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MAC DOUCETTE, KAYLA MOORE & CAT WHITE THE CAVALIER DAILY



NEWS

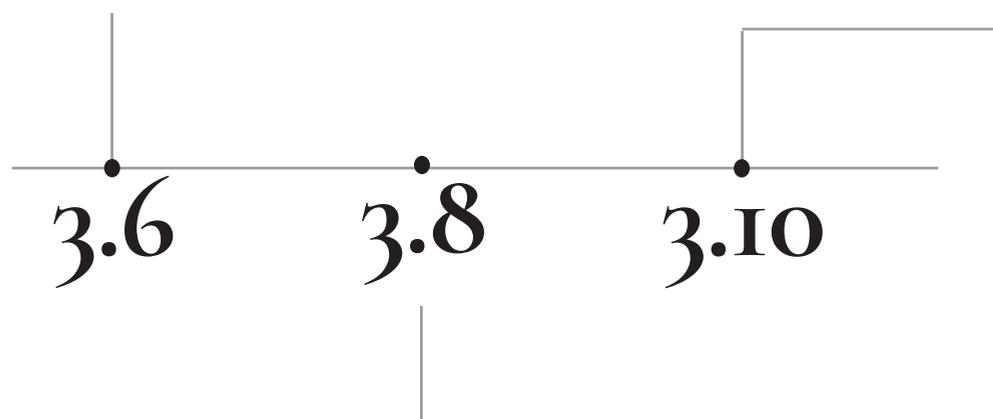
This week in-brief

CD News Staff

Board of Visitors charges Audit Committee with presidential search process review

The full Board of Visitors met Thursday afternoon for the first time since the appointment of Rector Carlos Brown, Vice Rector Victoria Harker and eight other new Board members by Gov. Abigail Spanberger (D). After an over two-hour long closed session, the Board passed a resolution charging the Audit Committee with a review of the five-month presidential search process for the 10th president of the University, which culminated in University President Scott Beardsley's appointment Dec. 19.

Board Member Mohsin Syed explained the resolution, stating that the Board is responsible for ensuring that University leadership decisions are made through rigorous processes and that the University's presidential search process should be reviewed and compared to those of peer universities.



Former U.Va. Health CEO Craig Kent files \$34 million defamation lawsuit

Craig Kent, former chief executive officer of U.Va. Health, filed a defamation lawsuit Feb. 23 seeking more than \$34 million in damages against the law firm and individual attorneys whose report to the University Board of Visitors preceded his resignation last year. The same attorneys sued Kent in federal court Oct. 3 over allegations of patient harm and financial fraud.

The 50-page complaint, filed in Albemarle County Circuit Court, names Jones Swanson Huddell LLC and its attorneys Gladstone Jones and Lynn Swanson, as well as Charlottesville-based attorney Les Bowers, as defendants. It accuses them of waging a "defamatory campaign" to force Kent out of his position and then leveraging his departure to build a federal lawsuit against him.

"The purpose of Defendants' campaign was to remove Dr. Kent as the apex leader of U.Va. Health and then capitalize monetarily on his removal, by filing a federal lawsuit that echoes many of the same defamatory accusations and uses Dr. Kent's ouster to validate them," the complaint reads.



Early voting begins in contentious April redistricting referendum — here's what to know

Early voting officially began Friday for the April 21 redistricting referendum, in which Virginia voters will decide whether the Commonwealth can join other states in a national mid-decade redistricting war. If voters adopt the amendment to Virginia's constitution at the ballot box, it would allow a 10-1 Democrat-favored Congressional map the General Assembly unveiled last month to immediately go into law. However, the Supreme Court of Virginia has issued numerous rulings, affirming that while the vote can take place, the Court is reviewing the amendment's constitutionality, and whether to nullify the result.

The amendment in question would give the General Assembly the power to bypass Virginia's independent redistricting commission and pass new congressional maps of its own until 2030 in response to other states. The measure passed the Democrat-controlled General Assembly in January, but under Virginia law, voters now have the final say on its adoption. Proponents of the measure say that redistricting Virginia is essential to counteract mid-decade gerrymanders in Republican-led states at the urging of President Donald Trump.



Newly-appointed rector brings four years of Board experience

Carlos Brown, appointed Feb. 20, also serves as an executive vice president for Dominion Energy

Cecilia Mould | Senior Writer

After Gov. Abigail Spanberger asked former Rector Rachel Sheridan and former Vice Rector Porter Wilkinson to resign from the Board of Visitors in January, the Board's two leadership positions sat empty for just over a month. Ten newly-appointed members and the remaining seven selected Carlos Brown as rector Feb. 20 — he will step into the role less than a year after his first term on the Board ended June 30, 2025 and brings experience from Dominion Energy and his previous position as vice rector.

Brown was appointed to the University Board of Visitors in 2021 by former Gov. Ralph Northam (D) and served as vice rector from 2023 until his term ended June 30, 2025. During Brown's time as vice rector, the Board voted March 7, 2025 to dissolve the University's Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in accordance with national executive orders. The Board also voted to pass a resolution April 29 rescinding portions of a 2020 resolution which endorsed goals laid out by the University's Racial Equity Task Force to support diversity. The resolution passed unanimously.

The now-rector served as a member of Spanberger's "Unit-

ed for Virginia's Future" transition committee, along with two other recently appointed Board members, Michael Bisceglia and Rudene Haynes. According to OpenSecrets donor lookup, Brown has not made any personal political donations since 2024 and did not donate to Spanberger's gubernatorial campaign, although he has mostly donated to Virginia Democrats since his earliest listed donation in 2005.

Brown currently serves as executive vice president, chief administrative and projects officer and corporate secretary at Dominion Energy, as well as president of Dominion Energy Services. Dominion Energy provides electricity services to 3.6 million households and businesses in Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina and, according to its website, is one of the United States' leading developers of offshore wind and solar power.

In his current role, Brown oversees corporate services provided to Dominion Energy's operating companies and is responsible for all major generation, environmental and corporate construction projects. He joined Dominion Energy in 2007 as senior counsel and moved through eight positions in the compa-

ny before beginning his current role as president in Jan. 2024 and role as executive vice president, chief administrative and projects officer and corporate secretary in June 2025, according to his LinkedIn profile.

Brown graduated from the University with degrees in American Government and Politics and African American Studies in 1996, also according to his LinkedIn profile. He later graduated from the School of Law in 1999 and worked as an associate at McGuireWoods and McCandlish Holton law firms before co-founding Brown, Martin, P.C., where he worked as president and managing director from 2003-2007. He also joined Obsidian Capital Group, LLC as managing director from 2003 to 2008.

Brown has held a number of board positions throughout his career besides his work for the Board of Visitors, including at Christopher Newport University between 2009 and 2013. He also served on the boards of NextUp, Inc., Feedmore, Inc., the Virginia Small Business Advisory Board and the Richmond Virginia Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

Although Brown has not made personal political donations in



BENVIN LOZADA | THE CAVALIER DAILY

Board of Visitors meeting room, photographed March 5, 2026.

the past year, between January and July of 2025, Dominion Energy donated \$200,000 to the Democratic Governors Association, Spanberger's largest source of funding in 2025. The company also donated \$100,000 to the Republican Governors Association in the first half of 2025. A report on contributions between August and December of 2025 is not yet available.

Dominion Energy also donated \$250,272 to Winsome Earle-

Sears for Governor in 2025, as well as \$100,000 to Spanberger's Inaugural Committee. Their website states that by participating in political affairs, Dominion Energy hopes "to contribute to legislative and rule-making activities affecting our business consistent with our corporate values and strategies."

Newly-appointed vice rector brings executive experience

Harker has prior Board experience as well as business experience, having served as executive vice president and chief financial officer of TEGNA Inc. for 12 years

Lauren Seeliger | News Editor

Victoria Harker was appointed to the Board of Visitors Jan. 17 by Gov. Abigail Spanberger (D) and elected to serve as vice rector in a special meeting of the Board Feb. 20. Harker is a Class of 1986 alumna and a former Board member — former Gov. Robert McDonnell (R) appointed Harker to the Board in 2012. During her four-year term, she chaired the Board's Finance Committee and was a member of the Executive Committee, the Academic Affairs Committee and the Health System Board.

Beyond her time as a former Board member, Harker brings professional experience to her role. She worked as executive vice president and chief financial officer of TEGNA Inc. — a global media and digital communications company — from 2012-24.

In her role as CFO, Harker was responsible for overseeing the company's financial functions and operations worldwide.

Harker also has experience serving in leadership roles for various companies — many of which include roles dealing with companies' finances. She is chair of the Compensation Committee and a member of the Finance Committee for Huntington Ingalls — the largest military ship building company in the U.S. She has sat as the Audit Committee Chair of Xylem, Inc. — a water technology company — since 2011, a position in which she "oversees overall enterprise risk assessment and risk management processes and policies."

Across educational boards in Virginia, she is chair of the University's Frank Batten School of

Public Policy and Leadership Board, treasurer of the Rare School Book Board, former member of the U.Va. Jefferson Trust Board and former chair of the Alumni Association Board of Managers — which she chaired from 2010-12. She is also a trustee to the Board of American University, where she graduated in 1990 with a Master of Business Administration, with a concentration in Finance.

Former Gov. Ralph Northam (D) appointed Harker to the Board of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia in 2019, where she went on to serve as vice chair until 2024 after being reappointed by former Gov. Glenn Youngkin (R) in 2022. Harker's work during her first term was centered around policy and financial oversight

for institutions of higher education and as vice chair, Harker was responsible for assisting the chair in leading the 13-member council to coordinate policy, recommend budget and uphold academic quality. SCHEV oversees all institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth and leads planning and policy development.

Harker received her bachelor's degree in English, with a concentration in economics, from the University in 1986 before she went on to study at American University.

In her role as vice rector to the University's Board, according to the bylaws, Harker will be responsible for serving as vice chair to Rector Carlos Brown, who serves as chair. Additionally, the vice rector is responsible for per-

forming the duties of the rector in the rector's absence — maintain interest and activity among members of the Board, plan wisely for the future, observe rights of faculty and students, care for and preserve the Honor system and prevent "harmful" outside influence from affecting students and faculty of the University.

Further, the rector serves as the leading officer of every Board meeting, and Harker's responsibility as vice rector is again to serve in Brown's position in his absence. Harker's term as vice rector will last for two years, and her first meeting in the position took place March 5 at the meeting of the full Board.

Undergraduate cumulative GPA average reaches 3.61

The University's Office of Institutional Research and Analytics shows cumulative GPA averages rising from 3.24 to 3.61 since 2010

Jaylynn Perez | Senior Associate

An analysis from the University's Office of Institutional Research and Analytics shows a steady increase in undergraduate cumulative grade point averages over the past 15 years at the University. This reflects a broader pattern known as grade inflation — where students are awarded higher grades on average without a corresponding increase in academic performance. The University's spring term data from 2010-25 show the overall mean GPA climbing from roughly 3.24 to approximately 3.61, with a notable jump between 2019 and 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, the undergraduate GPA average at the University has stabilized at approximately 3.60.

The undergraduate GPA data — which tracks mean cumulative GPAs across schools, years and genders — indicates that the average GPA for undergraduates of all years and all schools at the University rose from approximately 3.39 in 2018 to approximately 3.60 in 2021. The GPA showed a decrease to 3.56 in 2022 before gradually increasing to 3.61 by 2025.

Gender breakdowns show similar upward trends for male, female and students of “another gender,” with female students consistently posting slightly higher mean GPAs than male students. Across the 2010-25 period, female students' mean cumulative GPAs are generally about 0.05-0.07 points higher than those of male students.

Within this overall rise, schools at the University display distinct grading patterns. The School of Data Science — which officially opened April 26, 2024 — had the highest average GPA in 2025 and appears at the top of the most recent distribution, with mean GPAs above 3.7. The School of Nursing also ranks among the highest averages — with median GPAs reaching near 3.8 in 2021 and remaining in the 3.7 range since.

The McIntire School of Commerce and Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy have GPA data available beginning 2013. Batten's GPA averages have fallen between 3.6 and 3.74 since 2019, and McIntire's averages have fallen between 3.63 and 3.68 since 2015.

