November 1, 2023
volume 24 | issue 2

state press magazine

the element issue

Arizona State University Housing Fair

Arizona State University

CollegePads

November 14 - 15

10 am - 2 pm

Memorial Union, Cady Mall, Tempe Campus

A fun and interactive way to check out local properties, meet landlords and enter giveaways!

Scan the QR code to view the official off-campus marketplace

state press magazine

Contents

03 The deep dive

07 The life of Sparky the Sun Devil

13 Demystifying Barrett

19 Sudan will not be forgotten

27 Hollywood dreams just out of reach

32 'Paying to be unpaid'

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Angelina Steel

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Camila Pedrosa

MANAGING EDITORS
Madeline Nguyen
Savannah Dagupion

DESIGN EDITOR
Monica Navarro

ENGAGEMENT EDITOR
Sydney Huyge

WRITERS
Zach Bradshaw
Audrey Eagerton
Fatima Gabir
Sam McGee
Leah Mesquita

ILLUSTRATOR
Andrea Ramirez

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Anthony Cavale
Hajin Lee
Calvin Stewart

Editor's letter

As journalists, asking questions is the core of our job, whether to a search engine or to an interviewee. Often, the answers to these first questions lead us down a rabbit hole of more questions and answers, allowing us to collect a trove of information on the topic we are writing about, which we then have to sift through to find the core element. The stories in this issue embody this classic practice. With histories and explainers, the articles in The Element Issue break down a variety of broad topics both commonly reported on and generally left alone.

Writers look deeper into important ASU icons in the sports and academic arenas — from Barrett, The Honors College to the stellar men's swim team to the face of it all, Sparky. Our writers also explored the challenges young professionals currently entering their careers must face. Unsustainable work conditions for screenwriters led to one of the longest strikes ever in the entertainment industry, which hamstrung young graduates looking to break into the film industry. Also, pay inequities laced through internship culture have widened systemic wage gap, stymying students who cannot afford to hold unpaid positions.

Finally, our featured writer reflects on the brutal ongoing war in Sudan, highlighting local and global perspectives on the conflict's effect on the Sudanese people — and questioning the media's failure to properly cover it.

The Hot Issue crossword answers

#1. endometriosis
#2. mobile
#3. people of color
#4. sorority
#5. objectification
#6. MaRTy
#7. uterus
#8. urban heat island
#9. representation
#10. wolf
#11. lidocaine
#12. height
#13. homelessness
#14. Machiavellian
#15. ANDI
#16. ASU effect
#17. housing

Bold | Risk-Taking | Provoking

@statepressmag @statepressmag statepress.com/section/magazine @statepressmag


IGNITE THE FORK

Report

The deep dive

The ASU men's swim team is entering the season as the top college program in the nation, but the job is far from done

by Zach Bradshaw
Photos by Hajin Lee

The ASU men's swim and dive team is in its element.

Ranked No. 1 nationally by the College Swimming & Diving Coaches Association of America for over 10 months, the team is experiencing a level of growth and success unmatched by any other ASU athletic team — and arguably any other college swim team.

In March, the Devils won their first-ever Pac-12 Championship title. They also finished second in the 2023 NCAA Swimming & Diving Championships — the highest finish in program history.

Though the wins have racked up for the Devils lately, the team is still unsatisfied.

"We expect a level of excellence here," said Grant House, an alum who swam with the Devils from 2017 until this spring and now swims professionally. "We expect to be the best in the world."

House still trains with the team six days per week. For three of those days, practice starts at 6 a.m. The team works out in the water for 18 hours every week, with an additional three and a half hours set aside for dryland strength workouts.

"There's this idea that when you work really hard and you move past a lot of adversity or challenges, you get to this peak," House said. "But the thing that a lot of people don't understand is when you get to that peak, an even steeper hill of adversity awaits you."

The team faced the Georgia Bulldogs in its first two outings of the 2023-2024 season. In back-to-back meets, the Devils blew them out of the water 89.5-49.5 and 183-117.

But head coach Bob Bowman's reaction?

"I wasn't really happy with today's meet at all," he said.

Sun Devil swimmers Jonny Kulow and Jack Dolan echoed Bowman's dissatisfaction.

"There's a lot of room to get a lot better," said Kulow, a sophomore studying microbiology.

"We just got to keep getting faster," said Dolan, a graduate student studying sports law and business.

To Dolan, the meet was a "wake-up call," as he believed the swimmers' energy fell short of the pace they had set for themselves.

"There's one meeting per year that matters in… intercollegiate swimming [the NCAA Championships], and last year we got second," he said. "So we are maybe ranked No. 1, but we still haven't won it yet."

Bowman means business

The Sun Devil swimmers say coach Bowman isn't afraid to speak his mind.

In his first short course swim meet as a Sun Devil, Ilya Kharun didn't seem like a newcomer. The No. 4 swimmer in SwimSwam's NCAA swimming recruits list for the high school class of 2023 ended up shattering ASU's record in the 100-yard butterfly with a time of 44.88.

After a 1:40.68 in the 200-yard butterfly also secured him a first place finish against Georgia, the freshman studying sports business had more than one reason to celebrate that day: His time ranked as the third fastest in the Sun Devil swim program's history.

But Bowman and Kharun were both left unsatisfied.

"While that's a great swim for today, it's not going to take us where we want to go," Bowman said. "If [Kharun] wants to win at the NCAA [Championships], he's definitely going to have to be four seconds faster."

Bowman has been coaching professionally since 1996. Hundreds of swimmers — from decorated Olympians to local legends — have practiced under him. He's seen what works and what doesn't.

On the international stage, Bowman served as a coach for the U.S. Olympic team during five games, and in September, he was inducted in the International Swimming Hall of Fame. His former protégé Michael Phelps, now the most decorated Olympian of all time, was awarded alongside his mentor.

At ASU, similarly prestigious accolades have been bestowed upon Bowman. In June, he was voted the Sun Devil Coach of the Year.

Bowman is the kind of coach who is not shy about giving feedback, according to his swimmers.

It's not rare to see him speaking with a swimmer after an event, his hands flying with emotion as he describes what he's seeing and how he wants the swimmer to improve.

"He's so mean," Kulow joked after a meet.

Bowman, standing a few feet away, smirked and shook his head.

"He does a really good job of… keeping us in check," Kulow said. "[He's] making sure that we're…not being too relaxed and…trying to be the best that we can."

"Yeah, he keeps us humble," Kharun said.

Bowman builds his relationships with his swimmers on a base of "tough love," which House said allows the coach to foster a strong personal connection with each of the Devils while still being honest with them.

The key to Bowman's coaching technique is his ability to pinpoint something that needs improvement in every swim, regardless if it was the swimmer's best or worst performance.

"I don't think it's criticism," Bowman said. "It's feedback, right? What we want to do is keep moving forward."

For House, that's Bowman's defining element: He always wants more from his swimmers.

"It's always, 'How can we be better?'" House said. "That's really how he loves us."

'Different level of respect'

In early October, the Devils faced the University of Las Vegas in a dual meet, beating the Rebels 229-71.

Kicking off the event, a team consisting of Kharun, sophomore Hubert Kós, junior León Marchand and freshman Filip Senc-Samardzic won the 400-yard medley relay with a time of 3:04.67.

The quartet of Dolan, Kulow, Kharun and graduate student Cam Peel also won the 200-yard free relay, clocking in at 1:16.10.

The wins meant the Sun Devils achieved automatic qualifying times for the NCAA Championships in both men's relays.

"At a dual meet? In October?" said Duncan Scott, a volunteer public address announcer. "Have you ever heard of that before? That is just special."

Scott said it feels like he has announced every ASU home swim meet as far as he can remember — that's since 1975. In his time there, he's witnessed history unfold — he worked alongside the swim team back when head coach Mona Plummer rebuilt the women's swimming program to be one of the best in the country during the late 1970s, and he remembers when the Tempe campus' aquatic complex was named after her in 1985.

He's seen the swim team peak and fall through coaching changes and funding issues. He was even

there when the University entirely defunded the men's swim team in 2008 due to its limited budget for varsity sports.

Bowman's ability to inspire his swimmers has stood out to Scott ever since the head coach joined the team in 2015. Scott said Bowman treats every day as a fresh start for the swimmers under the philosophy that "if you miss today, you don't ever get it back."

In 2021, two Sun Devil swimmers, including Marchand, made it to the Tokyo Olympics. With the 2024 Paris Olympics on the horizon, Scott said it's not unrealistic to fathom at least six Sun Devil swimmers making it to the games this time.

"There are times when people... have a dream out there, but it's really way out there," he said. "[Bowman has] got several people with realistic Paris dreams.

"It's a different level of respect this team has earned."

Center of attention

After the Devils' highly decorated 2022-2023 season, the media platformed the program as one of the best in the nation — a change of pace for a team that has long lingered in the shadows.

"Top-ranked Arizona State men's swim remains one of the school's best kept secrets," an AZCentral headline read.

"Once dead in the water, Arizona State's swim program is thriving," another headline on SwimSwam read.

Despite the newfound attention, the team isn't getting complacent.

"It's hard when we had a good season last year, and everybody tells you how good you are and has these expectations for you," Bowman said. "But the reality is that was last year. Today is today. We have to win today, and we have to do better tomorrow, the next day, the next day."

To reach the NCAA Championships, the team will likely have to face schools like Cal and the University of Texas – teams that have challenged the Devils for years.

"There's always a target on our backs," House said. "Everyone wants to beat the person at the top."

The California Golden Bears were the swimming champions of the Pac-12 for five consecutive years from 2018-2022 until the Devils dethroned them this year. A formidable foe for the Devils, Cal has placed first at the NCAA Championships in three of the last four seasons.

The Longhorns also measure up — since 2015, they have placed first at the NCAA Championships five times.

"I want [the swimmers] to feel good about what we're doing here," Bowman said. "But they also need to know that there are a lot of people out there…who are talented, and we're going to be racing them. And we're just going to have to improve every day if we want to really be the best team we can be."

Now that ASU is fresh off a second-place finish at this year's NCAA Championships, falling just behind Cal, Scott said the team is primed.

He said he's noticed "significant" improvements in the team's chemistry and communication, which will make all the difference at the championships next March.

"That's the kind of thing that... can kick them over the top," he said. "I think this is the year they got to do it."

When asked if the Devils could take first place at the NCAA Championships, Scott didn't even hesitate: "The answer is yes. They can win it."

In order to swim their way to the top, the Devils just need to keep getting faster, according to Kharun. To him, the team's objective for the championships is simple: "Just to get No. 1."

Report

The life of Sparky the Sun Devil

Being the symbol of ASU is anything but easy — here's the truth behind the mask

by Leah Mesquita
Photos by Anthony Cavale
and Calvin Stewart

It's a Saturday night in October. A sea of maroon and gold floods Mountain America Stadium. The student section crawls with animated fans. Surging with adrenaline, Talen Osborn decides this is his chance to do the unthinkable — hop onto the railing and steal the show.

"I thought, 'I could fall, but no one is going to tell me to get down,'" said Osborn, a senior studying economics.

Osborn was right — he wasn't reprimanded for his dangerous stunt. In fact, he was encouraged as the cheers of the crowd echoed through the stands.

