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MAC DOUCETTE, KAYLA MOORE & CAT WHITE | THE CAVALIER DAILY

Permission to Pause

Amid midterm pressure, students consider what it means to prioritize health on Grounds

NEWS

U.Va. experts warn against substances kratom, cychlorphine

Following the deaths of two students at the University of Mississippi, U.Va. experts advise students to take increased caution in a rapidly evolving drug supply

Michael Racz | Senior Associate

In the wake of recent deaths at the University of Mississippi, as well as suspicions surrounding the presence of the potent synthetic opioid cychlorphine in the drug supply, University officials, medical leaders and student organizations across the country have begun urging students to exercise increased caution around controlled substances.

The University of Mississippi confirmed the deaths of two students Sept. 22. Shortly after, the Lafayette County Metro Narcotics Unit announced that they had no evidence to indicate that the two deaths were connected, but the Unit did caution the public to avoid kratom and reported that packaged kratom had been found during both investigations.

Kratom is a plant-derived substance that in low doses acts as a stimulant, but in high doses can act as a sedative and have opioid-like properties. In some states and counties — including Virginia — kratom is legal to buy, possess and use for adults aged 21 and older and is commonly sold in convenience stores and gas stations.

Shortly after the announcement of the two students' deaths, several Greek life organizations at the University of Mississippi released statements expressing concern about cychlorphine — a potent synthetic opioid — being present in the drug supply. The organizations noted that cychlorphine does not show up on fentanyl test strips and encouraged members to avoid using unprescribed substances due to the possible contamination.

The University's Inter-Fraternity Council released a similar statement to University fraternity members Sept. 24, discussing the deaths of the two students from the University of Mississippi and reiterating the suspicion that cychlorphine may have been contaminated in the drug supply. The statement from Tejus Lakshminarayan, vice president of risk management for the IFC and fourth-year Commerce student, further encouraged students to avoid non-prescribed substances and ensure that all fraternity chapter houses have Narcan available.

Narcan — or naloxone — is an opioid receptor antagonist that can be administered during an opioid-related emergency to rapidly reverse an overdose. Narcan works on overdoses caused by substances such as fentanyl, cychlorphine and oxycodone.

Dr. Abigail Kerns, assistant pro-

fessor of emergency medicine at the School of Medicine and medical toxicologist, wrote in a statement to The Cavalier Daily that one of the biggest concerns for college students regarding cychlorphine is its ability to enter the drug supply without consumers' knowledge.

"The biggest concern is that someone may be exposed to cychlorphine without knowing they are taking an opioid ... [which] can be life-threatening, particularly in somebody with no opioid tolerance," Kerns wrote.

Kerns also wrote that cychlorphine is an example of how the illicit drug supply changes over time, and new synthetic opioids can enter the supply before physicians, toxicologists or other health agencies can identify what they are and their potential risks.

Medical toxicology is the subspecialty of emergency medicine that would traditionally care for patients suffering from an overdose. Kerns shared in her written statement to The Cavalier Daily that she has personally cared for patients that have been affected by kratom and 7-hydroxymitragynine — or 7-OH — and other emerging synthetic opioids.

According to Kerns, 7-OH is a naturally occurring substance found in the traditional kratom leaf, but in many places, it is being sold in highly concentrated formulas, which can pose increased risk to consumers.

"It is important to distinguish traditional kratom leaf from concentrated 7-OH products. 7-OH occurs naturally in kratom in very small amounts, but concentrated 7-OH products can contain much higher amounts," Kerns wrote. "The FDA has specifically warned about concentrated 7-OH products, noting that they have not been proven safe or effective for any use."

Kerns also said caring for patients experiencing adverse effects from intentional or unintentional synthetic opioid consumption can be particularly difficult for toxicologists because patients may not know what they have consumed, and the substances do not always appear on common diagnostic tests.

Dr. Christopher Holstege, professor of emergency medicine at the School of Medicine and director of the Blue Ridge Poison Center, reiterated the concerns shared by Kerns regarding the inclusion of synthetic opioids and other unknown substances in the drug supply. Holstege also described it as a "fourth wave" to



COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

A U.Va. Health patient room.

the opioid epidemic.

In a press briefing Sept. 29, Holstege explained the emerging threat of orphines — a broader class of synthetic opioids that include substances like cychlorphine — and that the first wave of the opioid epidemic involved prescription drugs, followed by heroin and then fentanyl. Now, Holstege said, the country is entering a fourth wave characterized by a "plethora of drugs" and mixtures of substances, making it increasingly difficult to determine what is in the illicit drug supply.

"We're seeing this plethora of drugs, various substances and mixtures, so it's not just one," Holstege said. "You're not just getting heroin or getting fentanyl, but you're getting xylazine with an orphine and fentanyl, and that's why these are such challenging times."

Holstege also said that he and other toxicologists in his field believe that fentanyl is still the most common opioid in the drug supply, but he explained that the newer synthetic opioids can be very difficult to detect and thus more difficult to examine their actual prevalence in the community.

Lakshminarayan said in an email statement to The Cavalier Daily that the University's IFC is working to help protect not only members of Greek life, but the broader University community through risk manage-

ment programs. He explained that IFC requires each chapter to have at least two doses of Narcan and a first-aid kit in their house. He also said every chapter's risk manager must be certified in both CPR and Narcan administration, meaning most houses have multiple trained members at any given time as risk managers typically rotate each semester.

Lakshminarayan also explained that the IFC is actively working alongside the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life and Well-Being Services at Student Health and Wellness to promote public safety initiatives, including a program that offers free Narcan pickup and training to students.