The College of Arts and Sciences remains toward the lower end of the distribution, with average GPAs gradually increasing but not reaching the mid-3.5 to around 3.60 range until 2021. The School of Architecture reports slightly higher average GPAs than the College through 2020, before both enter the mid-3.5 range in 2021. The School of Engineering also remains toward the lower end of the distribution and does not reach the 3.5 range until 2020.

According to data published by the U.S. Department of Education, the increase of GPAs at the University reflects broader national trends in American higher education. Average GPAs for four-year public and private not-for-profit institutions have risen by more than 16 percent between 1990 and 2020 — with A grades awarded in the U.S. more frequently than any other grade in 2020.

A 2019 study by sociologists Joseph Hermanowicz and David Woodring analyzed more than 460,000 grades and found that 73 percent of grades at public higher education institutions in the United States were A's and B's, demonstrating how heavily grades are concentrated at the upper end of the grading scale. The study also reports that in 1960, the most commonly awarded grade at U.S. higher education institutions was a C.

As undergraduate GPAs at the University remain elevated, Keith Williams, associate professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering, wrote in an email statement to The Cavalier Daily that the trends in the University's published data align with what faculty are observing in their own courses, noting that Engineering students are earning higher grades on average than in the past. He added that current GPAs in the School of Engineering fall roughly between 3.44 and 3.63, which he characterized as high and indicated that he anticipates that this upward trend will continue.

Williams attributed the increase to a combination of structural and cultural factors, including an increase in the number of students receiving academic accommodations for disabilities and what he described as general faculty fatigue. He also pointed to the University's grade-replacement policy — a policy that allows students who repeat certain courses to have the higher grade count toward their GPA, though both attempts remain on their transcript.

According to Williams, many instructors view grade inflation as a trend that individual departments have limited ability to reverse.

“No single faculty member wants to be the bastion of traditionalism — broadly speaking, faculty perceive grade inflation as an unavoidable trend,” Williams wrote. “Opinions differ quite sharply on the cause, but I think you will find broad agreement that GPA inflation is happening and is probably unavoidable.”

Williams also confirmed that more students are earning A-range grades than in previous years. He wrote that faculty responses have



OLIVIA THOMPSON | THE CAVALIER DAILY

generally accepted these trends rather than actively resisting them. He also noted that Engineering departments often emphasize opportunities such as research and internships as alternative ways for students to distinguish themselves from other students whose GPAs may be similar.

Student perspectives reflect varied experiences with grading practices. Second-year Engineering student Sladjana Suzic said students in the Engineering department often have mixed views about whether their GPAs accurately reflect the rigor of their coursework.

“I’d say that it’s really in the middle,” Suzic said. “For some people, they think it’s fair, so their GPA does reflect the rigor of the classes. But for other people, they feel like it’s way too hard in comparison to ... the [College].”

According to Suzic, curved exams are common in some Engineering courses, particularly when exam averages are low. In one of her computer science classes, she said exam averages fell into the 50 percent range before the professor applied a curve to raise the distribution to a more typical range — such as between 60 to 70 percent.

Suzic added that these curves are typically applied equally to all students in the classes, raising the overall average while still preserving differences in students' academic performance. She also noted that GPAs often play a limited role when Engineering students apply for internships. Although employers may set minimum GPA requirements,

she said many place greater emphasis on practical experience such as prior internships or research opportunities.

Susan Fraiman, director of undergraduate programs in English and English professor, similarly wrote in an email statement to The Cavalier Daily that her grading patterns in her own courses align with the data from the University's OIRA — which shows a rise in undergraduate GPAs over the past 15 years. Speaking about her own grading practices rather than the department as a whole, she said she now assigns fewer B-minuses and more A-pluses in her courses. While grades have “skewed up,” she wrote that the overall range of grades in her classes have not changed because she has expanded it at the top — allowing some students to earn higher grades without eliminating lower grades.

“For me, an A+ for a semester grade used to be a rarity — in recent years, that’s somewhat less true,” Fraiman wrote. “But the point is that there’s still a range and, therefore, still a basis for comparison.”

In reviewing candidates for scholarships in the English department, Fraiman said that the department begins by considering students with GPAs above 3.8 in the major — a benchmark she described as a useful starting point for distinguishing students. She added that, in her view, even though average grades have been rising overall, higher grades still reflect measurable differences in students' academic performance.

“[It is not] my sense that I’m lowering my standards. I think my classes are as rigorous as ever, and I’m happy giving grades that reflect my high regard for student work,” Fraiman wrote. “I might add that, in English, we give feedback in the form of substantial comments that are at least as important as the grade.”

Williams, however, questioned the importance American institutions place on GPA. Drawing on his own experience studying in multiple countries with different cultures surrounding grading, he argued that American institutions assign excessive weight to a single numerical indicator. He said that he would prefer a simplified system of “pass,” “pass with distinction” and “retake,” rather than the traditional letter-grade plus-minus structure.

As GPAs continue to cluster in the mid-3.5 range and above, Williams advised students not to rely solely on GPA as a distinguishing factor on transcripts and resumes.

“My advice to students is to realize that GPA is not a particularly distinguishing factor on their transcript or resume ... I don’t think that [the School of Engineering] ... [does] nearly enough to support the opportunities that help students demonstrate who they are and what they can do,” Williams wrote. “We faculty don’t exist to provide barriers and point values for those who clear them ... We exist to provide learning opportunities and support students to learn.”

Dickerson reflects on volatile year as Student Council president

Dickerson navigated numerous changes in University leadership and accomplished many goals, including strengthening connections with the College at Wise

Margaret Nichols | Staff Writer

Fourth-year College student Clay Dickerson served as Student Council's president for the 79th term, and throughout the year, led the student body through key changes in University administration — four different University presidents and a reshaping of the Board of Visitors. Further, his term was also centered around increasing accessibility for students through initiatives such as the Cavalier Career Closet to provide free business attire to students.

Just four months into Dickerson's term, former University President Jim Ryan resigned under pressure from the Justice Department, and a search for the University's 10th permanent president began. Dickerson, alongside Student Council executive members, spoke out against the presidential search process with a vote of no confidence in the Board Aug. 8 due to what they said was a search that lacked transparency and student input.

Dickerson said that through the major change in University leadership, student self-governance was "at its most powerful, yet most vulnerable [point] in its history." He further noted his pride for the way the University community came together over the summer and remained "resilient" against ongoing turbulence.

"I think I've realized how strong U.Va. can be when we are united. I think there were points during this year in which we were so divided that it weakened that magic ... but the power of togetherness really shines through here," Dickerson said. "There truly is a brighter tomorrow when we're all part of it, and we all share our visions and our architecture."

Dickerson ran for Student Council president in February 2025 on the "Brighter Tomorrow" ticket alongside Michael Mitchell, vice president for organizations and third-year Commerce student, and Princess Wuraola Olubuse-Omisore, vice president for administration and graduate public health student. Dickerson had specific goals to increase resource accessibility for low-income students, many of which he accomplished.

Dickerson cited his proudest achievement in the position as the creation of the Cavalier Career Closet. With help from Micah Andrews, chief of Support and Access Services and third-year College student, Student Council partnered with My Career Closet — a D.C.-based organization focused on providing solutions to

professional wear problems. The Cavalier Career Closet grew into a sizable resource of professional clothing available to University students free of charge.

"Something I was really passionate about doing was the Career Closet. U.Va. was the only university in the Commonwealth without one," Dickerson said. "I got to realize that something like the Career Closet was truly a need and it has so far unimaginably affected students' lives."

Dickerson also focused his attention on strengthening the Council's relationship with the students at the College at Wise. Council members visited the College at Wise's Student Government Association in the fall, and Dickerson described the trip as the "most fulfilling experience" in his role.

"I can't even describe how grateful they were that we took the time to go down there," Dickerson said. "We took the time to ... invest in their student life, go to their meetings, speak at their meetings ... care about their history [and] care about why they are tied to the University of Virginia."

The commitment to an improved relationship between the two campuses was solidified with a memorandum of cooperation sponsored by Dickerson and Imane Akhanous, chair of the Representative Body and fourth-year College student, Oct. 20. The memorandum establishes that the two organizations will work together to put forth legislation which is mutually beneficial for both campuses and will maintain a strong working relationship.

Beyond his own accomplished goals, Dickerson emphasized the success of other members of his executive team this year. A key pillar of the "Brighter Tomorrow" platform was to audit the internal Council budget, for which Wuraola Olubuse-Omisore has worked on lowering internal spending and increasing club appropriation to achieve a higher utilization of funds. Currently, Dickerson reports that utilization is approximately 75 percent — higher than the utilization rate of 64 percent at the end of the 78th term in March 2025.

Dickerson's platform also had the goal of establishing a higher number of advisory boards to operate regularly. Advisory boards are a collection of students and University stakeholders who work together to address specific community concerns, and Dickerson credited Lily Dorathy, Student



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Student Council President Clay Dickerson speaking at first-year Convocation Ceremony, Aug. 25, 2025.

Council chief of coalitions and fourth-year Batten and College student, for her efforts in creating and organizing these boards. He named the Student Council's Student Well-Being and Safety Response and the Public Service Advisory Boards as two successful advisory boards to come out of this term.

"We never had a consistent structure, and/or administrative partners at these [advisory board] meetings," Dickerson said. "Now ... we have a structure that is going to be transitioned, and these meetings will continue and outcomes will only grow."

The Student Well-Being and Advisory Board, whose goal is "to enhance safety across Grounds" and "create a culture of care and resilience," was able to run surveys that found useful data on students' sense of safety on Grounds and also inspired the creation of initiatives like HoosConcerned.org — an online forum in which students can post concerns and receive direct updates from Council members as to how those issues are being addressed.

The Public Service Advisory Board, which is designed to serve as "the front door to public service at the University," successfully launched the "Walk with Honor, Lead to Serve" campaign focused on strengthening the link between leadership, honor and public service on Grounds. The

Public Service Advisory Board also introduced the American Disabilities Act-accessible Guidebook to Ethical Service, increasing the inclusivity of leadership and service resources on Grounds.

In terms of his road to becoming president, Dickerson said he never originally saw himself in that position but emphasized his passion for service as the reason he joined Student Council his first year. Dickerson began as a member of the Administration branch of the Council, which oversees internal operations, and said he learned about the larger structure of the organization. The next year he operated in the Cabinet as the director of Financial Accessibility, preparing him to later take on the role of chief of SAS — the branch responsible for providing accessible resources to students, particularly first-generation and low-income students.

Dickerson shared that he was most strongly drawn to the latter two roles because of the impact he saw his predecessors have on low-income students and others in need.

"I just felt really inspired by their dedication to uplifting the folks who need it the most, and I have always found my heart trending in that direction," Dickerson said.

Dickerson explained that the mentorship he received within Student Council — specifically

from Brookelyn Mitchell, former Council vice president for administration and Class of 2025 alumna — had the effect of encouraging him to run for the position of Student Council president.

"I think for a low-income student, mentorship is invaluable because you don't always have the pathways to success that other students do," Dickerson said. "By having those around you see something in you, you can really blossom."

Dickerson also left words of advice for Mitchell, the incoming Student Council President. Dickerson said the role of president requires uplifting of every student voice, from every "nook and cranny" at the University, and that while it can be easier at times to look away from concerns, it is important to remain cognizant of all student needs.

"You have to have a heart for those who may not show theirs to you," Dickerson said. "Serving those who might not expect you to serve them ... is what's so empowering about this [University], and that is how unity is achieved."

Dickerson's term began March 30, 2025 and ends March 29. Mitchell will begin his term March 30.

LIFE

Therapy dogs promote paw-sitive mental health support

The Women's Center and Student Health and Wellness embrace the role of therapeutically-trained canines

Charley Thomas | Staff Writer

From everlasting study nights in Shannon Library to weekend work schedules and everything in between, Grounds has a way of grinding down even the strongest-willed students. To help students take a step back from assignments and ease anxiety, both Student Health and Wellness and the Maxine Platzer Lynn Women's Center have enlisted new members of their teams — therapy dogs.

Combining mental health movements across the world with the age-old adage “man's best friend,” therapy dog programs at the University offer students a way to unwind with therapeutically-trained canines. Extensive training programs, such as those by the Service Dogs of Virginia or Green Dogs Unleashed, equip these dogs with the skills to react calmly to high-stimulation environments, providing comfort to students in situations ranging from one-on-one therapy to drop-in meet-and-greets.