That's because Osborn was one of a select few ASU students who enjoyed such special privileges — as long as he remained in disguise and kept his identity secret.

"When a student looks at the character, they shouldn't think of the person inside," Osborn said. "If you connect a name to the character, it becomes the only thing you see."

No, Osborn was not a superhero, nor was he a part of some ultrasecret society. Instead, his character required the performance of a lifetime. He was Sparky, the ubiquitous face of ASU and its athletics department.

"Sparky's the coolest guy in the room," Osborn said. "[Knowing the] name [of the person in the suit] automatically diminishes his reputation because he's the coolest. You can't beat him."

Life as a devil

The idea of being Sparky first popped into Osborn's mind his senior year of high school when his brother, then an ASU cheerleader, brought him to a practice.

"The spirit squad is really close with Sparky, so I remember seeing [Sparky] and thinking, 'That's an opportunity for me,'" Osborn said. "My parents encouraged me to do it, and I already had game-day experience [in high school], but I didn't join until second semester freshman year."

As an "athletic Sparky," Osborn attended sporting events with two major responsibilities: promoting Sun Devil Athletics and hyping up the crowd.

"Our main focus is the student section," he said. "During timeouts and halftime, Sparky will get on the billboard to do promotions. We also have a game script that we stick to."

Osborn said when he wasn't expected to follow this game script, he was free to do whatever he chose as Sparky — with a few limitations.

"You're not allowed to jump from anything crazy, and you're not allowed to bring props unless you have permission," Osborn said. "But there's not really a whole lot Sparky isn't able to do."

Sparky's stunts, he said, must meet strict standards set by the risk management team to ensure the safety of the mascot — and the student in the suit. "We have to ask, 'What are the safety protocols that need to take place?'" he said. According to Osborn, these protocols primarily mandate what safety equipment is required for particular stunts the actors perform, such as a gymnastics mat for backflips.

Though Osborn isn't experienced in gymnastics, the Sparky retiree is a trained acrobatic dunker and avid wakeboarder, both skills he was allowed to flex as Sparky due to the high level of visibility the

suit provided.

"We see through the [suit's] eyes, which a lot of mascots don't," Osborn said. Mascot costumes can also provide visibility through the suit's mouth, neck, nose or body.

"It gives us a lot of flexibility to do tricks," he said. "I'm able to do a lot in the suit."

The birth of a legend

Even though it may be difficult for current students to imagine a time when the instantly recognizable Sun Devil wasn't the face of ASU, Sparky — who turns 77 on Nov. 20 — is actually third in the University's lineage of mascots, which spans over a century.

The student body selected the Owl as the school's first sports mascot in 1889. The Owl later became the Bulldog, a trendy mascot that was popular among East Coast schools like Yale and the University of Georgia.

It wasn't until 1946 that students voted to oust the Bulldog and replace it with the now-iconic Sun Devil, partly due to repeated requests run by The State Press. Berk Anthony, a former Disney animator, was tasked with designing Sparky's appearance.

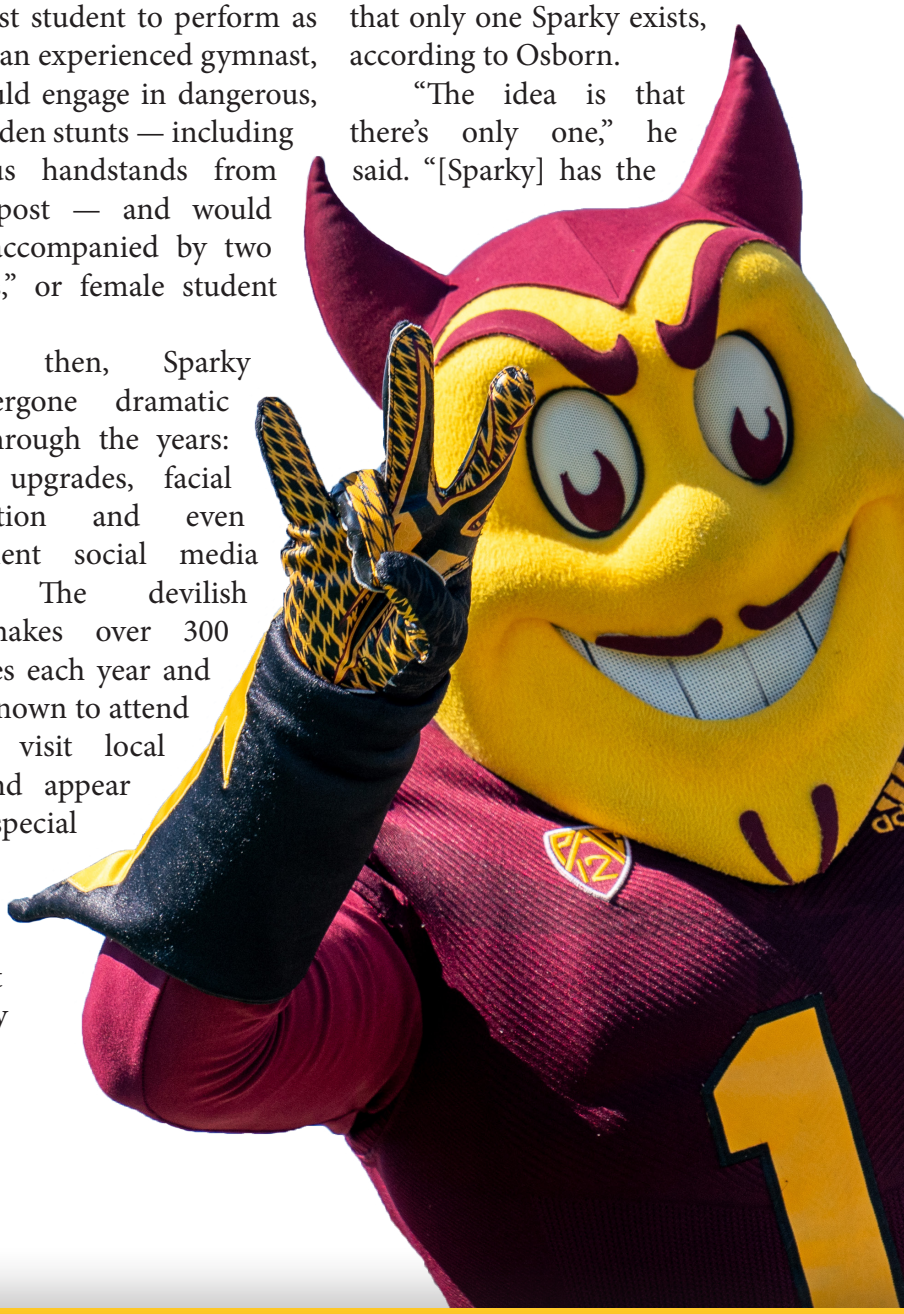
In 1951, Sparky appeared in person for the first time by attending an ASU game decked out in a satin jumpsuit, pitchfork in hand — a motif that has continued to the present. In fact, Sparky may have even been one of the first costumed sports mascots in history, according to ASU News.

Dick Jacobs, who died in 2020, was the first student to perform as Sparky. As an experienced gymnast, Jacobs would engage in dangerous, now forbidden stunts — including his famous handstands from the goal post — and would often be accompanied by two "Sparkettes," or female student acrobats.

Since then, Sparky has undergone dramatic changes through the years: wardrobe upgrades, facial reconstruction and even a prominent social media presence. The devilish mascot makes over 300 appearances each year and has been known to attend weddings, visit local schools and appear at other special events on request, as long as it won't potentially damage ASU's reputation.

Because Sparky is in such heavy demand, each campus, as well as some of ASU's largest schools and departments, has its own copy of the suit. This allows Sparky to attend events in different places at the drop of a hat, despite the University's attempts to maintain the illusion that only one Sparky exists, according to Osborn.

"The idea is that there's only one," he said. "[Sparky] has the



superhero powers to transport between events. He'll be at a football watch party, and an hour later, he'll be charging the field with the football team in California."

Although ASU intended for the Sun Devil to reference Arizona's blistering climate, some fans have viewed Sparky as offensive and even creepy. In 2020, thousands of fans petitioned for the "Sun Devils" moniker to become the "Sun Angels."

"Anyone with an ounce of Christian belief will have a hard time pledging allegiance to…being loyal to…or spending money with the devil," the petition stated. "With every T-shirt, souvenir and game ticket they sell, they solidify their consent that idolizing the devil is just fine with them."

Nothing has come of the petition, as a majority of fans disagree with the proposed change. But this was not the first time ASU has come under fire for Sparky. In 1987, St. John Paul II, the only pope to have visited Arizona, hosted an evening mass for over 75,000 people at what was then Sun Devil Stadium — under the condition that all Sparky advertising and references at the stadium be covered up.

Maintaining the brand

"He's really unique," said Jill Andrews, the University's chief brand officer of Enterprise Brand Strategy and Management. "We hold tightly to tradition because it's one that's rare. It's precious, and we want to preserve [Sparky's image] over time."

Andrews said she oversees the direction and "creative articulation" of the ASU brand, including the instances in which Sparky is used for commercial purposes. She also typically deals with requests to modify the mascot. When making decisions about Sparky's brand, Andrews must often ensure her choice will promote spirit, pride and tradition for ASU.

"You're never going to see Sparky on a grant proposal or academic document because that's not what the logo was intended for," Andrews said. "I've gotten questions like, 'Can you put a lab coat on Sparky?' and 'Can he wear swimming goggles?' I just have to say, 'No, Sparky is great how he is.'"

Anyone outside of Sun Devil Athletics and registered student groups seeking to use photos or icons of the mascot is required to receive approval and is restricted to using Sparky's likeness only in a way that reflects "tradition and university spirit," according to ASU's brand and marketing guide. Requests to use Sparky for fundraising, research communications and "conveying quality of student, faculty or alumni" will not be approved.

Typically, Andrews responds to requests from staff members or student groups to use Sparky, she said. Requests made by ASU bookstores and vendors to use Sparky for merchandise are filtered by the University's licensing office.

Despite the strict parameters surrounding Sparky's professional brand, Andrews and other representatives who oversee the mascot do not influence his online presence or reputation, she said.

"We don't closely monitor how [Sparky's] being conveyed on social media," Andrews said. "We're generally not managing the discussion around Sparky himself. We control the usage of the logo, so if Sparky is being used by an external party that is not licensed to do so, we'll work to dissolve that issue."

“SPARKY’S THE COOLEST GUY IN THE ROOM.”

—Talen Osborn

Inside the suit

"I told my scholarship adviser that my one goal was to be Sparky by my senior year," said Katelyn Andersen, an ASU alum. "He helped me with that goal and directed me to what people did to become Sparky."

Andersen is one of very few women to perform as Sparky throughout the mascot's lifetime, she said. Prior to tryouts, she recalls feeling intimidated by the lack of women who had donned the devil mask.

"Sparky is usually played by male gymnasts, so I was afraid I wouldn't make the cut," Andersen said. "But at the end of the day, it didn't matter. Anyone can try out [for Sparky]."

Unlike Osborn, Andersen decided to be a community Sparky after injuries she had previously sustained would have kept her from effectively performing as an athletic Sparky.

"I just opted to go for a public relations Sparky," Andersen said. "I mainly took pictures and went to events, which was perfect because I still got to be Sparky without subjecting myself to further injuries."

