the student at fault is not identified.

**Harvard of the West**

Littered throughout Tempe Barstool’s feed of campus candids is a recurring pair of sunglasses floating above a white beard. Their owner has been recorded vaping on zoom calls, embracing a student in the middle of a lecture and in the center of BeReals.

Matthew McCarthy, an ASU lecturer and professor of nearly 20 years and author of “How to Avoid F*cking Up in College,” is a regular feature on the Tempe Barstool account.

McCarthy, like many others, said he followed Barstool for “the original Dave Portnoy: sports and everything around it.” But his opinion of the platform has been tarnished by its recent shift to user-supplied content.

“You can see drunkies at Hassayampa pushing people down staircases and destroying stuff,” McCarthy said. “I think they’re looking at their analytics and they go: ‘Hey, we’re getting a lot more likes and clicks if we show the stupid stuff.’”

Throughout McCarthy’s almost two decades at the University, he’s seen the rise of social media from the very beginning and radical changes in his students’ behavior as it has become more prominent in everyday life.

“My opinion is: everyone’s a content maker,” McCarthy said. “If you’re on Fox News, your real job is to sell adult diapers and pharma products. And when social media started doing that, then people started to say, ‘Wait a minute, I can make money at this too.’”

In September, Tempe Barstool shared a video of three unidentified ASU students carrying a Barrett, The Honors College sign pulled out of the ground. The on-campus incident made its way to the ASU Police Department, which is now using a portion of the video to seek information about one student, whose face is visible in the clip.

An ASU PD spokesperson said in a Nov. 7 email that the investigation is still ongoing, and no arrests had been made at the time.

The photo was posted on the police department’s Twitter page, asking other ASU students to share information they have regarding the individual’s identity. Instead of filling the comment section with pertinent information about the issue, students have taken the liberty of directing ASU PD to various dead ends, mentioning people like former ASU football head coach Herm Edwards, University athletic director Ray Anderson and actress Keke Palmer.

Others tried to bargain in exchange for information: “So what? There’s no incentive?” read one reply. “free tuition and I’ll give you all the info you could want,” read another.

In October, residents of Tooker House racked up over $10,000 in collective damages to 11 exit signs, 125 light covers and 13 resident door signs. An email detailing this information was sent to ASU parents, saying the entire building must pay if the student at fault is not identified.

READ MORE: Tooker, Vista del Sol housing damages may be split among all residents

While Warner concurs with other sources about Tempe Barstool’s content shift, he believes what it is choosing to include in its Instagram feed is just a reflection of business. “Although they still post a decent amount of sports, it depends on the season and how good the teams are. I think Barstool as a company is just trying to universalize all their content, so I’m not
Me and my roommates made it a goal to somehow get on Tempe Barstool, just because it would be funny,” said Alex Pleskovitch, an ASU sophomore studying marketing who was featured on the Tempe Barstool account performing an “ollie” on a food delivery robot. “Everybody loves those little robots, and I just thought it might be a good way to get on there,” he continued.

The video was included amid other miscellaneous tomfoolery: shirtless “chapter” boys waving their flashlights and singing in the middle of a lecture. Students jumping in an elevator at max capacity. A hickey resembling the Air Jordan logo. But despite a multitude of content from various one-time features, Pleskovitch’s video was among the most popular in the comment section:

“Whoever ollied Wall-E thank u”
“That ollie over Wall-E sent me”
“My man with robot ollie!”

Pleskovitch elaborated on his decision to send in a video that could be self-incriminating to Tempe Barstool: “I would never have sent anything if I thought I’d get in trouble for it, especially with the school because I don’t want to mess up any of my tuition or education.”

Facing potential consequences was never Pleskovitch’s main concern. “I didn’t break the robot,” he said. “I didn’t do anything that’s worth getting in trouble for, so I felt fine sending it in.”

As far as anonymity goes, Pleskovitch is fine with people knowing him as the “robot ollie” guy, replying to comments on the Tempe Barstool post that tagged his Instagram handle.

“I was trying to do that all year,” he said. “I was trying to find one of them rolling so I could get a video of it. People thought it was funny, so I thought I’d take credit.”

Behavior beyond the screen

While Tempe Barstool has stirred up a slew of opinions within the ASU community, the questionable content many college students interact with online may have long-term effects on their behavior.

Deborah Hall, an associate professor at the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, believes social media trends seen online — specifically ones enticing people to perform physical stunts or vandalism around campus — can promote reckless or dangerous behavior.

“I think some of the appeal of viral internet trends, particularly among younger populations, is the riskiness of it,” Hall said. “Younger social media users are sometimes exposed to incredibly risky behaviors they wouldn’t even think to perform on their own.”

Barstool Sports overwhelmingly captures a male audience between the ages of 18 and 34, who spend up to a combined 45 million minutes every month interacting with Barstool’s content, the company said.

Hall’s research investigates both social and group identity, specific to relationships with social media. With Tempe Barstool, the names of those who are featured in videos are mostly kept secret, unless they are shouted out in the comment section.