SHW began working with therapy dog teams in late 2022 following the Nov. 13 shooting. These canine companions were part of a broader effort to support student well-being through several stress-relief initiatives. After receiving positive feedback from students and staff, SHW decided to expand animal accessibility on Grounds by welcoming its own resident therapy dog, Madi, a six-year-old Labrador retriever mix. In addition to attending major mental health events, such as Wahoo Wellness Fest, Madi has standing “Pawffice Hours” in the SHW lobby on Mondays from 11 a.m. to noon.

Danielle D'Andrea Black, Director of Marketing and Communications at SHW, explained how therapy dogs like Madi play an important role on college campuses, as they make conversations about mental health and well-being more approachable.

“Interactions with a therapy dog often create a low-pressure entry point for students to connect with staff, ask questions and learn about available resources in an informal setting,” Black said in an email to *The Cavalier Daily*. “For students who may be unsure about or unfamiliar with our services, these brief welcoming moments can increase comfort with seeking support when they need it.”

Margaret Edwards, Trauma Counselor at the Maxine Platzer Lynn Women's Center, echoed this sentiment. Edwards serves as the



HANIA RAZA | THE CAVALIER DAILY

handler of the Women's Center's resident therapy dog — a black Labrador retriever named August. Edwards said August helps visitors relax and feel connected during counseling sessions, drop-in office hours and strolls around Grounds.

“College students need some life outside of academia,” Edwards said. “For people who are ‘dog people,’ it never fails to bring a smile to their face. It is a nice contrast to what is going wrong with the world to have things like this that are what's going right.”

Before two-year-old August joined the Women's Center last Fall, she underwent intensive training at Service Dogs of Virginia. Here, trainers are able to identify the roles for which each dog might be best suited based on their performance — which in August's case, indicated strong therapeutic aptitude.

“They are trained in everything from picking things up off the floor for people to noticing if somebody's blood sugar is low,” Edwards said. “The dogs that are really good at scent and focusing on one person usually become medical alert dogs. August is really well-rounded — if you start crying, she'll bring you a tissue box. Anybody can touch her, and she won't be reactive.”

A key aspect of August's training

as a therapy dog included teaching her how to calm people experiencing difficult emotions. For instance, August will lay her head on someone's feet or lap if they want physical contact during counseling sessions, providing comfort during uncomfortable moments.

“There is almost nothing anyone could do that would make her react in an aggressive way, and she does not get anxious when other people are upset,” Edwards said. “That requires training a dog to be very relaxed even when there's a lot of stuff going on because dogs are highly attuned to human emotions.”

Like August, Yukon, a five-year-old Labrador retriever and member of the visiting therapy dog team at SHW, also displays an easygoing temperament. His handler, Bonnie Falbo, said that he provides students with non-verbal physical comfort that is “unlike any other” during their frequent visits to the SHW lobby and at special events.

“Some students sit on the floor to hug him and pet him, and you can feel the soothing effect Yukon has on them,” Falbo said in an email to *The Cavalier Daily*. “Yukon's responsibility is to show up happy, healthy and ready to ‘work,’ although for him, meeting people and giving love is not work at all. I call him a ‘love ambassador.’”

Third-year College student Mylo Haugh first met Yukon while tabling for the Cavalier Food Pantry. In an effort to increase foot traffic, the Food Pantry volunteers asked if Yukon would join the tabling team — a job he gladly accepted.

“The main attraction was Yukon,” Haugh said. “Normally, people will just walk by, but everyone stopped to say hi to him. We were able to get a couple of people to donate because of that.”

Nearly a decade before meeting Yukon, Haugh discovered that he had a love for therapy animals when a canine classmate became the highlight of his school days.

“Service and therapy animals are severely underutilized,” Haugh said. “When I was in sixth grade, my teacher had a therapy dog, and he would bring it on Fridays. Fridays were always the best day of the week, no matter whether [we] had an exam ... just because the dog was there.”

Haugh said that he has always wanted to go to SHW's “Pawffice Hours,” but scheduling conflicts with classes have prevented him from attending. Diversifying both time slots and locations of therapy dog events, he said, would be a worthwhile pursuit for SHW if they are looking to reach a greater number of students.

“Student Health and Wellness is kind of [far] out there for a lot of people,” Haugh said. “Having some therapy dogs on the Lawn, for example, would be very nice. I also think increasing the number of hours and available locations during midterm and final seasons is important because that's when students are most stressed.”

The bustling, productivity-driven culture at the University is precisely why advocates like Edwards say students need these animals. A simple wag of a tail or friendly head nudge can be enough to get students to pause — or paws — a spiral of anxiety, providing key emotional care without even saying a word.

“UVA is a wonderful, creative, competitive, busy place,” Edwards said. “UVA students go off and do great things in the world, but at this point in development, it is also really good to learn how to take care of yourself. Interacting with a dog gives you a little break from work. I think that's good for people because a happy and productive life requires you to take care of your mental and physical health.”

Best Buddies connects students and adults with IDD

University students provide a social support system for the local intellectual disability community

Sadie Adams | Staff Writer

At the annual Valentine's Dance last month, University students and adults alike gathered to play games, enjoy snacks, make crafts and hit the dance floor in style. For many participants, this dance is among the favorites of the many events run by Best Buddies, an international organization working to build meaningful relationships and opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities — often referred to as IDD.

The IDD community worldwide is disproportionately affected by social and emotional isolation, with nearly 40 percent of people with IDD reporting feelings of profound loneliness. Moreover, communities often lack adequate social networks that foster relationships between people with and without disabilities. Best Buddies provides a support system for individuals who are often not given the support they need or deserve.

March is designated Best Buddies month, a global celebration dedicated to promoting their mission of fostering individualized friendship pairings, developing leadership skills and creating inclusive social and living environments for people with and without

IDD.

In 1989, Best Buddies was brought to Grounds and has since expanded its reach to include over 100 students. Best Buddies programs build genuine connections by pairing middle school, high-school and college students with a member of the local IDD community.

To become a buddy, students are interviewed to gauge their individual interests, hobbies and values. Peer buddies are then matched with a buddy who shares similar interests.

Will Barlow, peer buddy and first-year College student, explained that he originally joined Best Buddies to make a positive impact on the community, but found that the genuine connections he made positively impacted him as well.

"Even though [IDD] does impair certain functions and it does limit them in certain ways, they still are capable of so much and doing so much in their community," Barlow said. "The impact that they have on individual people like myself, and the impact that hanging out with Greg and the rest of them has is, regardless of what their [disabilities] are, extremely impactful."

Echoing this sentiment, Catherine

McClure, Buddy pair coordinator and second-year Education student, highlighted how formative the connection with her buddy, Noah, has been for the both of them.

"You just know that they've impacted your life just as much as you've impacted their life," McClure said. "It's that genuine connection that you [get] with these people ... they want the best for you, [you] want the best for them."

That sense of reciprocity — of impact flowing both ways — extends beyond individual friendships. For many members, such as Barlow, joining Best Buddies has reshaped how they go about their day-to-day lives. Barlow explained how consistently engaging with his buddy has prompted him to step back from the stressors of college life and reframe his perspective.

"[People with IDD] love to hang out and just feel included, like one of your friends. It's just a normal Saturday, and they're going and having fun with all their friends, that's how they see it," Barlow said. "I found that as someone doing [Best Buddies], it puts life into perspective."

At the University, Best Buddies hosts at least one club-wide event a month. Past events include the Hol-

iday Party, the Winter Reunion and the Valentine's Dance. Several of the organization's events take place at the YMCA's Kindness Cafe, a local coffee shop that provides employment opportunities and a supportive environment for people with IDD.

Emi Flowers, a young adult buddy and a cashier at Kindness Cafe, said that buddy groups often come to the cafe to socialize. One of Flowers' favorite memories from Best Buddies was playing a fiercely competitive game with a group of students.

"When UVa. was [at Kindness Cafe], we did Spot It," Flowers said. "It was hard. I love memory games."

Apart from club-wide events, students and their buddies hang out socially multiple times a month. Flowers said she enjoys grabbing a bite to eat at Chick-fil-A and stopping by the Dairy Market with her buddy.

In addition to its focus on friendship and inclusivity, Best Buddies at UVa. also works to counteract harmful rhetoric and derogatory language towards people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Their "Spread the Word" initiative started in 2009 to end the use of the derogatory r-slur towards people with IDD, encouraging

awareness, empathy and person-first language when referring to the IDD community.

Beginning March 9 as part of Best Buddies Month, the University's chapter of Best Buddies will bring this initiative to Grounds, campaigning against derogatory language and promoting inclusive speech and thinking.

Although there are about 200 million people worldwide with IDD, there are still very few support systems in place for this community, contributing to chronic isolation that permeates throughout the IDD population.

At the University, Best Buddies breaks down traditional social barriers between young adults with and without IDD, creating a less isolating world through sincere, enduring friendships. For Best Buddies chapters across the country, the month of March merely amplifies the ideals of inclusivity, friendship and support that each sector works to embody.

"I feel like bringing more awareness to having disabilities, making them be seen as humans, rather than a disability [is important]," McClure said. "I feel like that's like something that really is needing to change and continue to develop."

Revolutionary Soup lives up to its name

This cozy, brick-and-mortar bistro on the Downtown Mall turns comfort food into something truly revolutionary

Lucy Larsen | Staff Writer

Last month, my roommate and I were searching Grubhub for soup — a favorite of ours that rarely makes an appearance in the dining halls — when we stumbled across Revolutionary Soup. I had never heard of it before, but the idea of a warm bowl of soup on a chilly evening was infinitely enticing. So after checking out the menu, we decided to give it a try.

Tucked right off of the Downtown Mall, Revolutionary Soup has been serving soups, salads, sandwiches and a variety of other comfort staples for over 20 years. All of their meals are made from local, organic ingredients, and their menu offers a variety of vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free options.

Open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Revolutionary Soup is an ideal spot for Charlottesville residents to dine in or enjoy takeout. Inside, the space feels cozy and welcoming, almost nostalgic, with wooden floors, simple seating and handwritten menu boards. Vibrant paintings on the walls and tables give the space a playful, eclectic aesthetic.

While the restaurant has plenty of indoor seating, I noticed that a large portion of its patrons choose to grab

takeout — opting to enjoy this comfort food in their own homes. If opting for takeout, the restaurant's website features a user-friendly interface that allows customers to place orders online with ease.

While I highly recommend a dine-in experience, Revolutionary Soup's service extends beyond their dining room. They also offer to-go soups by the quart for patrons who hope to get multiple meals out of their order, as well as catering services for large gatherings.

On the other hand, in-restaurant patrons order at the counter and wait for their number to be called. Thankfully, I looked at the menu beforehand, as there were plenty of intriguing options.

As a vegetarian, I am used to having limited choices at restaurants, so the variety of options — ranging from a Mozzarella & Pesto to a BLT with veggie bacon — was a nice surprise. The soups and sandwiches were inspired by a variety of cuisines including Japanese, Mediterranean and Southern classics, offering plenty of fun flavors from around the globe.

If you're an indecisive diner like me, you're in luck. One of my favorite

aspects of Revolutionary Soup is the pick-two combo, which allows you to choose a small soup and a half-portion of any sandwich or salad.

With soup options ranging from classics like Loaded Potato and Tomato Basil Bisque to unique sandwich offerings from Thai Wraps to Pimento Grilled Cheeses, this place offers a little something for everyone.

Soup aside, I was disappointed to learn that all pick-two sandwiches come as a wrap instead of being served on their delicious bread choices like sourdough and sunflower wheat. Nevertheless, after debating between several combinations, I ultimately chose the Peanut Tofu soup paired with the Garlic Garden Club wrap.

Reasonably priced, our pick-two combos came out to \$13 each, which seemed very sensible for a wrap, a cup of soup, a fountain drink and a cornbread muffin. For those craving only soup, the restaurant also offers a "soup flight" — an in-house sampler of four half-cups that makes for a fun tasting experience.