Andersen's previous experience as her high school's mascot did help her fill her new role as Sparky. But the job surprisingly extended beyond quick photo-ops, as the former student said she had to adjust her mannerisms to match the mascot's manly physique and "lady's man" reputation.

"He's very masculine, and I am not," Andersen said. "When I first started in the suit, I'd have my mom videotape me at events so I could see where I needed to improve."

For Andersen, the biggest challenge in emulating Sparky's devilish nature was retraining her naturally feminine stances.

"I noticed that when I was standing, my hip stood out to the side," Andersen said. "It was a big adjustment. I watched videos of previous Sparkys and tried to copy their signature moves. I even trained to walk like Sparky."

Although Andersen had to transform the way she carried herself to immerse herself in Sparky's role, the alum said having multiple Sparkys on the downtown Phoenix campus, where she worked, made the job less stressful. "For me, the job wasn't very draining," Andersen said. "The Downtown campus didn't use Sparky very much, but there's a couple people working on campus [ready to help]."

According to Osborn, Sparkys are paid a $500 stipend each semester and are expected to attend multiple events every week. "It's not that much compared to how many hours we're putting into the program," he said. "But we sign up for events because it's fun and enjoyable."

Those who become the mascot seem to enjoy the tricks and antics they can get up to while donning the suit, and this unique opportunity for playful fun as a maroon and gold Sun Devil often overshadows their long work hours. "Sparky was something I always wanted to do, so I was just happy to be a part of it," Andersen said. "I was grateful to have a little extra [money] here and there."

Andersen said she believes playing Sparky is a unique experience for anyone, but especially for die-hard Sun Devils. "Growing up and going to ASU games with my family, I was there to see the cheerleaders and Sparky," Andersen said. "These are memories I'll always remember because Sparky is so exciting. I hope that I emulated that when I was Sparky, and [I hope I] got kids excited about sports and school [like he did for me]."


ASU
Barrett
The Honors
College

Report

Demystifying Barrett

An exploration into the history of The Honors College and what it brings to the student experience

by Sam McGee
Photos by Hajin Lee

To many Sun Devils and future students, Barrett, The Honors College may seem like just an advertisement in a pamphlet — a mysterious ASU gimmick only really understood by the select students enrolled in it.

On its website, Barrett touts itself as a "community of scholars at all four of ASU's metropolitan Phoenix area campuses" that is "designed to complement your overall ASU experience by providing additional opportunities within your major or the university at large."

But what The Honors College actually is may still be unclear to those outside Barrett.

According to its website, Barrett offers its students access to over 600 "honors academic experiences" each semester — including the yearlong set of foundational courses called The Human Event — special topics courses on subjects in which Barrett faculty specialize and exclusive study abroad opportunities.

While some students have embraced Barrett's curricula, not all students have had the same experiences. For the students in Barrett who enjoy the variety of courses and experiences offered by The Honors College, there are also students who dislike the price they must pay for these exclusive offerings — from a more demanding workload to higher expectations and weightier responsibilities.

Barrett's history

According to faculty who have worked at Barrett for decades, The Honors College hailed from relatively humble beginnings — given that it's now an academic behemoth encompassing thousands of students and dozens of faculty.

"When I first came here in 1992, I became the third…of a three-person faculty," said Michael Stanford, an Honors Faculty Fellow and professor at Barrett. "The student body couldn't have been more than six or seven hundred."

"We were tiny," said Jacquie Lynch, another Honors Faculty Fellow and Barrett professor. "When I started in 2001, we had under 2,000 students, as opposed to our almost 8,000 now. [Among] the faculty, when I joined it, there [were] maybe seven of us."

Established in 1988, Barrett has now grown to house over 7,200 students and a community of more than 20,000 alumni. It employs 135 faculty and staff members, with nearly 60% of them working full time.

Although the college came from simple beginnings, it was then that much of the foundation of the core Barrett experience was developed.

"In some ways, it's very much like it is now," Stanford said. "We had a course called The Human Event, which was required of all freshmen, and it was basically a Great Ideas course modeled on the kind of similar courses at some of the best private universities — Chicago, Stanford, Columbia."

But Barrett still needed to grow to better fulfill its own and the University's missions, according to Lynch.

"[Growth] went hand in hand with ASU's charter for inclusivity, and so we wanted to make [Barrett] available to a lot more students," she said.

Despite Barrett requiring its students to take The Human Event sequence, some faculty members still felt its curriculum lacked

educational depth for an honors college. But change would come — in the form of a mandate from ASU President Michael Crow.

Barrett grows

"When Michael Crow gave us a mandate to grow The Honors College to 10% of the undergraduate class, we hired a lot more people and got a lot more resources that way," Lynch said. "It was an explosion of growth."

The order — which sought to have 1,600 incoming first-year students enrolled in Barrett on the Tempe campus by fall 2015, according to Nicole Greason, director of marketing and public relations for Barrett — led to a variety of impactful changes.

One involved the creation of a faculty mentoring program, which is in place to this day. In the program, Honors College faculty participate in a two-year training period, during which they visit other Barrett professors' classes and give each other feedback, according to Lynch.

"It's why I can be teaching some of the same classes 22 years later with the same enthusiasm," she said. "[Class curricula are] always changing, and we're always learning from each other."

In addition, Barrett grew and diversified its student base. Initially, the college was mostly filled with English and philosophy students, according to Lynch.

"Now the pendulum has swung to the point where we have very high percentages of STEM and business students who wouldn't necessarily otherwise get the kind of interdisciplinary studies that the honors curriculum offers," she said.

Course curricula also became more diverse once many Barrett professors introduced non-Western texts to their classes in an effort to teach students about key ideas from civilizations worldwide, as opposed to just Western civilizations.

"It's more stimulating to me because I get to read more widely in a lot of different cultures, rather than restrict myself and my students to reading [Western books]," Stanford said. "I would say that we've advanced, we moved on, we've progressed."

Recently, Barrett has focused its expansion efforts on online education. In fall 2021, Barrett launched its online program, which welcomed its first student cohort.

Benjamin Fong, a Barrett professor teaching online sections, said the program has since "gone swimmingly." The level of student engagement he observed in his online classes surprised him, given the time zone differences that divided his students. Currently, he teaches a class from 6–8:45 p.m. MST, and some students in the class live on the East Coast.

"One would expect the kind of situation that by the end of the seminar, students are kind of checked out a little bit…It's extremely late on the East Coast," Fong said. "But I just haven't experienced that at all — my students stay engaged throughout the seminar until the very end, and oftentimes, they want to go over."

Honorable devils

Barrett's unique curriculum has elicited mixed reactions from students enrolled in the college — from wholehearted enthusiasm to lukewarm ambivalence to outright opposition.

Some students, like Hannah Lennon, a sophomore majoring in global studies, have thrived as a result of the courses, experiences and academic environments offered by Barrett.

"It's been incredible — to be surrounded by such a motivated and inspiring group of students has really impacted my college career," she said. "Every day I go to class, and I see my fellow peers in Barrett, and they just inspire me in so many ways because they're so dedicated to their studies and really wanting to make a difference in this world."

For Lennon, Barrett's approach to learning helped her develop important academic and professional skills. The Human Event, which was one of her favorite classes she's taken, was invaluable to her educational experience at the University.

"We read literature that involves science and philosophy and history and culture and religion," Lennon said. "And you're presenting that information to a group of students coming from various majors — you synthesize that information, you come to conclusions, you make arguments. I ultimately feel like that embodies what…Barrett inspires out of their students."

With aspirations to one day work in health care, she found Barrett's interdisciplinary studies have primed her to be a more understanding and flexible provider.

"I recognize the importance of the learning process and considering other perspectives — challenging what I know to be true — in order to make myself a better health care provider," Lennon said.

For other students, like Sarah Brown, a junior majoring in film, being a part of Barrett has harmed their educational experiences more than it's enriched them.

Brown said she dropped out of Barrett at the end of her freshman year due to stress from classes and anxiety about the required honors thesis. According to Brown, she struggled as a freshman to keep up with the additional workload Barrett brings to students' plates.

"We had to do three rough drafts and three argumentative essays…that were between five to seven pages each," Brown said. "I felt like that was just a lot to introduce everyone in The Honors College to.

"I probably would have stayed if that was something I could do more later on in my college experience, rather than just the beginning of my freshman year."

In addition, she felt daunted by the expectations she felt were set for her as a Barrett student and the way faculty responded to a situation in which she was reprimanded. Brown and her friends had gotten in trouble in Gordon Commons during her freshman year, and when meeting with Barrett faculty about the incident, she said she felt "intimidated."

"[T]hey said something along the lines of how being in [B]arrett meant we had to uphold more reputation and we had more to lose in a sense," Brown wrote in a message.

Despite these negative experiences, she said she does regret leaving Barrett.

"I know it would be better for my resume to say that I was in The Honors College for more than a year," Brown said. "It'd be better for me careerwise and academically."

Furthermore, Brown recommended that new students stressed with the heavier workload Barrett brings should work to push

through it as best they can, rather than leave the college entirely.

"Once you get past the hard parts in the beginning, it should go more smoothly from there," she said. "I wish I had stuck through it and just tried to get all my work done then because now, I do have regrets about it."

Other students, like Jace Clark, a senior majoring in computer information systems and supply chain management, harbor mixed feelings about their time in Barrett. While Clark has had doubts about Barrett, ultimately, he said he is thankful he decided to remain in the program.

"There was a time for a while where I was like, 'The thesis is gonna be too much for me. I might drop it,'" Clark said. "But I figured it was probably worthwhile to just stick it out regardless, and the thesis wasn't nearly as bad as I thought."

Through all his doubts, what he said kept him in Barrett was his experiences with the honors faculty.

"I think [the] Barrett faculty are all really nice — they've helped me when I've had issues," he said.

Through the years, Barrett has undergone dramatic change, and it's certain to evolve even more in the future. But through it all, what Barrett itself means has also shifted from student to student — the Barrett experience is fluid, amorphous and in constant flux, defined by the students themselves.

drybar®

Drybar® Shops are so much more than just hot air.

It's about happiness and confidence.

Book the best blowout in town!

scan to learn more and book your appointment

Tempe at The Watermark

410 N. Scottsdale Rd Tempe, AZ 85288
480-877-1010

Feature

Sudan will not be forgotten

From displacement to a lack of international media coverage to working to ensure the world won't forget about their country, Sudanese people and Sudanese Americans are piecing together what's been torn apart

by Fatima Gabir
Designs by Monica Navarro

I'll always remember the way my heart dropped when the gut-wrenching news came out that fighting had broken out in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan.

Worry burned through my veins as my mind stirred over my family's safety and the uncertainty of Sudan's future. They were questions that had no real answers then. Months and battles and bodies later, I've still come up empty.

I've visited Sudan regularly since I was seven. Some of my childhood experiences there were worlds away from the mundane life I lived in the U.S. Throughout my time there, I would drift down the Nile River on boat rides. Not to brag, but that's not something you do every day.

I still fondly treasure memories of lunch with my mom's side of the family, when I would eat a variety of Sudanese and North African dishes, like *fūl, mulukhiya* and *mullah*. Eating them in the States will never feel like eating them in Sudan.