The direct messages between students who send in content and the Tempe Barstool account are ‘masked’ by the social media personas we hide behind. While anonymity can negatively impact our integrity online, Hall said it does not necessarily keep our words and actions secret.

“Not having to engage in real life, face-to-face interactions with others allows people to sort of drop their guard or not hold themselves to the same moral standards,” Hall said. “Perceived anonymity of online interactions can give people the perception that their behaviors are somehow less identifiable.”

“But on the flip side, once you post something online, you’re no longer the sole person in control of the dissemination of that content,” she added.

According to ASU’s housing policies and procedures, a student who participates in vandalism or destruction of any kind will face a charge to their student account, or a split charge among the entire residence hall if the individual at fault fails to come forward.

While online anonymity can cause some students to disregard the weight of their actions, holding students accountable is different for every situation.

“From a technical perspective, it is getting harder and harder to be anonymous online,” said Stephen Carradini, an assistant professor in ASU’s College of Integrative Sciences and Arts. Carradini has spent his career analyzing digital ethics and professional communication through social media, and is familiar with Tempe Barstool’s content.

“There’s so much on the internet; this is a problem of content moderation,” Carradini said. “There’s always going to be a level where we say something’s bad, but it’s not bad enough that we’re going to take action.”
Forget Lightning McQueen and Radiator Springs — the Phoenix metropolitan area is the true pit stop for motorized vehicles. In 2020, car owners in metro Phoenix spent more money to buy vehicles than those in any other city in the country, according to 2019-20 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. With 76% of students living off campus at ASU, according to a U.S. News report, students at the University are no stranger to a long commute on one of the Valley’s winding freeways.

For many students, one ASU entity brings the blissful car cruise to a screeching halt: Parking and Transit Services. With fewer than three stars on Google Reviews, ASU Parking and Transit Services has a mixed reputation among members of the ASU community. “ASU’s parking services are predatory because they know students don’t have any other options on where to park,” one impassioned Google review from a few months ago reads. Other complaints about poor customer service and high fees date back years.

When asked about the complaints, a Parking and Transit Services representative said in an email “Parking and Transit Services receives no student mandated fees and responds to customers as quickly as volume allows via in-person office hours, online and calls through ASU’s Experience Center.”

For some commuter students, housing prices near ASU have forced them to find accommodations farther from their home campus. That’s the case for Garrett Busby, a senior studying supply chain management. Busby lives about 25 minutes away from the Tempe campus and 10 minutes from Polytechnic. He said housing is more affordable in Mesa than it is near downtown Tempe, and so is parking. He bought a parking pass for the Polytechnic campus instead of Tempe and parks there every morning before catching the shuttle to ASU’s main campus.

Phoenix is a case study in urban sprawl, a place where copy-paste houses are seemingly endless and an hour-long commute is ordinary. In other words, metro Phoenix is spread out. And so is ASU. The route linking Polytechnic and West is over 50 miles.

“Density is the single most important factor for transit to be successful,” said Steven Polzin, a research professor at the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering and a former senior advisor at the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Phoenix had a population density of about 3,100 people per square mile in 2020. “You need that high concentration of activities and people to generate the kind of travel demands that justify investment in a transit service that’s frequent enough to be attractive,” Polzin said. Greater parking availability and lower parking costs tend to encourage people to drive their own cars instead of taking public transportation.

More than a fee

One of my first experiences on campus as a freshman consisted of waiting in a winding line for three hours just to get my hands on a University parking pass. By the time I had reached the front, the Parking and Transit Services office was closing in 20 minutes. When I first queued myself in the line, it wrapped around the entire University Center building. Those of us at the end couldn’t see where the Parking and Transit Services office was. Many gave up and left before reaching the front, where two workers collected students’ payment.

The parking pass in question was for the East garage, about 0.7 miles from my residence at the time. The garage is far from campus and the walk is often unbearable in the heat. I swore that I’d never park in that garage ever again.
The next year, when it was time to forge out for a coveted parking pass, I set four alarms and woke up at 7:30 a.m. to buy my pass online the second the portal opened. Clumsily, I made a mistake and clicked the link too late — about three seconds after it opened. I was already over 100 spots behind in the queue. And I was one of the lucky ones.

About half an hour later I was short nearly $800 and had secured a parking spot close to campus. Sadly, it was a rooftop spot, and would provide absolutely no protection for my car from the unbearable Phoenix sun.

My strife isn’t unique. Gideon Friedman, a third-year film student, said the parking situation was “bleak” when he was living in Phoenix. He was originally given the wrong parking pass and had to go back to Parking and Transit Services for a new one. When he went in person to receive the correct pass, the worker wasn’t sure what to do; Friedman waited 45 minutes for the manager to return to the office.

“I was kind of just sitting there in the office and a line started building up,” Friedman said.

The parking spot he did acquire — a place in the Second Avenue Lot on the Downtown campus — “was like a dirt lot that hadn’t been maintained in years, constant potholes, not great and the same price as (lots in Tempe) which are much nicer,” according to Friedman.