Within about 15 minutes, our orders were ready. The presentation was adorable, resembling an elevated school-cafeteria meal. While I was

excited about the muffin, it ended up being a disappointing element of my meal, as it crumbled everywhere the second I took a bite.

The wrap was filled with sautéed peppers and onions, avocado, lettuce and a rich garlic cream cheese. Each bite brought together the smokiness of the sautéed vegetables with the fresh avocado and cheese, allowing all of the flavors to work in tandem with each other without one overpowering the rest. It was a generous portion for a half wrap — served sliced in two — which was a pleasant surprise for my grumbling stomach.

However, the most "revolutionary" part of the meal was the soup itself. The sweet peanut flavor perfectly balanced the heat of the Thai spices, while the tofu and green onions added an additional layer of texture and flavor. The thick, chowder-like consistency was so hearty and satisfying that I seriously considered buying an entire quart to take home.

My roommate ordered the Spicy Chicken Tortilla soup and Kickin' Chicken wrap and was just as pleased with her meal as I was. Her soup came with a side of tortilla strips, adding some variation in the texture.

Her wrap consisted of roasted chicken, sautéed vegetables and a chipotle mayo sauce. She described the soup to be light yet flavorful, and the creaminess of the mayo and cheese created a perfect balance to the spiciness of the broth.

We both agreed that while it will be hard to switch up from our delicious orders, we need to expand our repertoire and try a new pick-two combination next time.

Regardless of the time of day or year, Revolutionary Soup is a deliciously convenient place to turn for your next comfort meal — a hearty bowl of soup can be the perfect remedy for March's remaining chilly days, while a refreshing wrap or salad provides a lighter option as summer inches closer.

Thoughtfully accommodating dietary preferences and restrictions, the restaurant's wide array of gluten-free and plant-based dishes has quickly placed it among my favorite food spots in Charlottesville. It's safe to say that Revolutionary Soup has indeed revolutionized the way I think about comfort food.

SPORTS

Bittersweet triumph and 313 wins for Coach Joanna Hardin

With seniors set to depart, Hardin brings her Cavaliers to a long-awaited crescendo

Ben McNiff | Senior Associate

Following a Friday night victory over Ohio State three weeks ago, the players and coaches of Virginia softball stood together, as is tradition, for a rendition of the Good Ol' Song. In a weekend full of delays and cancellations from frequent rain, the most unexpected downpour did not come from the sky. As the song wound down, senior infielder Jade Hylton had a surprise for Coach Joanna Hardin.

Their defeat of the Buckeyes brought Virginia's win streak to 10 games, but that accomplishment was secondary to an even greater feat — that night, Hardin achieved her 300th career win, a count to which she has since added 13 more. To celebrate the occasion, Hylton and a member of the coaching staff ran to grab a cooler from the dugout, hoisted it up and tipped it over, drenching Hardin in Gatorade.

"[Senior pitcher Eden Bigham and I] have been here four years now," Hylton said. "So we're proud to say we've been with her for a lot of [wins], but definitely a well-deserved ice bath."

In total, the Class of 2026 has seen 125 of Hardin's 313 career victories — and counting. Should the Cavaliers' 23-2 start translate to a winning percentage above .500, 2022-26 — the current seniors' seasons with Hardin, plus the year prior to their freshman campaigns — would represent Virginia's first streak of five consecutive winning seasons since 1988-1992 under former Coach Terry DeTuro.

"When we committed, gosh, six years ago ... We came in wanting to change the program and help [Hardin] reach these goals," Bigham said. "I think it's super special for us to be here and celebrate those with her."

Virginia has had plenty to celebrate in recent years. With Hardin at the helm, the softball program has experienced a renaissance and this year, they are off to a roaring start — the Cavaliers came within four games of matching the school's all-time record for consecutive wins. Although their streak was snapped, they are still set to qualify for NCAAs for the third year in a row, and to improve on their overall record for the fifth consecutive year. Three years ago, Virginia had only qualified for the national tournament once in program history.

Now, the duo of Hylton and Bigham, who befriended each other as showcase teammates in high school and led the Cavaliers through these historic highs, are set to depart from the program after this season. When the day comes, it will be bittersweet for all involved — at least telling from



AHNA HAMPTON | THE CAVALIER DAILY

Hardin's reaction to a question on the pair of seniors.

"Oh, you're going to make me cry," Hardin said. "Jade and Eden are special ... They are everything you ask for and you want as a coach, they are elite athletes, they are hard workers, they are humble and kind, they are competitive ... It is such a joy to coach them and just to be part of their journey. I tell our staff as often as I can to just soak in the moments with them."

For Bigham, Virginia's all-time leader in saves, the years have gone by fast — she too is looking to savor each moment.

"We just celebrated [Hardin's 250th win] last year, at Florida State, and it felt like just yesterday," Bigham said.

The greatest stretch of success under Hardin has come during Hylton and Bigham's tenure as Cavaliers — however, the foundation was laid amidst years of losing seasons by a team without a true home.

Prior to Hardin's hiring in 2016, the Cavaliers had achieved only three winning seasons in the previous 10 years, even ending 2014 with only eight wins. The venue where the team was forced to compete — an impractical eyesore almost a mile away from the future location of Palmer Park — was symbolic of Virginia softball's lack of standing as a competitive athletic program.

Hardin, when asked to reflect on her success relative to where the program was when she took over, did not shy away from the reality of the situation.

"It has been a really hard journey, a really worthwhile journey," Hardin said. "I think that ... we want instant gratification and want results worked out even now, like you can take over a program, go into the portal and fill it up — that was not the case when I got here."

Before Hardin's arrival, the program was an afterthought, tucked away behind Barracks Road Shopping Center, playing in a park left unrenovated since 2009. After one season at the helm — culminating in the program's first ACC tournament appearance since 2013 — Hardin advocated for a new stadium, speaking at a winter 2017 Board of Visitors meeting.

"Where we are now just doesn't accommodate the needs of being a program at the national level," Hardin said at the meeting. "A new facility ... would change the face of this program."

Although initial efforts to find a new location for a home field failed, Hardin would have her field eventually thanks to support from longtime program patron and Virginia softball great Lisa Palmer. The state-of-the-art Palmer Park opened to fans for the

2020 season and has been the home of the Cavaliers since. Today, Virginia softball competes alongside the facilities of Virginia baseball, track and lacrosse.

"When Lisa [Palmer] signed on to build this amazing facility, I remember thinking in the fall of 2018 we broke ground," Hardin said. "I'm like, there's going to be a point where I'm standing in center field and I'm looking at this amazing facility and it's going to be done, and I'm going to have to pinch myself."

The change of venue coincided with a change of play for Virginia, as the program has suffered only one losing season since its construction and achieved multiple national rankings — including a No. 24 ranking in 2024, the first time the program has been nationally ranked since 1995.

The current senior class joined the program in 2023 and are on pace to participate in four consecutive seasons with over 30 wins. As the fifth-ever Cavalier to be named All-American and the program's all-time home run leader, Hylton is exemplary of Virginia softball's ascension. In her typically humble fashion, she expressed her belief in Hardin's role as an architect of the program's resurgence, referring to her own time with the team as one small part of a greater whole.

"She put a lot of work into the pro-

gram," Hylton said. "So I'm very, very blessed to be a ... little part of the big stuff she's done."

Hardin shares her shortstop's gratitude — she is overwhelmingly thankful for her players, staff and the program's supporters.

"Being part of the Charlottesville community, the UVa. community is really special," Hardin said. "This place is really, really special, and I've had some really special athletes and coaches, and so it's been a lot of work from the beginning, for 10 years. It's like almost a quarter of my life."

Just as Hardin thought to pinch herself in her reverie of then-unfinished Palmer Park, she may want to do so now — Virginia's 2025-26 season has been nothing short of her dream for the ascending program. The Cavaliers are ranked No. 18 in the country, on pace for the greatest season in program history. They recently won a jubilant seventh-inning comeback against Michigan, a victory which the players celebrated in front of fans at Palmer Park.

"It's a dream for me to be here, to be coaching here, to be coaching at the University of Virginia," Hardin said. "All my family is here. Get to raise my daughter here. I'm around people like Jade and Eden every day, and then to compete at a national level has always been the dream."

What Virginia's ACC Tournament exit says about its season

Three beat writers break down Virginia's regular season and postseason standings

Sofie Keppler, Xander Tillock and Jordan Zimm | Senior Associate, Senior Writer and Staff Writer

Virginia's regular season was defined by ups and downs, landing the Cavaliers (19-11, 11-7 ACC) a No. 8 seed in the ACC Tournament. But their conference tournament run ended almost as quickly as it began, with a second-round defeat to No. 9-seed Clemson March 5 in Duluth, Ga.

After opening ACC play with a 5-0 record for the first time since the 2017-18 season, the Cavaliers faltered due to late-game lapses and slow starts. They struggled to stop the bleeding in their final two regular season games — first, against the red-hot No. 21 Tar Heels and then, falling short by one point in the Smithfield Commonwealth Clash against Virginia Tech. This lack of successful late-game execution was a trend that resurfaced against Clemson in the ACC Tournament.

Despite the abrupt exit from the tournament, the squad notched some signature wins through the regular season against Notre Dame and then-No. 8 Louisville. Those games demonstrated that when the Cavaliers can deflect in passing lanes and get out in transition, they can get downhill efficiently and establish a rhythm.

The Cavaliers sit firmly on the bubble of the NCAA Tournament, but Virginia's postseason fate remains in question after a short-lived ACC Tournament run. Three beat writers discussed Virginia's regular season and postseason outlook as the Cavaliers await the selection committee's decision on Selection Sunday, March 15.

What mistakes held Virginia back in its ACC Tournament loss to Clemson?

Sofie Keppler, Senior Associate: Virginia's perimeter defense against Clemson was abysmal despite a formidable interior defense. The Tigers shot the lights out from deep — drilling 10 three-pointers at a 50 percent clip. Though Coach Amaka Agugua-Hamilton emphasized the team's need to "take care of the three-point line" prior to the rematch, the exterior defensive execution was sorely lacking — Virginia repeatedly lost open shooters on closeouts. Though Clemson only shot 29 percent in the first half, the Tigers' balanced scoring attack and persistent intensity kept the Cavaliers on their heels. By the second half, the defensive breakdowns on the

perimeter proved decisive, as Virginia failed to contain Clemson's shooting and lost the game.

Xander Tillock, Senior Writer: The same old story reared its ugly head once again — remarkably inefficient team offense sank Virginia. Three starters in senior forward Tabitha Amanze, junior forward Sa'Myah Smith and graduate guard Romi Levy combined to score just 12 points, whereas all of them scored in double figures in the first game against Clemson, Jan. 1. Meanwhile, junior guard Kymora Johnson scored 12 points of her own on an inefficient 18 shot attempts. A team that averages 75 points per game cannot score 50 in a postseason basketball game and expect to win. Virginia has the talent to field a consistent offense, but poor passing, rushed shot selection and cold shooting streaks have doomed the Cavaliers.

Jordan Zimm, Staff Writer: Virginia's inability to shoot the ball consistently from downtown, a hallmark of its scoring droughts this year, was the reason the Cavaliers fell short in the ACC Tournament. On the season, Virginia shot 32 percent from the three-point line — not terrible on paper, but also not extraordinarily effective, as the All-ACC Johnson shot over 40 percent of the team's three-pointers at a 36-percent clip. Against Clemson on the biggest stage of the year, the Cavaliers shot 4-for-19 from behind the arc compared to the Tigers' 10-for-20. Going into one of the most difficult postseason conference tournaments with such poor perimeter shooting was never going to get the job done.

Looking back, which games exposed Virginia's weaknesses the most this season?

SK: Both matchups against Virginia Tech exposed the Cavaliers' most persistent weaknesses. In the first meeting in Blacksburg Feb. 1, Virginia trailed by just five points heading into the final quarter but lost by 12 after recording a perplexing season-low of five assists alongside a season-high of 28 personal fouls. Virginia's rematch with the Hokies was similarly frustrating. The Cavaliers erased a 23-point first-half deficit but fell by one point in the end. In both second halves, winnable games felt insurmountable because of the Cavaliers' lack of late-game synergy and careless decision-making. Rather than consistently moving the



BENIN LOZADA | THE CAVALIER DAILY

The Cavalier women are stuck in limbo until Selection Sunday.

ball to find open shooters and prevent turnovers, Virginia often drove into clogged lanes hoping to draw fouls.