Right after, I would spend the night with my cousins on my dad's side because they were closer to my age. And if I weren't there, I would play with my cousin's small kids, who would visit from Australia. Since then, I've built long-distance relationships with them over 8,000 miles away from my home in the States.

But April 15 changed these memories forever. On that day, fighting erupted in Khartoum between the Sudanese Armed Forces, the country's military, and the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces, sparking a power struggle that worsened a devastating humanitarian crisis in Sudan. The two groups are still fighting over control of the country and its resources.

Seeing Sudan in shambles has shattered my heart into a million pieces. I still wonder how long the war will drag on and when the world will stop turning a blind eye to the country I love. Sudanese people around the world are mourning the significant losses our country has sustained. But like Sudan itself, we remain standing courageously to ensure the world does not forget about our struggle.

The real war versus global perception

Sudan seemed to be headed toward a path to democracy after the fall of former President Omar al-Bashir's 30-year regime in April 2019, which was riddled with humanitarian crises — the dictator is wanted by the International Criminal Court for 10 counts of crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide. Initially, the military, led by Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, temporarily ruled the country after al-Bashir was ousted.

Beginning with Sudan's 2019 Constitutional Declaration and 2020 Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan, the country embarked on a steady climb toward democracy. In 2019, the civilians and military formed the Transitional Sovereignty Council, a power-sharing partnership that would temporarily reign until democratic elections were slated to be held in 2022. Al-Burhan then became the council's president.

In October 2021, however, al-Burhan led the Sudanese military in a coup to seize power from

the civilian representatives in the council, interrupting the country's charted course toward democracy. After dissolving the council, al-Burhan repeatedly said the military would return authority to elected civilians. Nearly a month after the coup, Sudan's prime minister was reinstated in November 2021 when he signed a controversial deal to reestablish the council and once again share power with the military and al-Burhan.

As part of the deal, the prime minister's role dramatically shrank, and he resigned less than six weeks later amid mass protests against his deal with the military. This left de facto control of Sudan to al-Burhan. Now, al-Burhan is leading the SAF in the war against his former second-in-command, who turned against him and is now leading the RSF against his forces to win control over Sudan.

Sara Elhassan, also known as @BSonblast on social media, is a Sudanese American political writer who provides daily updates on X and Instagram to "fill the gap" in international media coverage of the war. She gathers news from media outlets, grassroots resistance committees and emergency response teams in Sudan. These local organizations usually post information about fighting or program initiatives happening in their communities. On-the-ground activists in Sudan will also contact her to relay information.

Elhassan said she has had to fill the information gap herself because the world has falsely viewed Sudan and Africa as places where turmoil is unending, typical and even normalized. The sudden shock value of the war didn't affect non-Sudanese people because they had a preconceived notion that the country's citizens always lived in conflict even though shock was the immediate reaction for Sudanese people.

"Sudan doesn't really have a big presence in the global consciousness because for 30 years, we were completely isolated from the world," Elhassan said, referring to al-Bashir's regime. "Some people didn't know where Sudan was until Rihanna posted about it in 2019. I think it's difficult for the world to care when they have no frame of reference for people they don't know."

Major American media outlets have failed to televise and distribute significant information about the conflict in Sudan, according to The Nation. The lack of global media coverage of the war may even promote the perception that the conflict is improving, according to a United Nations memo. In turn, the U.S. and the rest of the world have responded slowly to Sudan's spiraling humanitarian crisis — even as the bodies pile up and civilians' lives are uprooted.

"There's a lot of stuff behind the scenes that make it difficult for the war not only to stop but also for people to know what is happening," Elhassan said. "What role has the media played? Little to none."

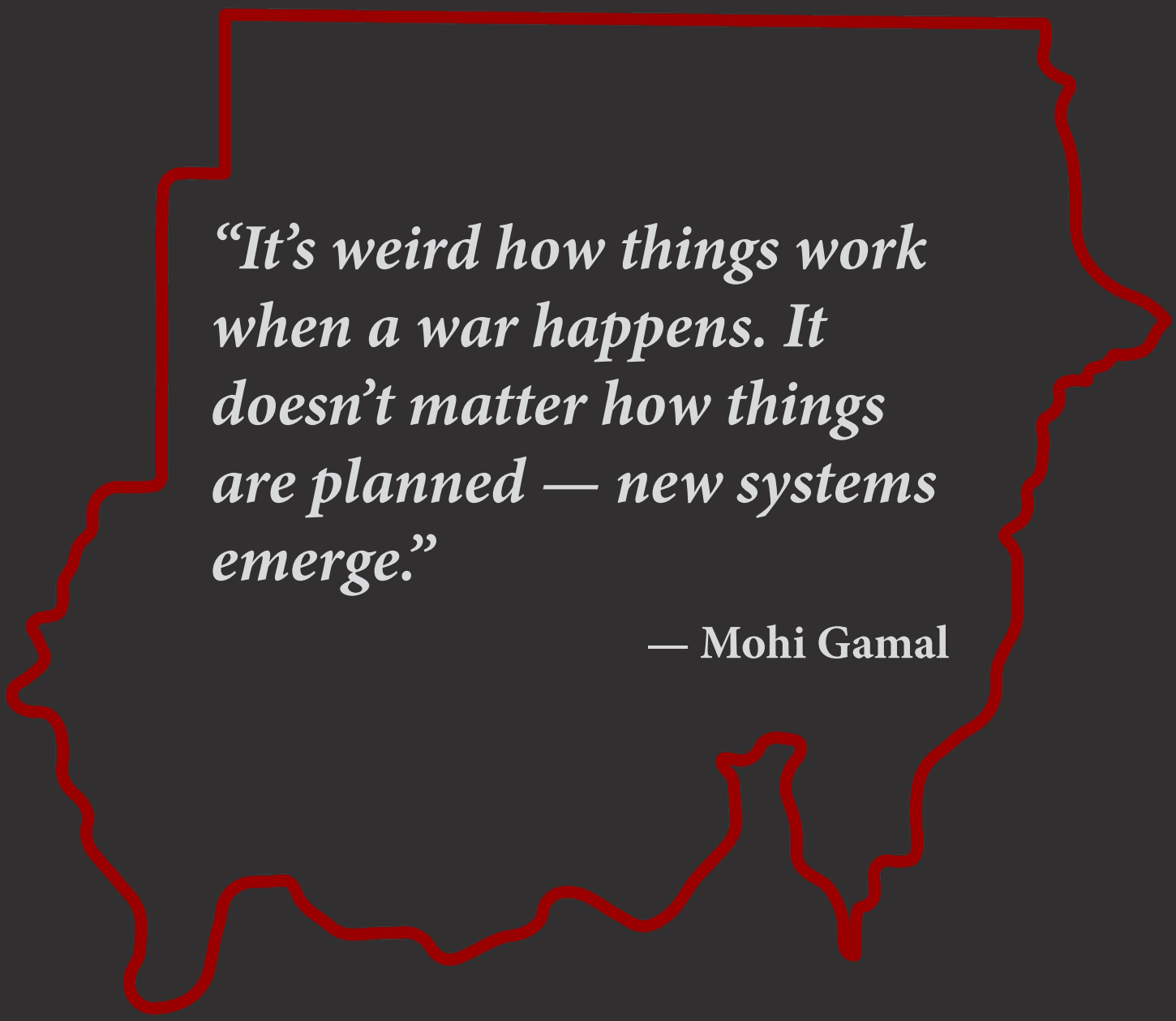
As of this May, about 24.7 million people, or roughly half of Sudan's population, need humanitarian assistance, yet 70% of the country's medical facilities are inoperational due to insufficient supplies and staff, as well as civilians' inability to safely reach them. The SAF and RSF have destroyed hospitals, factories and infrastructure, halting work and severely limiting vital resources, including food.

The journey away from home

Since the conflict broke out, over 4 million people have been internally displaced, and that number continues to rise. As of September, over 1 million people have left Sudan as refugees and migrated to neighboring countries, like Egypt, Chad, South Sudan and Ethiopia.

April 15 began as a seemingly typical spring Saturday morning in Khartoum. Many were getting ready for work, but my cousin, Mohi Gamal was at home when he heard strange noises from far away. He didn't know if they were bombs, construction or something else entirely. "I joked to myself, 'It started. They're fighting each other,'" he said.

He dismissed the unfamiliar sounds after noticing a landscaper noisily fixing the patio outside. While talking with the landscaper, however, the same sounds boomed



“It’s weird how things work when a war happens. It doesn’t matter how things are planned — new systems emerge.”

— Mohi Gamal

through the air again. It was then that he realized they weren't coming from the landscaper. The fighting really had begun.

After this seismic realization, Mohi, his sister Attiat and his mom, my Aunt Amira, received a phone call from my uncle to stay inside, downstairs and away from the windows.

It was the one day Mohi didn't make his weekly shopping trip. As a result, their family missed the chance to stock up because they now couldn't leave the house — and they didn't know when the next time they'd be able to would be. Endless questions about the challenges they would now have to face popped into their minds.

"How long is it going to be?" Mohi said. "How do you move around? How do you contact people?"

On the first day, they had electricity, but by the next day, it was cut off. The noises outside were deafening. The fighting came in fits — it would begin before dawn, quiet down by 4 p.m., and then start again toward the evening. After enduring this for five days, they realized they couldn't live in these conditions.

One of the first areas struck by fighting was Khartoum's airport, which would have provided civilians with the best route to safety. The airport was close to Mohi's house. I remember sleeping over when I was little and hearing airplanes zoom by the bedroom.

The airport was also a vital resource for Aunt Amira. Mohi was concerned for his mom because some of the medications she needed weren't available in Sudan amid the fighting, so they were hoping to travel to Egypt or England to get them. But now the airport was destroyed.

Eventually, Mohi's family moved to my uncle's in-laws' house in a different part of Khartoum where it was calmer. Rumors spread that if you drove in a big car, the RSF or soldiers would hijack it, so six of them packed into a small car with their bags and headed west.

Using social media, they were able to determine the best routes to take to avoid the fighting. Thankfully, they safely made it to my uncle's in-laws' house, where shops were still open and kids were playing on the streets. "This is a different world," Mohi said.

When they first arrived, they were thankful to once again have power to charge their phones and watch the news. But bizarrely, Mohi said, the power went out that night. The first night was hot — with no fans, sleeping was difficult, and Mohi tossed and turned.

Mohi's family stayed for four nights. By the fourth day, the fighting drew close, and a bomb razed a neighboring house to the ground — thankfully, it was empty. The in-laws were considering leaving Khartoum, so Mohi's family decided their next safe haven would be Egypt.

After the warring factions called a ceasefire to allow citizens to evacuate, Mohi, Aunt Amira and Attiat returned home to collect important things, like their passports. When they arrived, it was the first time in over a week that they had been home. It was too quiet, and the streets were eerily empty.

Traveling to Cairo was a tough journey. First, Mohi's family had to determine which bus stations to depart from — some of the buses could hold 50 people. They learned the bus would pick civilians up for a fee, but sometimes, bus drivers wouldn't even show up because they found a better price. Now that the war had broken out, Mohi's family was living in a new world ruled by uncertainty.

"It's weird how things work when a war happens," Mohi recalled. "It doesn't matter how things are planned — new systems emerge."