The Second Avenue lot is paved but has potholes and little shade to protect cars from the sun. It’s currently priced at $720 annually.

In order to avoid the high prices of on campus parking, Téa Zawilak, a sophomore studying biomedical informatics, found a way to circumvent Parking and Transit Services entirely. Instead, she parks at Tempe’s Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which has a parking garage on campus. Instead of paying ASU, Zawilak said she pays the church a $5 fee every semester and maintains at least 75% attendance in a class that the church offers.

“Parking is a cost that people don’t really tell you about, but it definitely adds up over the four years,” said Zawilak.

Zawilak isn’t alone — every year, many students find creative ways to avoid purchasing an ASU parking pass. Leticia Fierro, an ASU class of 2017 alum, didn’t pay the University a cent for parking in all of her four years of schooling.

“They were just always too expensive,” Fierro recalled. The average price of parking permits available on Tempe campus is $686.67 per calendar year.

Rather than forking over hundreds of dollars, she instead paid for a parking spot at her off-campus apartment, which was cheaper than paying the University. Then, she would walk to class from her apartment. In the summer months, she said it was extremely difficult to walk or bike to class due to the heat.

“I still found it a better option, although I would get to class all sweaty and gross,” Fierro said.

There are 15 lots or garages available to students in Tempe, 28 on Polytechnic, 10 on Downtown and 10 on West campus.

When asked about demand for parking versus supply, the spokesperson said “overall, ASU has sufficient parking for the current demand.”

Despite the prices and long waits, this coming summer I will be up early to get the most convenient, and thus expensive, parking pass possible — and I won’t make the mistake of clicking the link three seconds late either.

“Parking is a cost that people don’t really tell you about, but it definitely adds up over the four years.”
— Téa Zawilak
Aries (March 21-April 20)

Hey girl! We noticed that you were in your bed in every single one of your BeReals for two weeks straight. And not to be a stalker, but that half-eaten bowl of mac and cheese was in the exact same spot on your bedside table on Thursday ... haha. Maybe we could try out goes-outside core today? The stars are telling you to go look at the stars.

Taurus (April 21-May 20)

Babe, you’re LOVED. Like, I’ve never met a person who doesn’t love you. All your exes left because they were intimidated by you and never felt good enough. Bonus — you’re hot. Our suggestion: capitalize on your natural assets! Sign up for Wikifeet and get in your bag.

Gemini (May 21-June 21)

If you’re feeling extra slutty lately, it’s because Venus is in retrograde, or something like that. Your sexual energy is magnetic! Today is a great day to get in touch with your more sensual, exhibitionist side. Go ahead, post hole on the timeline — you won’t regret it.

Libra (Sept. 22-Oct. 22)

With this incoming Venus retrograde, romance is not on your side this week. That’s probably why you keep looking for love in all the wrong places, like the Memorial Union Qdoba line. It’s time to delete all three of those dating apps and download Duolingo or something instead. Your soulmate is not in Tempe, Arizona.

Scorpio (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

You have a natural talent for communication and a passion for petty gossip. It’s time to make yourself heard. Start a podcast about annoying pop culture “moments” and innocuous opinions on things like wiper blades and cereal, post the link everywhere, and talk to strangers on public transit about it. Everyone is obsessed with you.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

Life’s been a bit dull lately, but you’re on fire today! Expect nothing less than a life-altering, explosive surprise, and plan accordingly. Tonight’s blood moon means big changes are coming to your most sentimental safe spaces. There’s no place like home, which is why we recommend checking the batteries on your smoke detectors.

Horroroscope by Alexis Moulton and Camila Pedrosa
Illustrations by Sydney Huyge
Leo (July 23- Aug. 22)

It’s the third day of your bender, you’ve already texted your ex twelve times and fought somebody in your Twitter replies about whether or not sidewalks are ableist. No, you can’t tell your boss to go fuck themselves just because they won’t approve paid sick leave. Maybe try drinking some water for a change. Mercury retrograde literally ended last week.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 21)

Your sign is entering Jupiter’s seventh house this week — it’s time to cut one of your friends out of your life. Whatever she did, whether it’s “forgetting” to buy a second ticket to the Taylor Swift Eras Tour for you or kissing your crush of seven years at a New Year’s Party, it’s time to get the scissors.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan.19)

Sheesh! The pressure is on and your brain is off. What’s the point of trying to do homework when all you want to do is stare at TikToks until the inside of your eyes start to burn. Those 18 missing assignments can wait. You should skip class and cultivate your body dysmorphia instead.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

Oh my god. Um. Don’t forget to wear your seatbelt today.

Pisces (Feb. 19 -March 20)

All of history’s geniuses made their best work in their darkest hour. It’s just a fact. Today, you’re due for a public sobbing session on Orange Mall. But don’t worry — there’s like a 30% chance you come up with the next great American novel while you’re at it. Really lean into that creeping feeling of existential dread you’ve been ignoring for the past week. Trust us, it’ll pay off.