XT: In slim overtime wins against Florida State and Wake Forest, the Cavaliers barely scraped by against ACC bottom-feeders. In Virginia's victory over Florida State, a common theme occurred — Johnson and senior guard Paris Clark carried most of the scoring load while a talented supporting cast disappeared. That win at Wake Forest was a shining example of how Virginia's offense can vanish. The Cavaliers held an 18-point lead in regulation but ended up playing three overtime periods to dispatch one of the ACC's poorest teams. Agugua-Hamilton said her team "should have closed it out," yet they struggled immensely to do so. "Should have" sums up the 2025-26 season well.

JZ: The unforgettable matchup with UMBC, Virginia's third game of the season, was the first to expose the season-long problems that have continued to manifest since Virginia's first loss of the season. The Cavaliers didn't make a single three-point shot in that game. The Cavaliers lost six of eight ACC matchups in which they made four or fewer three-point shots. Johnson, the team's top scorer and the ACC's second leading scorer, only notched four points on 1-for-16 from the field. While sophomore forward Breo-

na Hurd dropped a career-high 22 points, the Cavaliers' missed layups, lack of balanced scoring and defensive lapses proved too costly to overcome.

How does Virginia's quick exit shape the narrative around its NCAA Tournament case?

SK: After a rough stretch to end their season, the ACC Tournament presented an opportunity for Virginia to define its identity heading deeper into March. The selection committee undoubtedly looks for teams that translate their potential into consistent, high-level performances on any stage, so a strong conference tournament showcase could have crystallized what Virginia basketball is all about at its most sustainable level. Instead, the abrupt exit leaves the selection committee to toggle with a resume that still lacks a clear throughline — a team capable of impressive highs, but one whose formula for winning feels nearly impossible to predict because those flashes are too often blurred by uneven execution down the stretch.

XT: A win over Clemson would have entrenched Virginia on the right side of the NCAA Tournament bubble. The loss, however, might mean that the Cavaliers are eliminated from NCAA Tournament contention. Virginia is 11-10 against Power Four competition and has just

one ranked win on its resume, plus a slew of nasty losses. The Cavaliers are also 7-6 on the road. That does not have the makings of a postseason basketball team, as they would not be playing inside the friendly confines of John Paul Jones Arena. As for the rest of the bubble, Virginia is fighting for one of the final four spots with Nebraska, Arizona State, BYU, Texas A&M, Stanford, Richmond and Utah. If the Cavaliers do make the NCAA Tournament, they will do so as one of the very last teams to make it.

JZ: The second-round exit was the worst possible scenario for the Cavaliers, given their spot according to bracketologists. ESPN's Charlie Creme has Virginia as one of the last four teams in the NCAA Tournament, a 12-seed forced to play its way into the Big Dance with a matchup against fellow projected 12-seed Arizona State. The Cavaliers had their season written out for them after defeating Louisville — control your own destiny by winning a game or two in the ACC Tournament and be a tournament lock. However, the Cavaliers' inability to execute in key moments leaves the season with a lingering question mark. If Creme's prediction holds, Virginia must fix these season-long issues to play into the 64-team bracket.

Dallin Hall, Virginia's linchpin, is built for March

The Cavaliers' starting point guard and de facto captain may not fill the stat sheet — but will still be vital to the team's postseason

Thomas Baxter | Senior Associate

Graduate guard Dallin Hall walked slowly towards the end of the bench, a bit of a grin on his face after fouling out.

It was senior day, his senior day, and hardly a soul was seated. A near sell-out crowd in John Paul Jones Arena gave Hall two standing ovations in the game against Virginia Tech Saturday — one before the game as he walked with his parents to receive his flowers, and another when he walked off Tony Bennett Court for the last time.

Zero points, the stat sheet read, five personal fouls, two rebounds, two turnovers, a steal. Oh, and nine assists.

"He does everything for us," Coach Ryan Odom said postgame. "I didn't even want to take him out [of the game], but I had to take him out there for a minute just ... so he could finish the game."

Par for the course for Virginia's starting point guard. The BYU transfer came to Charlottesville with three

seasons of Division I basketball under his belt — marketed as a steady presence, a clever game manager and a veteran competitor. Hall has been just that in his 31 games as a Cavalier.

Holding the lowest usage rate of any player on the team, Hall still manages to regularly make an outsized impact on the game as a playmaker and leader. Ranking 10th in the ACC in assists per game, Hall has an assist-to-turnover ratio of 3.3 on the season — a strong indicator of an effective distributor and trusted offensive conductor. Hall, however, said he looks at a different statistic to gauge his success.

"For me, it's just ultimately about that win," Hall said. "At the end of the game, that's the only real stat that matters to me. So different games require different things. I try to take what the defense gives me."

That results-first, stats-second approach is a staple of Hall's game and part of what has made him so suc-

cessful in his lone season as a Cavalier. His teammates, like Odom, certainly recognize that. "Captain America," as they call him, is a selfless leader, a standup guy and a high-level basketball player who makes an impact in a number of ways that do not always show up on a stat sheet.

"Whenever Dallin talks, we listen to him," senior center Ugonna Onyenso said. "He brings a different kind of energy to the game."

In a two-and-a-half minute sequence that saw the Cavaliers go on an 8-0 run to retake the lead against Virginia Tech, Hall assisted three baskets, including a lob to Onyenso just seconds after a baseline offensive rebound to keep the play alive. He would find Onyenso again later in the second half, his final assist of the game just 30 seconds before getting his fifth foul.

"I really enjoy situations where you have to respond," Hall said. "Credit to Tech — they went on a great run. So

in those instances, I just try to calm the game down, help us get some easy buckets, because they were making it tough on us. And the guys executed in their screening and [were] in the right positions on the floor."

That win over the Hokies was not the first time in the season that Hall would play his best basketball in crunchtime. He scored eight points in the last three minutes against Northwestern and iced Virginia's win over Ohio State with a transition layup and later, a crucial made free throw.

With that composure down the stretch, it should come as no surprise that Hall will continue to be a key starter as Virginia enters the postseason, playing the high-stakes March basketball with which he is already somewhat familiar. In his time as a Cougar, Hall played in four NCAA tournament games, notching a combined 18 assists across 93 minutes of play.

"Playing in the NCAA Tournament is an awesome feeling," Hall said. "I think just the intensity, the pressure, everything gets higher the farther you go."

Hall said that what he will remember most fondly of his time as a Cavalier is the journey — the plane rides, the meals, the community. If you had asked him three years ago, Hall said, he never would have guessed that his basketball journey would place him on a 27-4 Virginia squad poised to make a deep run in the national tournament.

Odom, talking about Hall on his senior day, was less surprised about his starting point guard's career. Hall is a winning player, the Cavaliers' de facto captain and vital to the team's success.

"He's the ultimate leader, he's not afraid in big moments," Odom said. "He's just unbelievable with his commitment to winning. And I couldn't ask for a better guy to start this journey off with."

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Matthew Marshall introduces silent films to a new generation

The educator and composer performs musical scores over silent films for live audiences, including those in his courses

Bridget Baile | Senior Writer

For over 20 years, Media Studies Lecturer Matthew Marshall has carved out a specific niche for himself in the Charlottesville film community. Equally adept at composing classical music as he is passionate about silent films, Marshall has melded these talents into a career — composing and performing live classic scores in the background of silent films at various venues across Albemarle County.

Marshall's passion for silent films began in his childhood, where he spent much of his time with his parents and grandparents, all of whom had strong interests in film. As an only child, Marshall commonly listened to adults talk about film, which he says primed him to be receptive to cinema of a bygone time. Marshall said he was mesmerized when he caught the silent film "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" on television as a youth, setting him on the path to becoming a silent film aficionado.

Born with a good ear, Marshall also grew up interested in music. In college he started to develop his passion for classical stylings by getting into composing. As he started writing music for other musicians in the late 1990s, he thought about how to combine his

craft with his love of silent films. Marshall said he feels as though writing for silent films was a natural progression.

"The good news is the kind of music I like to write sounds [like the] 1920s," Marshall said. "I try to keep you in the movie, in that world. I feel like to hear [music] that you would have heard at the time brings you back to that a little bit more."

An opportunity presented itself in 2001 when Richard Herskowitz — former director of the Virginia Film Festival — visited the senior center Marshall and his wife worked at, looking to spread word about the festival. Marshall's wife mentioned her husband's proclivity for composing scores and Herskowitz — looking for someone to play music for "The Phantom of the Opera" — was immediately interested. Since then, Marshall has composed and performed his music for silent films at VAFF annually from 2001 to 2012, and periodically in the years since. Beyond these experiences, Marshall performs for silent films at other local spots, from his courses at the University to the Paramount Theater and the Violet Crown, where he was named the theater's first artist in residence in 2024.

Fourth-year College student Emma Bauer watched Marshall perform live at the Violet Crown, and expressed her appreciation for his craft. Marshall performed solo at this screening, but he sometimes plays with a chamber group to create a fuller, more orchestral sound.

"[With Marshall] playing for the whole 70 minutes of the show and having to sit there and listen to the music without words and fast motion happening on the screen, it was a very calming and meditative experience," Bauer said.

Before beginning to teach at the University in 2016, Marshall taught classes in the film department at Hollins University for five years after receiving his Master of Fine Arts in screenwriting in 2011. Beyond teaching and performing, Marshall has authored multiple screenplays as well.

Transitioning away from screenwriting, Marshall now teaches MDST 2710, "Screenwriting" and MDST 2810, "Cinema As An Art Form" through the University's Media Studies department, as well as "Film Appreciation" through the Piedmont Virginia Community College's Prison Education Program. "Cinema As An Art Form"

gives Marshall an opportunity to showcase his passion for silent films and classical music in a classroom setting. Occasionally, he plays full-length silent films in class, accompanied with musical compositions that he performs live on a piano.

With "Cinema As An Art Form," Marshall is able to introduce silent films to a completely new generation. Marshall aims to introduce students to the power of images when creating meaning, which can be difficult with students accustomed to short-form content and not sprawling black-and-white films without dialogue. Marshall said he wants people to "watch less and see more" by reducing the quantity of visual media consumed and increasing attention to detail.

Marshall's process for composing music evolved as he gained more experience. In the past, his scores were completely composed himself, but as access to the scores and cue sheets for older films has expanded through online resources, Marshall began to draw more upon existing music.

Currently, Marshall's scores are typically made up of two-thirds his own composition and one-third existing music. When original music

for a silent film is widely accessible, Marshall prefers to follow the known score more closely. For example, when he performed live for VAFF's 100th anniversary screening of "Nosferatu" in 2022, Marshall relied almost entirely on the original score composed by Hans Erdmann. Through these performances, Marshall builds a relationship with his audience, something rarely achieved in other forms of media.

"There's the art that's on the screen, but then there's the art of the audience, their ability to make connections. When you're dealing with short-form content, you're not going to make connections, you're just going to experience the thing in the moment," Marshall said. "It's not so much that the movies have changed, it's that audiences have changed the way they take in content."

Through Marshall's dedication to silent films and composing, he has brought a greater appreciation for the aging art form to Charlottesville. Marshall will be playing the live score for "The Adventures of Prince Achmed" March 15 at the Violet Crown, with tickets available on their website.

Sharel Cassity on shaping the future of jazz education

Cassity, a renowned saxophonist, seeks to enhance jazz education for youth and University students

Preet Manukonda | Staff Writer

Sharel Cassity, associate music professor and the University's director of jazz performance, is no stranger to the spotlight, frequently gracing the stage as a saxophonist and jazz musician. Throughout her career, Cassity honed her craft in the music scene of New York and Chicago, working alongside Grammy-winning artists such as Aretha Franklin and even appearing on television shows such as Good Morning America. Last Fall, she added another role to her distinguished artistic career, stepping into academia as a professor at the University — a role that places her at the forefront of change in music education.

As the Director of Jazz Performance, Cassity leads the University Jazz Ensemble in their shows and teaches courses such as MUSI 2600, "Jazz Improvisation" and MUEN 3600, "Jazz Ensemble." In these spaces, she also works to expand the University's academic jazz program as a whole, especially in guiding students in musical development and career preparation.