They were finally able to catch a bus going to Halfa, a district in Sudan near the Egyptian border. It took an hour and a half just to get out of Khartoum on the safest routes. The bus driver planned the trip poorly; the bus ran out of gas, so they had to spend the night on the bus.

"The journey with all these things was annoying," Mohi said. "I mean, my expectations were very low. Really low. But you just keep calm and carry on."

The trip to Halfa took two days. Once they arrived, there were no hotels or apartments to rent. Instead, travelers fleeing the fighting would sleep in mosques or even schools.

Finally, Mohi's family was able to reach Cairo by ferry. Once they arrived, Mohi's brother, who lived in England, booked them a luxurious hotel, which gave them a chance to go sightseeing — well deserved after a tough and perilous trip to safety.

'The worst experience anyone could go through'

For some, it wasn't as easy to cross the border from Sudan to Egypt. In June, after Mohi's family had already reached Cairo, the Egyptian government required all Sudanese people to obtain visas to enter the country. This new rule expanded a prior rule that required only Sudanese males aged 16-49 to have a visa to enter Egypt. According

to Human Rights Watch, this violated "international standards by creating unreasonable and life-threatening delays in processing asylum seekers."

As a result of the rules, my cousins Osama and Hashim Shakir had to stay behind in Halfa longer than anticipated. They were stuck there for 43 days, living in a classroom and sleeping on the floor while awaiting visas to enter Egypt.

"I don't know how to explain this," Osama said. "It was the worst experience anyone could go through."

Their water supply was dwindling, so they resorted to using tanks to fill up on water from the Nile, which wasn't ideal. There was a response committee in Halfa that always managed to get Osama and his family what they needed. But there was no hospital — only a small clinic. When people were seeking medical advice and doctors, Osama was one of the few medical professionals available.

After two months of the war, Osama finally obtained the coveted visa he needed in June and embarked on the long journey to Cairo. Now, he and his family are waiting for the fighting in Sudan to die down.

But just because they're away from it all doesn't mean the challenges have stopped for Osama and his family. Now, they're facing even more changes in Egypt, including finding new jobs and moving houses.

"This is not as important as the sadness of being taken out from your own home," Osama said. "Life has difficulties. [Sudan] was the first place to call home."

Within the diaspora

The Sudanese community abroad has reeled with shock in response to the violent events that took place on April 15, said Tarteel Alimam, executive administrator for the Arizona chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the largest Muslim civil rights advocacy group in the country. When the fighting broke out in April, CAIR declared its support for the people of Sudan.

Unfortunately, Alimam, who is Sudanese America, did not have the luxury of sitting with her emotions, she said. Her impulses drove her to act because "Sudan needed us," referring to Sudanese people abroad who could raise awareness about the conflict from afar.

"It's almost too easy for the rest of the world to turn a blind eye," Alimam said. "I feel like it's my responsibility to ensure that the world hears and understands what's happening in Sudan."

She processed her emotional distress by posting on social media, raising awareness and collecting

information from people in Sudan about the war.

It's common for Sudanese people within the diaspora to feel powerless as we witness our family members and friends in Sudan fight to survive such a traumatic event.

Heba Saad, a Sudanese American junior studying business entrepreneurship and finance, was also overcome by shock when news about the war broke. Her cousin sent her a video of a bomb exploding near a Sudanese hospital. For her, it felt unfathomable that this was happening in Sudan.

"Why did this happen during my lifetime?" Saad said. "During their lifetime right here, right now?"

As a Sudanese American woman, she often feels that her identity is fetishized because of terms like "Nubian queen" and "Kushite princess." Yet some people still don't even know where Sudan is and what is happening in the country.

"There's not a lot of humanization around Sudanese people's culture, history, struggles or anything," Saad said. "It's just, 'Oh, more Africans or Middle Easterners killing themselves.' It's just disappointing."

Ahmed Wali, a senior studying justice studies, adamantly believes Sudan does not receive enough media attention abroad.

"The eyes are not on Sudan like they should be," he said. "We're running away from the main problem. War is still happening. People are still dying, and the world needs to put their vision back on what's happening in Sudan."

Months have passed since Sudanese people woke up to the booming sounds of battle. As in many international conflicts, many still don't know what's to come. Now, we are living in a new world of uncertainty.

What is happening in Sudan isn't normal. I am appalled by how the international community has treated and responded — or rather, failed to treat and respond — to it. The only reason why this story is even being written is because I am a Sudanese American journalist. Elhassan and Alimam have to use their online platforms because non-Sudanese people won't.

I believe Cronkite News, The Arizona Republic and even The State Press had the opportunity to publish more nuanced reporting on the conflict before me. Activists like Alimam and Elhassan are based right here in Arizona.

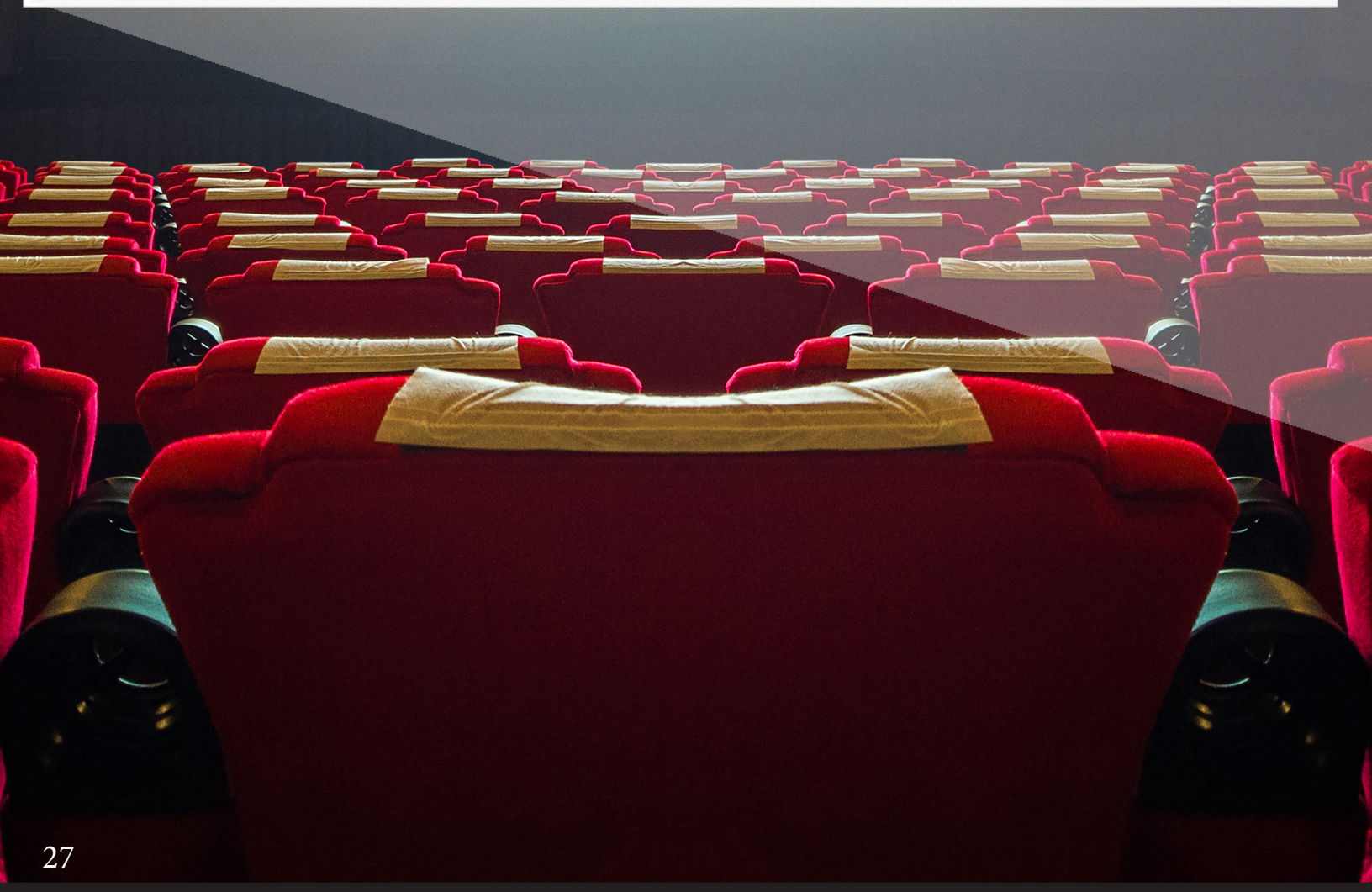
At the same time, I cannot blame only them when it falls on the rest of the world for turning a blind eye. If we don't speak up, who will tell our stories? Who will know what we did to fight back, and who will remember our everyday battles to survive?

Report

Hollywood dreams just out of reach

Recent changes in a tumultuous entertainment industry have given current and past film students renewed hope

by Audrey Eagerton
Illustrations by Andrea Ramirez
Designs by Sydney Huyge



Imagine you've been dreaming your whole life of working in Hollywood, with all its glittering promises of fame and fortune. The mere possibility that a famous actor will say a line or joke you wrote, or the chance that you'll star in or direct the next blockbuster film fuels your drive. The dream of making a living from doing something you love — something creative and fulfilling — continuously propels you forward, even amid box-office bombs and audition rejections.

Then, streaming services enter the industry, and Hollywood's landscape dramatically changes before your eyes — wages are cut, residuals are eliminated, and contracts are changed. Then, technological advances change the industry again, and the company executives who make millions — or billions — from the shows and movies you helped create suddenly think a rom-com written by a robot is bound to be the next big thing. With every tech update, the dream continuously slips out of your grasp.

After 148 days, the Writers Guild of America, a joint collaboration between two unions representing writers in the entertainment industry, ended its strike on Sept. 27, capping off the second-longest Hollywood walkout in history. In the three-year agreement struck by the WGA and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, the trade association that negotiates contracts for Hollywood's major studios, writers made massive advances in areas they fought for — compensation, length of employment, staff size and usage of artificial intelligence.

Meanwhile, the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists' monthslong strike continues, as the latest round of the union's negotiations with the AMPTP were struck down on Oct. 11. The turbulence has left many recent graduates and current students at ASU's Sidney Poitier New American Film School concerned about their future careers — and the landscape of Hollywood itself.

Understanding the strikes

It takes Chris LaMont and his writing partner four months to produce a script. That's four months of spitballing ideas and drawing inspiration from their own lives and imaginations. It's also four months of unpaid work — that's just how Hollywood works, said LaMont, a card-carrying member of the WGA and professor at the Sidney Poitier Film School.

But during the nearly five months the WGA was on strike, bringing the industry to a grinding halt, LaMont and his partner couldn't work on any scripts.

"We've got scripts [completed prior to the strike]," LaMont said. "We had a script with a producer that's attached, with a director attached to the project, and…every studio in town was waiting to see it, [but] they couldn't look at it for five months.

"The heat has kind of died down on all of our projects, so now it's a question of…jumpstarting everything again. But when…we have two scripts that are basically sitting around that have been waiting for the marketplace, that's eight months of work that has nothing to show for it right now."

The inability for screenwriters to meet with producers and sell their scripts led to many members losing their health insurance, including LaMont and his partner. The guild requires members to sell roughly $40,000 worth of scripts within a calendar year to qualify for health insurance. Those who weren't able to sell any because of the strike were dropped from their insurance.

Now that the WGA strike has ended and a new contract was ratified on Oct. 9, health insurance will be extended through the end of the year for screenwriters, replacing the original Oct. 1 expiration date. LaMont said things are looking up for him and his partner as they have

started to contact studios and regain the momentum they lost.

But Hollywood's future still remains uncertain as the SAG-AFTRA strike continues. While the WGA strike put existing screenwriters' careers on hold, LaMont said it was recent film graduates who were among the hardest hit by the strike's effects.

One step forward, two steps back

This spring, Eden Prieve was named the Outstanding Undergraduate for the Herberger Institute of Design and the Arts when she graduated from Sidney Poitier. In that moment, she should have felt on top of the world.

But when the WGA strike hit a week before graduation, she felt more stressed than excited about her future career. Once she graduated, making her professional dreams a reality proved nearly impossible as the strike loomed overhead. It meant some of the only jobs she could find were outside the screenwriting field, as working for films during this time would undermine the entire purpose of the strike.

She now works for ShotDeck, the largest searchable film image database in the world. As a tagger, she watches films and supplies key information on individual shots for the database.

"I was very nervous because I knew this was a job that's in the industry but didn't cross the picket line," Prieve said. "I knew that there are very limited options for this… and I was really lucky to land that. But it's a remote job, and it's not in writing."

Chloe Rudolph, another recent Sidney Poitier graduate, works as a talent agent assistant at Signature Models and Talent in Scottsdale, an agency franchised by SAG-AFTRA. There, she's responsible for connecting her clients — actors — with projects they'd be suited for.

She started as an intern with the agency and planned to work there only until graduation, when she would set off for Los Angeles — "every film kid's dream," she said.

"Before the strikes got announced, I was applying to all sorts of postings," Rudolph said. "But as soon as the strikes hit, the job boards went silent."

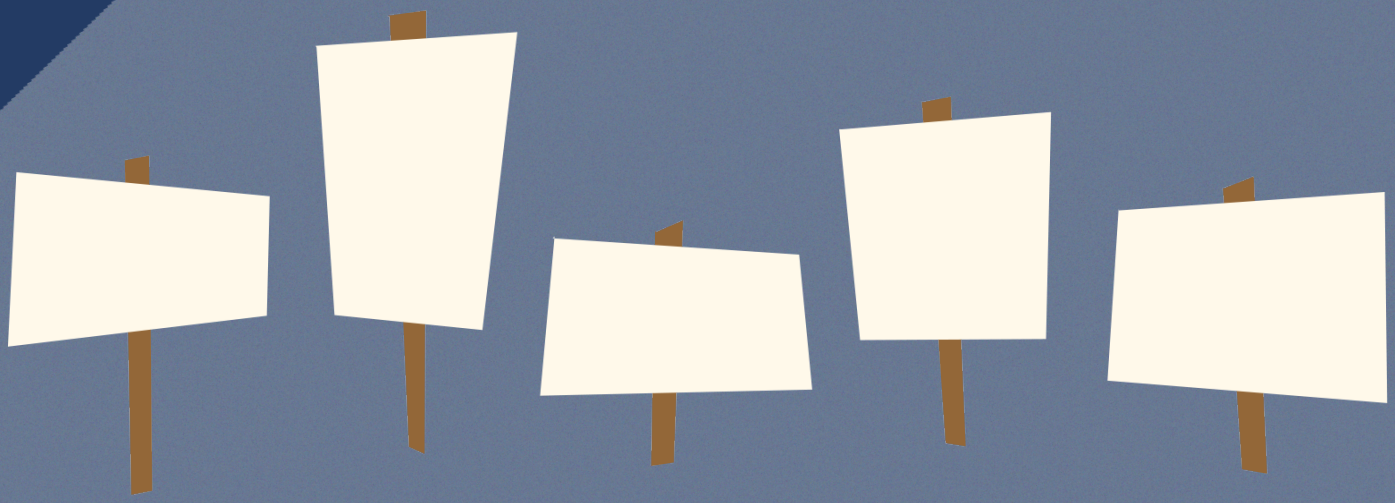
While Prieve and Rudolph said they are proud of the writers and actors for striking and want them to achieve success, they and their fellow film graduates have been left in limbo — though they're teeming with the desire to work and create, the opportunities simply aren't there.

Recently, Prieve asked her former professors how long it would take for the industry to whir back to life again. They told her to wait out the silence for just nine more months.

"This is because people are not just going to pick up exactly where they left off — it's going to take time," Prieve said. "Anything takes time to adapt to the new contract."

Staying creative

The mailroom that Sidney Poitier graduate Joe Nixon dreams of working in is only a block away from the coffee shop where he currently makes lattes for roughly



35 hours a week. For now, Nixon just works at a Starbucks in Beverly Hills. The illustrious mailroom in question is the one at the celebrity-endorsed Creative Artists Agency, where he hopes to climb the ranks to become a screenwriter.

But brewing espresso around the clock to afford an LA apartment doesn't leave much time for Nixon to practice his craft. In fact, scraping together the time and energy to be creative is something many recent film graduates have struggled with in recent months.

During the week, he spends five hours of his free time co-producing a short film for a nonprofit organization. Though he does care about the project, it's simply not work he is passionate about.

"I wouldn't really qualify it as creative work," Nixon said. "It's more like busy work. I spend probably an average of two hours on screenwriting and personal work."

At the beginning of the WGA strike, Nixon doggedly continued to search for opportunities that would bring him closer to his dream, but like many others, he turned up dry.

"I did try super hard to get a job," Nixon said. "I have a list, a spreadsheet, that I've built up for every job that I applied to, and it's over 150 jobs long. That kind of demoralized me a little bit. So I'm hyping myself back up to kind of get back into the job search."

When Prieve isn't watching films for her job, she's in her room trying to muster up enough creativity to write the script of the feature film she's been working on since her senior year.

"It's been hard for me to come up with new ideas," Prieve said. "I feel really stuck and very trapped by the situation.

"You would think all this downtime would be a great time — I can just write and really hone my craft, and when it starts back up, I'll be good. But feeling so discouraged at the moment makes it really hard."

Young filmmakers like Nixon and Prieve are longing to be in those creative spaces. But as the SAG-AFTRA strike continues in Hollywood, jobs are limited, and graduates have to remain patient.

"This is a really hard time, and I think it would be foolish to act like it's not scary," Prieve said. "But I think the best thing you can do is to treat job applications like your job — applying every single day, looking at things. And you just have to remember… how much you love it."

Looking Forward

Film classrooms at ASU have swirled with talks about the strikes and their implications, according to Victoria Gauza, a sophomore studying film and media production.

For current students like Gauza, the strikes were an inspiring and eye-opening introduction to the realities of the entertainment industry.

"I found how unfair it is," she said. "It took a whole strike…for us to get even a shred of recognition even though, you know, we are the backbone of the industry.

"I found that I can't ever settle for any less than what I offer because at the end of the day, writing is a passion that takes all your heart and soul, and it's such a difficult thing to do."

In the WGA negotiations, the guild was able to protect screenwriters' craft by giving writers more control over where and how they want to implement AI in their process, as well as holding companies accountable if they use AI.

Yet, AI remains something of a wild card in Hollywood. One of the reasons the SAG-AFTRA negotiations with the AMPTP were struck down was that the AMPTP pushed to allow companies to hire background actors, pay them for only one day's work, scan their likenesses and use these scans for the rest of the project without providing them with any additional compensation.

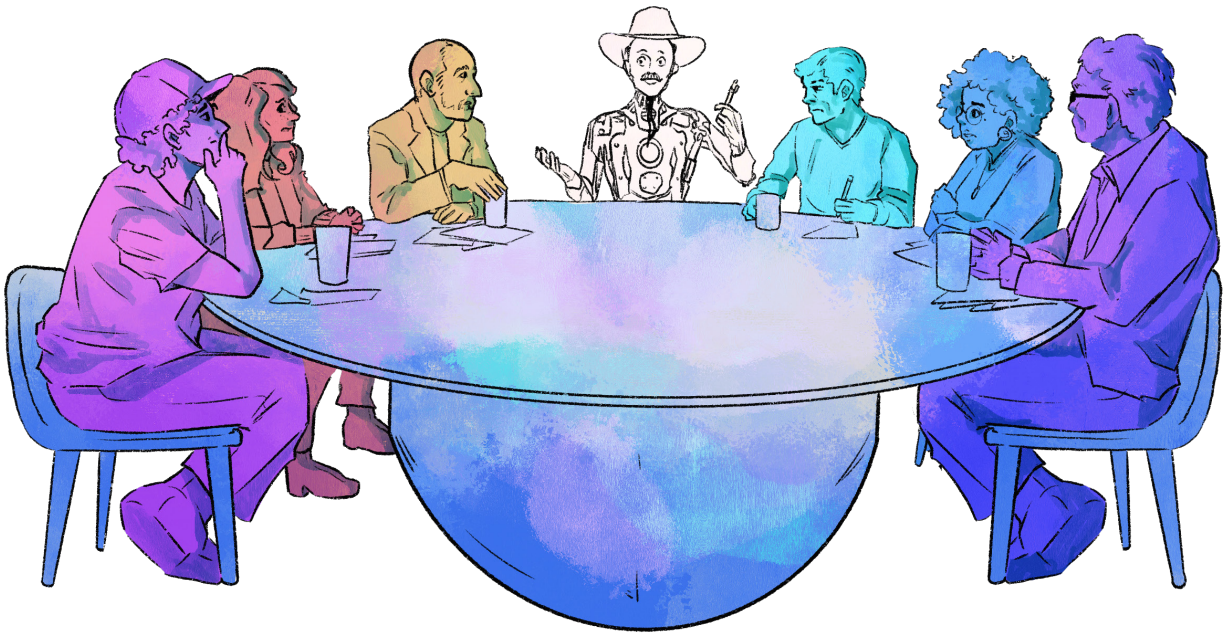
"I firmly believe AI could not write half the movies that I've loved or the TV shows that I love," Gauza said. "It can't bring the same impact because at the end of the day, it's only drawing from existing properties.

"It takes away the creative aspect that makes film, television, acting, writing — all that stuff. It takes away what makes it so special."

Protecting the humanity at the heart of filmmakers' work has been a core issue throughout the strikes. But it's one the unions are willing to fight for because the answer to this question holds so much sway over the future of the industry.

"It made me feel amazing to see all these screenwriters…standing up for a future that I want to pursue and seeing them fight not only for a future for themselves, but a future for people like me," Gauza said.

"They're picketing for the future screenwriters so that they would not have to go through what [striking screenwriters] did. [It's] really moving to see that the people [who] come before me are so passionate about paving the way for a better future for me and my fellow classmates."



Report

‘Paying to be unpaid’

Climbing the career ladder can be a precarious journey for many students, and often, an unpaid internship is the bottom rung. What they lose in the process goes beyond just a lack of pay

by Madeline Nguyen
Illustrations by Andrea Ramirez

This summer, no one saw Lauren Bly. At least, no one saw the Lauren Bly they knew before.