Cassity first learned to play an instrument by strumming along to simple guitar chords with her father. She attributes her early affinity for music to her parents, who both expected and encouraged her to be involved with instrumentation growing up.

"Music, on my dad's side, was an expectation for everyone. Everyone played piano, so I started playing piano at six...[music was also] something that my mom really encouraged," Cassity said.

According to Cassity, she wanted to be a musician by age 8. And at age 10, she began to find solace in music as a safe space after frequently moving homes growing up.

Believing music to be her calling, Cassity explored numerous styles of the art form. She explored classical and jazz sounds with her father, while simultaneously listening to Motown songs with her mother. As her career developed, Cassity also began to take inspiration from the sounds and musical ecosystems of the cities she lived in, ultimately gravitating towards the jazz genre.

"Hearing all the straight-ahead jazz in New York inspired me, and then, 16 years later, moving to Chicago [I was] inspired by the music there, because the music in Chicago has an element to it that's very deep," Cassity said. "Both cities really influenced my music."

However, for Cassity, the con-



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Sharel Cassity, associate music professor and the University's director of jazz performance, is no stranger to the spotlight, frequently gracing the stage as a saxophonist and jazz musician. Throughout her career, Cassity honed her craft in the music scenes of New York and Chicago, working alongside Grammy-winning artists such as Aretha Franklin and even appearing on television shows such as Good Morning America.

stant hustle between practicing and performing was never the final destination. As she noticed her mentors — notably National Endowment of the Arts jazz masters James Moody and Jimmy Heath — were nearing the end of their careers, Cassity's perception of jazz shifted. Instead of simply being an art form to master, Cassity now viewed jazz music as a tradition to pass on.

"I started to think about what's going to happen if we don't teach?" Cassity said. "And I didn't like that. So that's [why] I was inspired to teach because I realized that it's important to pass on this music, and it's important to help students into the industry as well."

This realization inspired Jazz Up — a non-profit based in Chicago founded by Cassity in 2021 which connects high school students with performance experience and like-minded peers. She currently still serves as the program director and president of the organization. At Jazz Up, students engage in combo rehearsals, rhythm classes, jam sessions and more as a means to broaden their perspective of music and improve upon their skills.

Cassity further noticed barriers in experience and opportunity between students in traditional public schools and those

in arts-centered high schools and communities. Therefore, Jazz Up aims to bridge that gap by providing mentorship to students who may lack prior guidance but aspire to pursue a music career.

That same career-oriented focus manifests itself in Cassity's work at the University, where she mentors students navigating the transition from classroom to a professional stage. Cassity has observed that collegiate students can often struggle to navigate the professional music industry without sufficient mentorship. Musical prowess, she believes, is only a small piece of the puzzle when it comes to a professional career.

"I think if you choose to play music, you should leave with an idea of how you're going to create income for yourself, the kind of community that you fit into... you should have an idea of what your product is going to look like," Cassity said.

Looking ahead, she aims to further highlight these career-building topics in the University jazz program, including topics relating to creating and sustaining a career in the music industry. Currently, one way Cassity accomplishes this is by helping students train their ear to recognize and listen for well-produced music they can take inspiration from.

Cassity also aspires for the

program to become nationally recognized as one of the strongest university jazz programs — an effort she has already advanced in the past semester by hosting nationally renowned jazz artists like vibraphonist Warren Wolf to workshop and perform with students. The jazz ensemble additionally may have the opportunity to take national trips, play at major conferences and even create albums.

"I'm looking to create one of the strongest programs, strongest big bands and combos, and to take trips nationally to play at major festivals, to play at major conferences [and] maybe to do an album," Cassity said.

Importantly, Cassity asserted even students not pursuing a major in jazz can benefit from these improvements, as she wants to create an environment where all students have access to any professionally enriching resource they need. In the University's jazz program, Cassity believes this can be done through a pathways program, which specifically provides a space for students with non-musical career aspirations to create and expand their musical capabilities in a collegiate setting if they want to.

"I think the music department's already doing a great job at guiding students, because they

have teachers that really focus on each student's need," Cassity said. "We are [also] working on creating a pathways option [within the program] to even create more opportunities for students to go in the direction they want to."

This proposed pathways option reflects a larger shift in how Cassity approaches music education at the University. Drawing from her experiences in her own career and at Jazz Up, Cassity is building a program flexible enough to accommodate various musical ambitions. By stepping into the role of Director of Jazz Performance at the University, Cassity's goals redefine what the jazz program can offer to University students — a space where mentorship and opportunity allow students of all backgrounds to find their place in the jazz community.

"When I came here, that was one of my big goals, is to help the students, first of all, see themselves being successful at [jazz] and then give them the pathway that they want into the industry," Cassity said. "I think that this is something that is changing very quickly in a positive direction in the program."

'We Dream of Life' brings ethereal energy to Ruffin Gallery

A collaborative art exhibition, the monumental piece stretches across the space with dream-like scenes inspired by the natural world

Delaney Coppola | Staff Writer

The "We Dream of Life" installation on view in the University's Ruffin Gallery transforms the entire space into an ethereal realm exploring divinity and the interconnectedness of life. Showcased from Jan. 30 through March. 20, the 56-foot-long textile project by California-based artist iris yirei hu and New Mexico-based artist Paula Wilson reflects the depth of their friendship and redefines the typical gallery setup, both in scale of the piece and in the collaborative process itself.

Both hu and Wilson have accomplished careers as multidisciplinary artists, with individual works exhibited across the country. hu's style, which highlights themes of journey and transformation across geography and life cycles, complements the vibrant explorations of myth, history and nature that characterize Wilson's art.

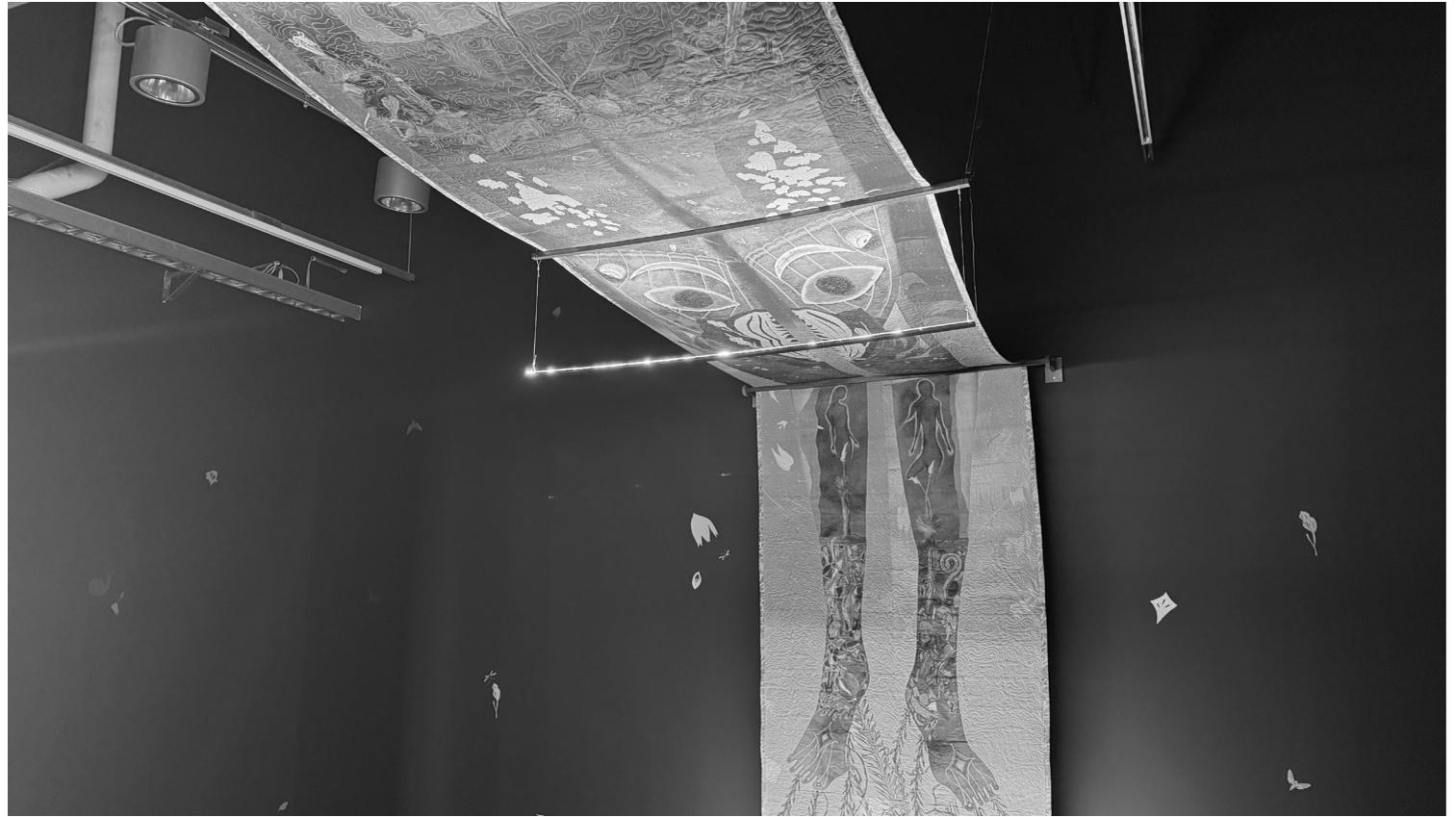
The two artists have shared years of kinship, from hu's annual birthday visit to Wilson's home in Carizozo, N.M. to the appreciation of their respective art that inspired this partnership. In an email statement to the Cavalier Daily, hu said the combination of their relationship and individual artistic talents translated into the monumental quilted artwork currently on display, weaving elements of their daily interactions into their shared creation.

"Paula and I have a habit of sharing our nightly dreams with one another. It seemed natural to incorporate our conversations into the collaboration," hu said. "We are also long-time admirers of each other's work, so finding ways for our work to coexist on the same surface, while developing new motifs together, was a very organic process."

Drawing from depictions of the ancient Egyptian goddess of the sky and heavens, Nut, the goddess-like blue installation stretches from wall to wall encompassing the gallery in a protective embrace. Joined with vinyl cutouts adorning the walls themselves, the masterpiece spans the entirety of the space and features intricate collaged, painted and stitched details across a surreal body.

Diverse visuals prompt intentional analysis from viewers, with each glance uncovering new elements woven into the tapestry of visual metaphors and motifs. Depictions of moon phases, outstretched hands, blooming flowers and animals embellish the piece's mini universe and compose the figure's structure. The work is incredibly dense despite its remarkable length. Psychedelic natural symbols and striking hues of every color grace every inch of the 56-foot quilt, aweing visitors.

hu spoke to the artists' shared multidisciplinary approach, high-



MAC DOUCETTE | THE CAVALIER DAILY

This unique collaborative creative process took place over the course of more than a year, with idea stages dating back to January 2025

lighting how their previous multimodal artistic experience in painting, printmaking and textiles contributed to the final piece. Both she and Wilson also said they strove to create an artifact that rewarded careful looking, incorporating small details — such as drawings of natural cycles — on either side of the work.

"I particularly love how the two ends of the piece mirror one another: the depiction of the roots that extend from the feet on one end, and the intertwined hands that embrace the compost heap on the other," hu said. "The figure is rooted in the earth, yet extends across the sky."

Commissioned specifically for the Ruffin space in 2025, the magnitude of this project challenged the artists as well as University staff organizing the residency. Elena Yu was the Ruffin Gallery and visiting artist program manager at the time, with "We Dream of Life" being her final exhibit in the role. In an email statement to The Cavalier Daily, Yu reflected on the logistical endeavors of the display and the use of a full scale mockup to play with the space.

"[The mockup] allowed us to experiment with the composition of the piece in the space; how many hanging points there would be, how high they would hang, and... exactly how long the artwork needed to be to touch the ground on either side of the gallery," Yu said.

hu and Wilson welcomed the daunting yet exciting task with a

work that occupies the room not only physically, but with a celestial energy as well.

"We loved the idea of a figure spanning the entire space, almost a sky from dawn to dusk, expanding time and space," Wilson said in an email statement to The Cavalier Daily. "There was definitely a moment when we looked at each other and were like, 'what were we thinking?' It's larger than anything either of us had ever undertaken."