Before this summer, the junior studying journalism had never experienced a panic attack — a world-crumbling explosion of pent-up anxiety so overwhelming she initially mistook it for a heart attack. Before this summer, she hadn’t sought the help of a mental health professional in years, and she wasn’t fainting “all the time” from stress-triggered flare-ups associated with her dysautonomia — a nervous system disorder that impacts her body’s automatic processes, like heart rate and blood pressure. Before this summer, she wasn’t driven to utter exhaustion, her body so thoroughly sapped of energy that moving her limbs felt like dragging them against rushing water.

“You look like you’re killing yourself,” Bly’s mom told her. “You look like the skeleton of a person that I knew, like a shell. What are you doing?”

Before this summer, she had never held an internship.

When Bly was contacted about an open internship at a Phoenix area TV station, the perfect work opportunity seemed to fall right into her hands: the chance to snag coveted on-air time as a student journalist and hone the skills that class projects simply couldn’t provide.

She didn’t realize the internship would be unpaid until she was face-to-face with her employment contract. She took the job anyway, despite the $1,000 price tag to register the internship for summer session credit and roughly $80 a week for gas commuting to the studio.

“Experience — that was all I thought about,” Bly said.

She thought she could feasibly earn money by working a variety of odd jobs — from dog walking to a paid position at Arizona PBS — outside the roughly 10 hours a week she was told she’d work as an intern. But 10 hours on paper became up to 18 hours in reality.

The loans she took out to pay rent in absence of money she couldn’t cobble together added yet another weight. The constant grind of taking

25 course credits combined with 45-hour work weeks, accounting for all her jobs, pushed her to the brink mentally and physically.

After this summer, Bly swore she would never accept another unpaid internship again, regardless of any promises of insider connections, exclusive experiences or an irresistible resume.

"I can't work myself to death," she said. "They think we can because we're young…and these people take advantage of like, 'These are young students, so they want to get all the experience they can get. And we're going to work them like a horse.'"

A legal blind spot?

Now that Americans are more educated than ever before, a college diploma is no longer a golden ticket into the workforce. Hands-on internship experience has become a key rung for young professionals to climb on the career ladder to access higher-level — or even entry-level — positions in many fields. In fact, internship experience ranked as the most influential factor for employers in challenging hiring decisions, according to a 2022 report by the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

As internship experience has become more valuable, many interns have had to work without pay in order to attain a coveted spot in the professional world. Last year, nearly one in two U.S. interns were unpaid.

Even though unpaid internships have become exponentially more common, according to Investopedia, these types of positions have polarized the workforce. In recent years, numerous high-profile companies across a wide range of industries — from Condé Nast to NBCUniversal to Elite Model Management — have been struck by dozens of lawsuits initiated by unpaid interns fighting for workplace protections. Around 2009, the Department of Labor also started investigating unpaid internships that promised to compensate interns with experience, instead of actual pay.

While unpaid internships are legal under the Fair Labor Standards Act, a Great Depression-era law meant to protect workers' rights, including fair compensation, there are regulations in place to protect interns.

To meet the FLSA's standards and be legal, unpaid internships offered by private employers must serve the intern's interests rather than those of the employer. This keeps an intern from qualifying as an employee in the eyes of the law and therefore exempts them from the FLSA's typical minimum wage and overtime requirements.

"If an employer says, 'Yeah, I got a bunch of things around here that I really need someone to take care of,' and the reason they're hiring an unpaid intern is so they don't have to find a paid employee to do that stuff, that's probably not compliant with the law," said Lindsay Leavitt, a Phoenix-based employment attorney who works with businesses to ensure their unpaid internships are legal.

In 2018, the Department of Labor identified seven recommended areas for courts to examine when assessing whether or not an unpaid internship offered by a private employer complies with the FLSA, including whether the internship was registered for academic credit, is for the intern's benefit and provides experience similar to what they'd receive in an educational environment.

The FLSA has stood for 85 years, but many unpaid internships offered by private employers still fail to meet federal legal standards. This is partly because the Department of Labor's guidelines are broadly worded so that courts may apply them to a wide range of cases. However, the tradeoff is that individually, they're murky, Leavitt said.

"It's hard to know because, like many things in the law, there's not a bright-line test," he said. "There's not a series of checkmarks that if you do, you're guaranteed to be compliant with the law.

"It would be cleaner if the Department of Labor wrote requirements that would more easily be determined…but the Department of Labor has chosen

not [to] to allow themselves room to maneuver, room for interpretation. And unfortunately, that's just the American legal system."

Volunteering or unpaid labor?

To an unknowing onlooker, the group dinner Jenny attended with her co-interns during the semester she spent working in Sacramento for a California assembly member may have seemed like any other typical after-work hangout among college students. In fact, the junior studying political science almost fell into the illusion herself — when she first described the dinner, she mistakenly called it a "potluck."

But then she doubled back on her words. The dinner wasn't a celebratory potluck to commemorate the end of the work day, said Jenny, whose name was changed to protect employer confidentiality. The interns attended the group dinner because they were unpaid and some of them couldn't afford to eat, so they all flocked to the apartment of their one co-intern who could afford to cook for everyone.

"At the [California State] Capitol, the unpaid interns were the voice [of] reason by writing speeches for the politicians," Jenny said. "We helped with drafting notes for the press conferences. We made sure their coffee had macchiato and the perfect espresso in it. We're just the reason why things were running very smoothly. And we deserved to get paid as well."

While unpaid internships may be offered in any field, they are particularly prevalent in the government, along with nonprofit organizations and industries like entertainment, media and the arts, according to U.S. News & World Report. Because the Department of Labor's seven guidelines for unpaid internships apply to private employers only, unpaid internships in the public sector and nonprofit organizations are generally legal, as they're considered volunteering.

Like many other aspiring politicians, Jenny took the internship for the political experience she'd gain and the resume boost working for a state legislature would provide. The lack of pay was something she begrudgingly accepted as a result — even though she would have to uproot her life hundreds of miles away to Sacramento, where she'd have to endure a higher cost of living.

"I was lucky to have…the socioeconomic privilege to move out of state and grab money from my parents," Jenny said. "Other kids in the program did not have that privilege…There's probably a kid [who] was more deserving [who] could have been in this spot, but they found out they couldn't go through this program because they couldn't afford to live there."

Unpaid internships proliferate not only in local and state governments, but also in Washington, D.C., which has stunted the diversity of the interns who anchor the government's everyday operations. In an effort to amend this, the Biden administration announced last year that White House interns would be paid "for the first time in recent history."

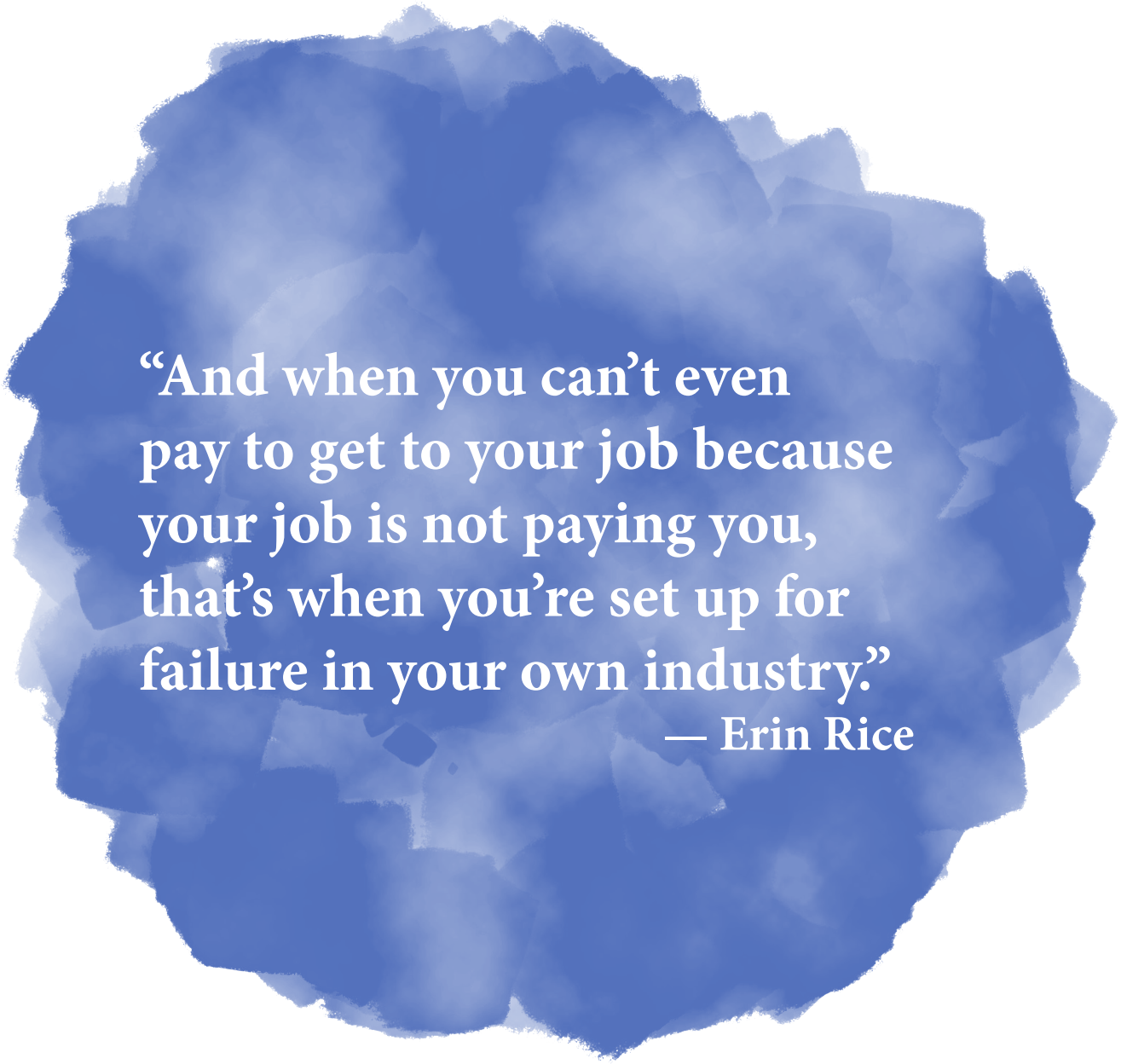
A gated entryway

Erin Rice would rather spend her time doing what she actually loves — working on films. But the senior studying film knew going into art school that she couldn't afford to take an unpaid internship, so instead, she spends her time serving coffee, ping-ponging between classes and her two jobs, scraping tips together and counting down the days until she moves to New York.

Rice has always been a dogged worker — in high school, she worked 30 hours a week just to make enough money to buy the clothes she wanted. When she decided to pursue film, she knew doing what she loved would come with a financial cost. However, she didn't expect that she'd struggle to even get her foot into the door of the film industry, a field in which unpaid internship experience is often a requirement to even reach the first true rung of the career ladder.

"Those artists come from wealthy families [so] they were given the tools to succeed," Rice said. "They were able to pay for their textbooks. They were able to do unpaid internships. They were able to pay for the gas to get to those places. And when you can't even pay to get to your job because your job is not paying you, that's when you're set up for failure in your own industry."

In the art industry, another


“And when you can’t even pay to get to your job because your job is not paying you, that’s when you’re set up for failure in your own industry.”
— Erin Rice

field that has been forced to reckon with its own reflection after recent discussions about its lack of diversity, the prevalence of unpaid internships still stands as a barrier to a more socioeconomically, racially and ethnically diverse art world.

In all fields, unpaid internships have come under fire in recent years for who they open career opportunities to — and who they don't. The burdens of unpaid internships build upon systemic disparities; those who can afford to work for free are less disadvantaged in unpaid internships than those who are financially struggling, according to Inside Higher Ed.

"Privileged, predominantly white, affluent demographics continue to progress because they can afford to do so and because they have the privilege of [their] parents," said DP Leighton, assistant director of Creative Career Services at the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts. "You see generation after generation…they have more career experience, they have more networking subsequently through those experiences, and then they are able to network their own community back into that pipeline of privilege."

Racial, gender and socioeconomic disparities impact whether or not students opt to participate in internships in the first place — both paid and unpaid. White students and male students are disproportionately represented among paid interns, according to data collected in July by NACE. In contrast, it's more likely for Black students to hold unpaid internships and for Hispanic students and first-generation students to have no internship experience at all, a 2019 NACE report found.

"We have to do something, or this is going to continue to be a problem," Leighton said. "People in the media, people in arts and design, people in filmmaking and entertainment, they're going to continue being affluent white demographics who continue to decide what is on TV, who's watching what, who's represented in the museums, who's getting more of the money, who's making those decisions."

The disparities that characterize unpaid internships don't stop there. Instead, they reverberate up the career ladder, impacting the career trajectories of unpaid interns over the course of their professional lives.

Students with paid internship experience receive on average at least one job offer postgraduation while students with unpaid internship experience or no internship experience receive fewer than one on average, according to a 2021 NACE survey.

"For a paid internship, [employers] treat you like you're going to be there forever because most likely in paid internships, they offer you a job in the end," Jenny said. "But unpaid [interns], they know you're not permanent, you're temporary. They don't want you to leave, but it feels like it."

It's also more likely that paid interns will receive a higher starting salary in full-time positions than their unpaid counterparts — the median starting salary for formerly paid interns was $20,000 higher than that of formerly unpaid interns, according to a NACE survey from last year. Because women are overrepresented in unpaid internships, this discrepancy has contributed to the gender pay gap that persists throughout women's careers, even before their professional lives really start, according to Bloomberg.

"Even if you're financially stable, I don't think you should work an unpaid internship because no matter what, it's still an exploitation of your labor," Rice said. "You wouldn't get an unpaid job…so why are you taking this labor and doing this work for these people who have enough money and time to be doing it?"

Reconstructing the ladder

Last summer, Leighton met with an employer to discuss an exciting new internship that would broaden the bounds of where ASU could take its art students: an opportunity to work in animation in Japan.

While sitting across from the employer, Leighton was casually informed the internship would be unpaid. He and his assistant promptly closed their notebooks. There was nothing more to discuss. He put on a cloying smile and outstretched his arm in a neutralizing handshake.

"Thank you so much for your

time," Leighton said to the employer. "You can send us the job description, and we'll pass that along to central Career Services [ASU's general career help department], but we're not doing this."

The employer wasn't fond of his response. Leighton didn't expect him to be.

As Creative Career Services has taken a stronger stance against unpaid work opportunities by refusing to post about or share them to Herberger students unless they benefit the wider community — such as volunteer positions offered by nonprofit organizations or government entities — not all of its would-be partners in the art world have been supportive, Leighton said.

When he came to work at ASU to help connect ambitious students to careers in the art world, he was coming off a past of couch surfing and freelancing in New York in an attempt to make it as a photographer with no unpaid internship experience, merely because he couldn't afford to accept one during college. From his own experience, he knew what needed to change, and he wanted to make it happen.

"ASU is committed to equitable access and thriving communities," Leighton said. "These [unpaid internships] fly in the face of that, and I'm done with it."

Numerous programs at ASU, as well as the University itself, have adopted stances encouraging employers to pay student interns, according to a University spokesperson.

"Arizona State University recognizes the significance of internship experiences in shaping students' career paths," a University spokesperson wrote in an email. "We strongly encourage all employers to provide compensation for these opportunities. Our commitment to this encouragement stems from our dedication to ensuring equitable access to career-building experiences for all our students."

Herberger has gone one step further by encouraging employers to pay student interns at least minimum wage because "Unpaid internships exacerbate income disparities, disproportionately privilege affluent communities and deepen the existing social divide," according to its website. Herberger's Design School has taken an even more aggressive stance by completely prohibiting its students from registering unpaid internships for credit.

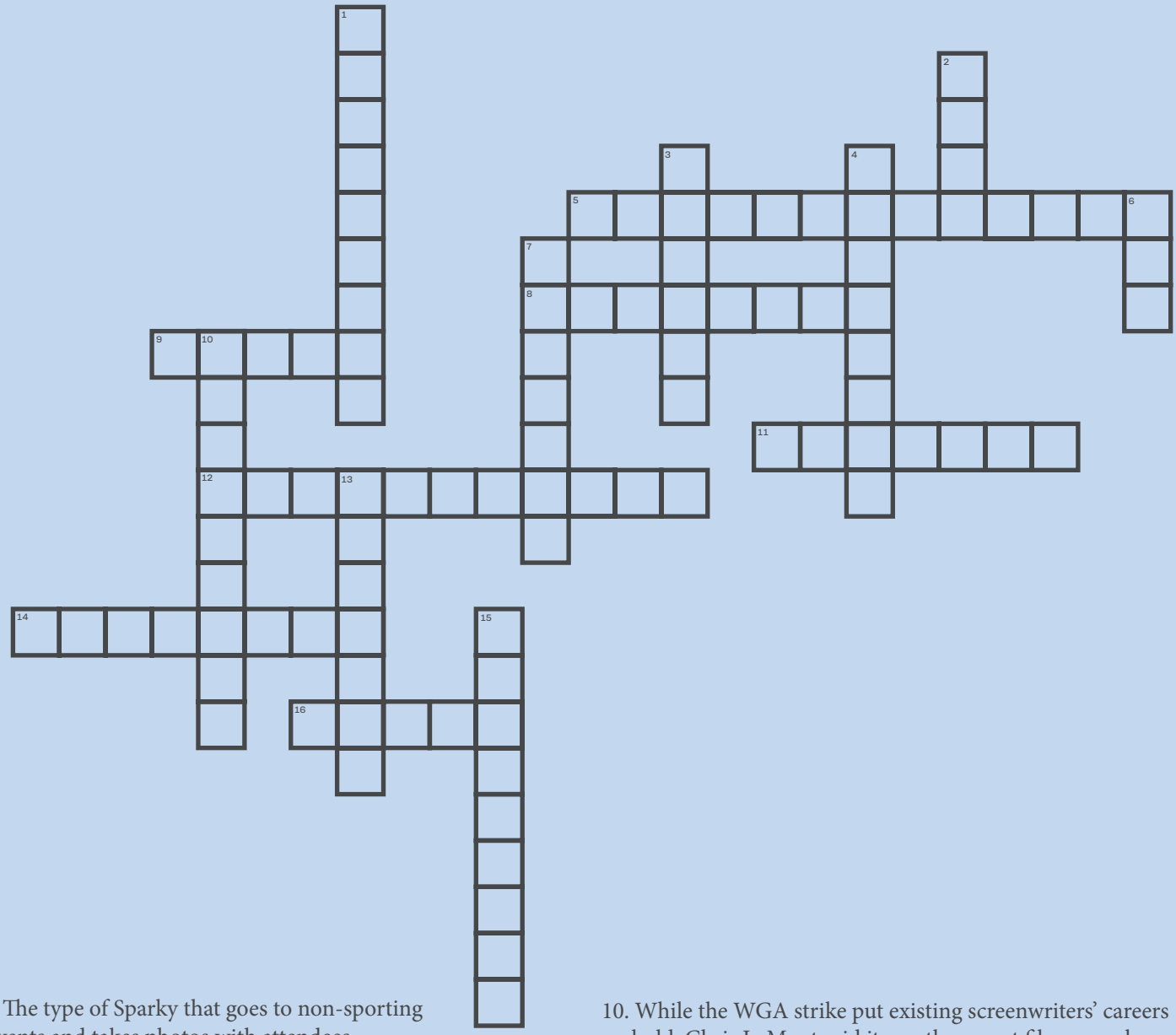
Universities have played a key role in facilitating unpaid internships for students. Many employers have their unpaid interns register their work for class credit as a form of compensation and to follow the Department of Labor's guidelines, but some critics of unpaid internships have condemned this practice as collusion between colleges and employers.

But universities are also helping to bridge the disparities that characterize internship participation by providing unpaid student interns with scholarships funded by donors to help them accessibly attain this professional experience. At ASU, a number of funds are offered for unpaid student interns, from those in public service to English to sustainability.

"We believe every student should have an equal opportunity to access valuable internship experiences that contribute to their career development, and we remain committed to working with our students to achieve this goal," a University spokesperson wrote in an email.

Even though calls for an end to unpaid internships have become only louder and louder in recent years, the future of intern compensation continues to be foggy. Employers are still hiring unpaid interns, lawsuits are raging on in the courts, and students are continuing to step foot on the internship ladder — even if this key bottom rung remains contested.remains contested.

the SPM crossword.



1. The type of Sparky that goes to non-sporting events and takes photos with attendees.
2. For Grant House, the element of head coach Bob Bowman that defines him is that he always wants ___ from his swimmers.
3. The inability for screenwriters to meet with producers and sell their scripts led to many losing their ___ insurance.
4. One of the Sun Devil swimmers who swam in the Tokyo Olympics.
5. Which Barrett course was modeled after similar courses at universities like Chicago, Stanford and Columbia?
6. Last year, nearly one in ___ U.S. interns were unpaid.
7. According to Jace Clark, a senior studying computer information systems and supply chain management, what kept him in Barrett were his experiences with ___.
8. The type of Sparky that goes to sporting events, performs stunts and hypes up the crowd.
9. A country that has accepted Sudanese refugees.
10. While the WGA strike put existing screenwriters' careers on hold, Chris LaMont said it was the recent film ___ who were among the hardest hit by the strike's effects.
11. What did Michael Crow give Barrett in order to ensure the college would grow to 10% of the undergraduate class?
12. The burdens of unpaid internships build upon systemic ___.
13. The head coach who rebuilt the women's swimming program to be one of the best in the country during the late 1970s.
14. The capital of Sudan.
15. Some fans have viewed Sparky as offensive or creepy, sparking a petition for the "Sun Devils" moniker to be changed to what?
16. In 2018, the Department of Labor identified ___ areas for courts to examine when assessing whether or not an unpaid internship offered by a private employer complies with the FLSA.

Your future of changing lives continues *at Creighton.*

OT | Pharmacy | PT | Medicine | Nursing | Physician Assistant

Applicants from ASU receive priority consideration for admission into Creighton's Doctor of Pharmacy, Doctor of Physical Therapy and Doctor of Occupational Therapy programs, all located in the Phoenix Medical Quarter.

For those called to care—we say, ***Welcome to Creighton.***

Creighton UNIVERSITY

creighton.edu/phoenix