This distinct creative process took place over the course of more than a year, with ideation dating back to January 2025, retaining the idea of connection both within the piece and between the artists themselves. Building on years of friendship and admiration of each others' work, hu and Wilson's intimate bond and strong belief in the power of partnership shines through in every artistic detail of the installation.

"[W]e wanted to challenge the idea of the artist-as-sole-genius by highlighting what a relational practice could look like," hu said. "We each contain and are a part of a network of identities, people, places and influences, and we wanted to work with that instead of against it."

The vibrancy with which this thriving relationship radiates from the piece speaks to the hours of dedication and coexistence from the artists, who share everything from personal dreams and conversations

in the space. Wilson expressed the deep-rooted cooperative nature of the project between co-artists and long time friends, each splitting up responsibility for the smaller steps of the whole.

"When we collaborate we really live and work together — cooking meals, keeping the same rhythm and spending long days side by side in the studio making constant decisions together. As iris once said, it feels like we become one organism," Wilson said.

The residency at the Ruffin Gallery itself emerged as a result of another friendship, that of the artists and Yu herself. With connections stemming back to hu and Yu's undergraduate studies at University of California, Los Angeles and eventual introduction to Wilson in more recent years, the trio's shared passion for the arts led to the exhibition's formation.

"When I was researching artists to bring to UVA., I immediately thought of iris and Paula, who are close friends but had never had the opportunity to collaborate on an exhibition," Yu said. "It was an honor to be able to commission a new artwork by two artists who I admire so deeply as both fellow artists and as friends."

Since its commencement in January, the "We Dream of Life" installation has offered students, faculty and community members alike the opportunity to walk into an immer-

sive experience of colorful creativity and otherworldly exploration. Second-year College student Sophie Gallivan experienced firsthand the magic of the gallery, noting the encompassing feeling of the artwork.

"I just loved how the piece wrapped around the room, it helped me to connect to the piece," Gallivan said. "It was easy to view her as a goddess and deity with all the symbolisms of nature."

With just over a week remaining in the installation's time at the University, both the artists and Yu spotlight the values of connection and openness evoked by the quilted textile. They hope these ideas continue to resonate with viewers at the University and beyond as it travels to future venues.

"[A]s iris said in the public artist talk on the opening day of the exhibition, 'sincerity is in right now.' I hope that visitors to the exhibition will take this sentiment to heart and continue to dream and create in collaboration with the humans, plants and places that they love," Yu said.

Within the walls of the Ruffin Gallery, hu and Wilson have designed a cyclical landscape of growth and the natural world. An artwork that praises the power of collaboration, the "We Dream of Life" exhibit offers a refreshing reminder of the beauty of shared creativity and community.

PUZZLE

Heer Patel | Puzzlist

Answers are available on the digital version of this puzzle which is published at www.cavalierdaily.com.

ACROSS

- 1 Comedy special full of insult
- 6 Many rooms in Gilmer
- 10 Indian city home to an ancient Wonder of the World
- 14 What the "A" in James A. Garfield stands for
- 15 Penne ____ vodka
- 16 Radar dot
- 17 Christmas carols
- 18 Person, place or thing
- 19 Acid's opposite
- 20 Lady's man
- 21 Neighbor of Vietnam
- 22 Greek god of the underworld
- 23 Self-_____
- 25 "Game of Thrones" network
- 27 Do the tango
- 30 Meeting plan
- 35 "He got that ___ in him"

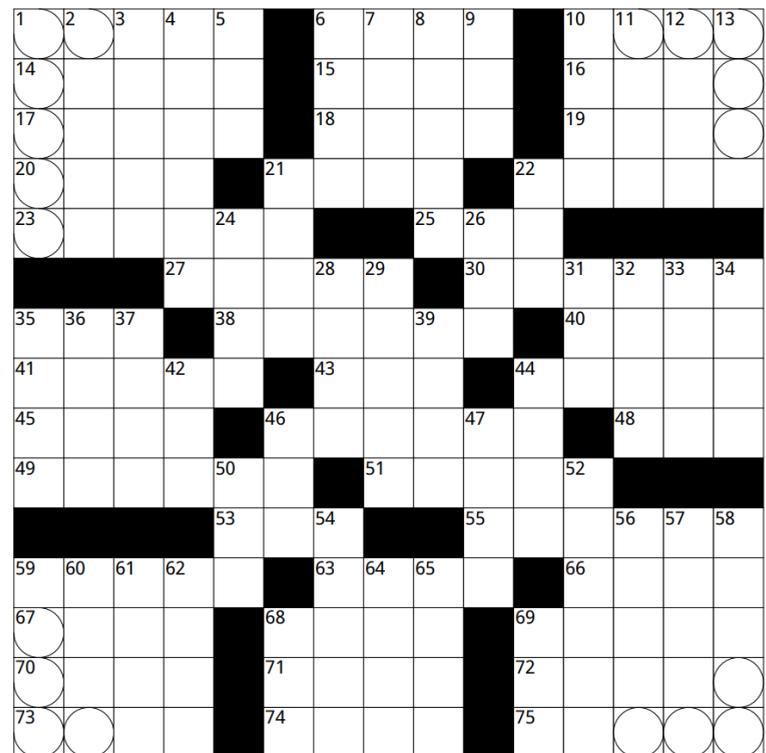
- 38 Robotic vacuum
- 40 Diving bird
- 41 Computer symbols
- 43 Fish eggs
- 44 Delaware-born president
- 45 ____ butter (moisturizer)
- 46 Involve
- 48 Opposite of NNW
- 49 With 54-Down, a restaurant on the Downtown Mall, or a product of the circled words
- 51 Street intersecting with Ivy Road
- 53 ___ Mahal
- 55 "What _____ of time!"
- 59 Thing of the past
- 63 Computer operating system
- 66 Where one could acquire a SILVERHÖJDEN
- 67 Hertz Rival
- 68 Uprising

- 69 San Antonio NBA team
- 70 What might be posted on Insta
- 71 Skincare target, for some
- 72 Musical category
- 73 Earnest request
- 74 Regard
- 75 Mayan ruins in Guatemala

DOWN

- 1 West _____ Cafe
- 2 Double-reeded instruments
- 3 "_____ we all?"
- 4 Like some peanuts
- 5 Corp. product IDs
- 6 "Summertime Sadness" singer Del Rey
- 7 Potato, on Indian menus
- 8 Cheek makeup
- 9 ___ Francisco
- 10 "Dancing Queen" band
- 11 Delighted

- 12 Ascend
- 13 "Planet of the ____"
- 21 JK follower
- 22 Refuse to share
- 24 Units of 28-Down
- 26 Sheep sound
- 28 Midwest crop
- 29 Fortnite dance move
- 31 Famed quarterback Manning
- 32 Signs of approval
- 33 Bucks' mates
- 34 Hathaway or Boleyn
- 35 The "D" in CD
- 36 Eight, in Ecuador
- 37 Move or party suffix
- 39 Wide grin
- 42 Invalid dataset value
- 44 Erupted
- 46 Historic period
- 47 Big-screen movie format
- 50 List-ending abbr.
- 52 Taiwan's capital
- 54 Electrical power, slangily
- 56 Striped stinker
- 57 Latin for "land"



- 58 Artist's stand
- 59 "Mean Girls" actress Reneé
- 60 Villainous
- 61 Head infestation
- 62 Actress Rae
- 64 ____ of the above
- 65 Thinking
- 68 "Far out!"
- 69 Cpl.'s superior

THE CAVALIER DAILY

THE CAVALIER DAILY

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OPINION

LEAD EDITORIAL

EDITORIAL: Elections promise growth for self-governance

The 2026 Student Elections were an example of student engagement that must continue into the future

In this year's Spring General Election, the most salient factor was the unprecedented amount of student engagement with turnout in the election for Student Council president more than doubling from 2025. The energy of candidates, campaigners, organizations and voters permeated the discourse on Grounds, leading to an election season marked by a genuine enthusiasm for the future of student self-governance at the University. Though not perfect in all respects, this year's elections should be lauded as a stepping stone to achieving greater student engagement in the future.

Leading this spike in engagement were the elections for Student Council executive positions. In the race for president, turnout jumped from less than 12 percent last year to approximately 25 percent of the student body. That excitement manifested in 'The Cavalier Daily and University Board of Elections' Debate for Presidential Candidates, which, though not traditionally a highly attended event, filled the debate room. In addition

to this, the Jefferson Literary and Debating Society hosted its own debate for down-ballot candidates, and both events provided candidates the opportunity to present their platforms to students in public, energetic forums. When combined with the proliferation of social media material and electioneering activities, the races for Student Council executive positions exemplified an election season undergirded by fervent engagement for student self-governance.

This year's elections were also notable for their absence of referenda, votes on which have typically garnered more engagement than votes for president. The last several general elections featured high-ticket referenda on issues such as the multi-sanction system for the Honor Committee, the University Guide Service and financial divestment initiatives. It is quite possible the lack of such referenda contributed to an increased engagement with candidates. However, engagement must be sustained by students' own enthusiasm rather than the mere lack

of more compelling items. Though referenda more directly encapsulate the substance of student opinion on certain issues, candidates are the ultimate agents of student opinion, using their platform and position to implement the substantive changes that students demand.

That deepening engagement, furthermore, becomes all the more important as the issues student organizations face become increasingly momentous. As demonstrated by Student Council President Clay Dickerson, student leaders have the ability to shape student discourse and debate on contentious issues such as University administration and national politics through a variety of means, including Lawn protests, coordination with other University student organizations and negotiations with University leadership. These student leaders must be guided by the opinions of the students they serve if their actions are to have any semblance of support from the broader student body. Ultimately, these opinions are best expressed dur-

ing election season, as debate around candidates reveals the priorities students value.

The level of student engagement in this year's elections is not valuable merely for the percentages. Rather, participation in the process of self-government is the foundational principle by which students' desires can be translated into a tangible product and respected by the University community. Participation provides legitimacy to decisions made by students. When the opinion of students is made tangible through debate and elections of student leaders, other stakeholders on Grounds are forced to at least pay cursory attention to it. Faculty and University leadership cannot ignore a student body critically engaged with the issues that affect it, and it is much more difficult to belittle the decisions of student leaders when they arise through an impassioned process. Instead of presupposing that decisions that disagree with faculty and leadership opinion are the product of naive students, University stakeholders will

realize that students themselves are influential stakeholders, replete with demands and desires of their own.

There is no telling what the coming year will bring for student self-governance at the University. What is certain, however, is the need for students to play a prominent role in University governance going forward. Though this year's elections were a first step, much work remains. Approximately 75 percent of students did not vote in these elections, continuing a trend of notable apathy towards participating in the University's unique system for student autonomy. What remains, then, is the need to carry that zeal into the future, and this year's turnout shows students are well-placed to do precisely that.

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DUTTENHOFER: The major flaw in major applications

The University's major application process currently prioritizes performance over passion, killing any hope of real intellectual discovery

Although the Olympic Games have recently wrapped up across the world, the competition feels close to home, as major applications loom closer for second-years. For several majors, declaring simply means filling out a form. For others, however, the process requires submitting an extensive application. Although there is no stadium at the University that makes students feel like Olympic athletes competing for gold, the major declaration process does. If education is not supposed to be a race, then why does choosing a major feel like a qualifying round?

Somewhere along the way, "exploring intellectual interests and curiosities" has quietly morphed into "optimizing your acceptance odds." At a University that proudly preaches intellectual exploration, the current major application process seems antithetical to this ethos. The flaw is not necessarily selectivity itself, but rather the goals and behavior that these applications incentivize.

At the University, students have two main application paths when choosing majors — either at the end of their first year or in their second year, excluding direct-admission majors

such as Engineering. Some programs have a first-year admissions process, while others require applications later in the second year. The system of applications is designed to encourage academic rigor, preparedness and merit. In practice, though, this system leads students toward more pigeon-holed

“If education is not supposed to be a race, then why does choosing a major feel like a qualifying round?”

academic trajectories, while incentivizing resume-building over genuine intellectual curiosity.

Major applications shift students' focus away from intellectual exploration in their first and second years, and instead, towards GPA boosters, resume padding and strategic course selection. The first months of college — a period that should be defined by academic adjustment and development — instead are dominated by quiet calculations. Rather than championing curiosity, the entire process centers on due dates and quantifiable proof of merit. Slowly, the social cul-

ture blossoming from these changes is transforming learning into a strategy rather than a discovery.

One of the most consequential implications of this system is what happens after rejection. Major applications — and their subsequent denials — do not simply redirect students,

In fairness, selectivity itself is not the core issue. At a highly prestigious and competitive university, some form of screening is necessary. Without any sort of application processes, certain majors could become overcrowded, unsustainable and attract students with minimal interest. And while

these concerns are legitimate, they do not justify the existing approach. Selective majors incentivize performance over process, a truth that follows the increasingly pervasive trend in higher education, where hyper-optimization and prestigious job placements are the goal rather than genuine curiosity.

While this dilemma exists at institutions nationwide, that does not absolve the University of responsibility. If intellectual curiosity and exploration are truly a priority, then structural support must match that rhetoric. The application timeline itself is a starting point, as meaningful

redirection cannot occur if students receive decisions late in their fourth semester. The University could move decisions earlier, allow rolling admissions into competitive majors or even create structured transition pathways that give students a semester to pivot intentionally or catch up.

Yes, application and enrollment into a specific school or major is up to the student. But the academic culture and the values it reinforces are within the University's purview. In truth, this is not the Olympic Games, and students should not feel as though their first two years of college are a qualifying heat. If the University truly believes that education is not a race, then it must build a system that stops treating it like one.

LUCY DUTTENHOFER is an opinion columnist who writes about academics for *The Cavalier Daily*. She can be reached at opinion@cavalierdaily.com.

CASTAGNO: A tale of two Charlottesvilles

The recent winter storm serves as yet another event evincing the necessity of affordable housing initiatives

In recent months, two major issues have distinctively marked Charlottesville's affordable housing and homelessness crisis. While the recent winter storm meant quiet streets, cancelled classes and perhaps a small dose of cabin fever for most of Charlottesville's residents, the brutal cold spell represented a life-threatening development and underscored an urgent crisis for the city's roughly 200 homeless individuals. During these adverse weather events, many local homeless outreach and support programs prepared themselves for higher than usual numbers of attendants, with some of them reaching capacity. For at-risk individuals, affordable housing is an issue of life and death in such conditions, necessitating action. Even for those who are not at risk, the external benefits of such action can lead to downstream improvements in their own lives.

Beyond the winter weather, another recent development has been a large encampment of homeless individuals near Free Bridge along the Rivanna River. Local homeowners have reported that the encampment poses environmental, health and safety concerns, as residents of the encampment routinely dump waste products into the river and surrounding riverbanks. This accentuates the concerns of cit-

izens who have seen their backyard turn into an impromptu shelter for disadvantaged unhoused individuals. Repeated attempts at the removal and disbandment of this encampment have been fruitless.

These two issues — the winter storm and the Free Bridge encampment — are a microcosm of Charlottesville's broader housing problem, forcing Charlottesville officials to

“

For at-risk individuals, affordable housing is an issue of life and death in such conditions, necessitating action.”

balance a perilous tightrope between ensuring adequate support for homeless individuals and guaranteeing a safe and clean environment for its housed residents. The urgency of this issue is especially clarified during severe weather conditions like those recently experienced — conditions that threaten the safety of Charlottesville residents and will no doubt be experienced yet again in the near future. It is imperative that City officials continue to tackle this issue posthaste in order to ensure the safety and security of its homeless residents and create a more habitable environment for its home-

owners.

To be fair, City officials have already taken some action in regard to this issue. Charlottesville City Council has reaffirmed their commitment to affordable housing initiatives, with the most recent instance being the Council voting to approve a funding package to close a budgetary gap for a mixed use development on 501 Cherry Avenue, featuring 71 afford-

able apartment units. In addition to

this endeavor, the City initiated an affordable housing plan that earmarked \$8 million a year for affordable housing programs, investing a considerable amount into affordable housing complexes around the city, along with a litany of subsidies for organizations that provide support to homeless individuals, such as The Haven. Increasing access to affordable housing will not only lower the homeless population of Charlottesville, but it will also create second and third order effects on housing supply, freeing up capacity in a manner that travels up the tax brack-

ets. However, time is of the essence. Despite the Council and associated entities' well-intentioned plans meant to ameliorate the increasingly severe housing crunch Charlottesville is experiencing, hurdling over bureaucratic impediments and maintaining housing accessibility as an issue of the utmost importance should be the top priority, in bold and italicized font. Every harsh winter is a reminder that although there are no consequences for those inclined to drag their feet on the issue, those who they represent run the risk of serious injury or death. Limiting or preventing such harm can be done through a multitude of avenues, such as closing funding gaps for affordable housing initiatives, scaling the Charlottesville Affordable Housing Fund and utilizing existing services and bylaws to bypass lengthy and costly public hearings for every dense housing project.

The benefits are two-fold, extending beyond the welfare of Charlottesville to more vulnerable residents. Cre-

ating affordable, accessible housing creates a positive externality for residents and homeowners, transforming neighborhoods and commercial zones such as those near Free Bridge into safer and cleaner environments. For the other side of the equation, the benefits are even more immediate. Housing security allows for a multitude of benefits ranging from obvious safety benefits to more intangible advantages, such as easier access to employment and improved mental health.

It would be a pipe dream to hope that these issues can all be rectified before the next winter. This is no reason, however, for officials to not approach this problem with a continued sense of urgency. Both individuals empathizing with the hardship of the homeless and homeowners frustrated by the introduction of health and environmental concerns into their neighborhoods can agree that there must be some communal push for change. Charlottesville officials have their hearts — and their wallets — in the right place. All that remains is alacrity.

CONALL CASTAGNO is a senior associate opinion editor for The Cavalier Daily. He can be reached at opinion@cavalierdaily.com.

Career Center to host 'LinkedIn Looksmaxxing' advising series

Advisors recommend students take measures to combat the rise in career cortisol

GLP-1s, strange new diets and unsolicited workout advice — what do these internet fads have to do with securing an internship? According to the Career Center, the answer is quite a lot.

Inspired by a wave of internet discourse, the Career Center will be hosting workshop events to assist students in making themselves more attractive to employers. The emphasis on appearance stems from a trend surrounding aspects of conventional beauty and how they are achieved — which is primarily through a questionably eugenicist formula, “looksmaxxing.”

Advisors at the Career Center are taking the same approach to combat these trends as they are to combat artificial intelligence. That is, no approach. In lieu of this changing culture around beauty, the Career Center has announced a series of workshops dubbed “LinkedIn Looksmaxxing.”

Stacey Slimm, program director of fraternal networking, is coordinating the workshop series. Recently, Slimm commented on concerns about recent hiring trends that seem to emphasize bone structure as a determining factor.

“I'd rather not intellectualize it,” Slimm said. “We have to adapt our ap-

proach to the job hiring process. That is why the Career Center is taking measures to best prepare students for corporate America's new hiring criterion — which is, of course, hotness itself.”

The workshops will feature self-improvement activities such as bonesmashing and consuming unseasoned steak from a wooden cutting board.

One example of rising prevalence of looksmaxxing in Gen Z culture is the influencer Braden Peters, known online as Clavicular. The allegedly 20-year-old sensation rose to internet notoriety practically overnight. He is known — particularly by 12-year-old Fortnite players and some niche online gay communities — for ascending from a level five chudmaxxer to a level nine mogger.

Finance Advising Program Director Melania Romania also gave insights on the importance of looksmaxxing, but claims that certain, non-superficial characteristics do actually still matter.

“I've seen this kid Clavicular,” Romania said. “But recent events prove that even a real looker playing die in front of ThePi on a Saturday afternoon is at risk of stress-related corti-

sol. Didn't you hear the news? Clav was frame-mogged by an ASU frat leader a few weeks ago. The high stress nearly reset all of Clav's progress. Don't let that be you!”

Some University students have actually reported losing internship positions to their Arizona State University counterparts, not simply due to sharper jawlines and positive canthal tilts, but cortisol control.

Chad Saintelmo IV, second-year College student and member of an unnamed “touse” fraternity, spoke on the competitiveness of top positions.

“I thought I was locked in for this position at JP Morgan. I've worked hard at school. Been looksmaxxing, too. But they went with my cousin, Chet,” Saintelmo IV said. “Chet's at ASU. Total stud who understands cortisol way better than I do. I didn't even know cortisol existed, how was I supposed to prepare? It was brutal — my own Dad betrayed me. How do you not choose your own son?”

Slimm has worked closely with Saintelmo IV, alongside other hopeless economics majors, throughout the recruiting process.

“We're trying to get Chad to live up to his name. We really want to create

a supportive space where we can say, 'don't get frame-mogged and cortisol-mogged by an Arizona Chet! Be a 10/10 applicant! Be a Chad!’” Slimm said.

Other students also expressed concern that the University is falling in prestige to “sexier” schools, like the University of Miami or Texas A&M.

Whitney Passing, publicity chair of the University's chapter of Turning Point U.S.A., explained that companies are moving away from the whole “woke vibe.”

“We're just too ... academic ... and independent. There is more to life than non-conformity. We have to look good, too. If anything, we should have signed that Compact when we had the chance,” Passing said.

The workshops will be held weekly on Fridays between 6 a.m. and 7 a.m. at Clemons Library. They are to take place conveniently after spring break.

“We are hoping some of that Fort Lauderdale tan time comes in handy for some of my pastiest peers. We call it the Mar-a-Lago effect. Have you ever seen Trump without his bronzer? Exactly. We're hoping these kids come ready for headshots,” Slimm said. “Did you know, polls show that employers

make 50 percent of hiring decisions based solely on LinkedIn profile pictures?”

Other advisors corroborated this sentiment, explaining that March is a critical time to capitalize on second semester successes and last minute internships.

“Beginning in March gives us time to assess the dedication of students to their New Year's fitness resolutions. If you've been skipping the gym or not hitting those macros, now is the time we can get you to begin,” Romania said.

University President and former senior partner at McKinsey & Company Scott Beardsley has expressed his support for this new development.

“I love this idea!! Let's get these boys a pack of Busch,” Beardsley said. “Oh, a woman? A chick came up with this? No shot. Well then run and get some White Claw!”

NATALIE BOUCHER is a Humor Columnist for The Cavalier Daily. She can be reached at humor@cavalierdaily.com.

CARTOON

Still on Vacation

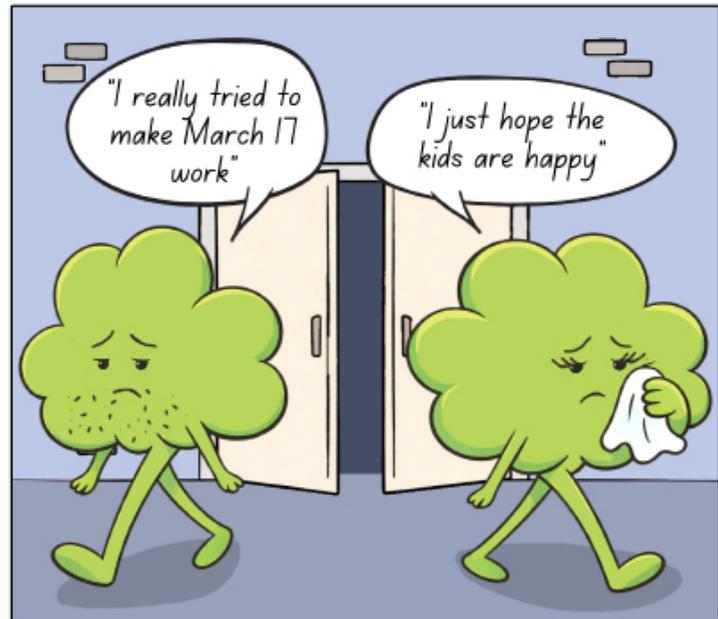
Agnes Zhou | Cartoonist



St. Paddy's Day Separation

Blake Maguire | Cartoonist

After years of couples therapy, St. Paddy's Day has officially filed for divorce.



U.Va. is honoring their joint custody agreement with back-to-back Saturday darters.

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