Concerns over the risks associated with legally sold kratom and 7-OH have also prompted recent legislation changes in Virginia. Gov. Abigail Spanberger (D) signed a bill into law in May that restricts the sale of kratom products and limits the sale of products containing 7-OH above specified thresholds.

According to Danielle D'Andrea, director of communications and marketing for SHW, SHW offers multiple resources and programs to help educate students on emerging substance use trends and provide resources to those suffering from substance use disorder.

D'Andrea also highlighted a program known as the "Collegiate

Recovery Program," a program that provides support to University students, faculty and staff in recovery from substance use disorders. D'Andrea said that these programs focused on substance use education and recovery are central to SHW's mission and have already reached thousands of University students.

Students can attend Collegiate Recovery Program meetings without signing up in advance. Meetings are held every Wednesday at 6 p.m. in the Well-Being Suite on the first floor of SHW.

According to D'Andrea, Well-Being Services at SHW hosted 202 programs and events that involved 7,346 students in programming focused on alcohol, cannabis, overdose prevention and other substance-use topics in fiscal year 2026. D'Andrea said that it is a priority of SHW to connect students with substance use resources when needed.

"The goal is to make it easy for students to find support at whatever point they may be in their experience with substance use," D'Andrea wrote. "Students can start with SHW, and staff can help connect them with the resource or level of care that is most appropriate for their needs."

UJC redesigns hearing panels in major bylaw change

New provisions will make cases automatically eligible for hearing panels if students admit guilt and will protect eligible cases from receiving permanent sanctions

Melody Yuan | Staff Writer

The University Judiciary Committee — a student-run judiciary body that investigates and adjudicates cases involving the 12 Standards of Conduct — passed several amendments to its bylaws following University Counsel approval Sept. 30. According to Zach Davidson, UJC chair and fourth-year College student, the UJC voted internally to pass the new amendments Sept. 13, and UJC intends to publish the bylaws to its website Oct. 12.

Major provisions of the new amendments include the ability for the Executive Committee to vote to dismiss complaints and the complete replacement of Article VII — the article responsible for alternative trial pathways. The newly amended bylaws will allow students accused of a Standards of Conduct violation to admit guilt to the accusations and receive the option for an expedited hearing process and protection from permanent sanctions such as expulsion, suspension or permanent transcript notation.

According to Davidson, the new amendments make up the largest structural change to UJC bylaws in recent years.

Davidson said that the main driver for the recent bylaw amendments was because of a recent influx of cases that prompted UJC to consider ways to make its process more efficient. Davidson said that the UJC is currently experiencing the highest volume of cases they have had since the COVID-19 pandemic — an increase in volume he attributes to enhanced trust in the UJC from the University community.

Increased case volume is also an issue faced by the Honor Committee. Genny Freed, Honor Committee chair and fourth-year College student, cited it as a problem she hopes to address during her term by restructuring executive committee and support officer positions to improve case processing efficiency. Former Honor Committee Chair Thomas Ackleson also reflected on the influx in cases at the conclusion of his term in April. Ackleson similarly attributed the increase in cases to broader engagement and trust in the Honor Committee by the University community.

Below is an analysis of the two major changes to the UJC bylaws.

Article VII, Hearings

Article VII was completely rewritten in the newest rendition of the bylaws.

Before the amendments passed, Davidson said there were two main avenues to accuse students — the first is a full trial, which Davidson

described as a “lengthy process” with opening and closing statements and witnesses. The second is a hearing panel, which previously did not require the accused student to attend trial and instead have their sanction decided by a panel of three UJC judges without direct involvement from the student.

Davidson said there were a number of requirements that students had to meet before a hearing panel could be called, a major requirement being that the offense had to be deemed “minor” by a 3/5 majority vote of the Voting Members of the executive committee. The Voting Members include the chair, the vice chair for sanctions, the vice chair for trials, the vice chair for first-years and the vice chair for graduate students. Because of these requirements, Davidson said the hearing panels were not used often, and it was difficult for the three judges of the hearing panel to decide on a student’s sanctions without having interacted with the accused student.

Accused students are now automatically eligible for hearing panels and are required to attend. Exceptions include unless four out of five Executive Committee members vote that the alleged conduct necessitates a full trial due to the severity of the accusation, the complaint involves an accused group rather than an individual or if the student has previously been found guilty through trial.

Davidson said because the accused student has already pled guilty, the UJC is not focused on investigating the student’s Standards of Conduct violation but rather how the student is learning from their actions and what they have done to repair any harm caused. Thus, Davidson said the focus of hearing panels is placed on the accused student rather than the complainant and subsequently, the complainant is not required to attend. However, the new bylaws do permit complainant attendance in hearing panels if they desire.

Scheduling concerns were another reason cited by Davidson for the restructuring of hearing panels. He stated that if complainants are no longer required to attend hearing panels, then the scheduling process can occur more quickly because fewer parties are involved.

Davidson clarified that before the amendment, a “hearing panel” referred to both the process of the hearing panel and the three judges who oversaw the process. Now, the process is called a “hearing,” and the three judges are called “the hearing panel.”

Under the new article, the hearing panel cannot issue expulsion, suspension, permanent transcript notation or other sanctions deemed permanent, though these sanctions can be issued in abeyance. A sanction issued in abeyance means that a student’s punishment is suspended unless they later engage in specified conduct and are found guilty.

The new article also removes the option for students to pursue an alternative hearing panel, which Davidson said was because the new hearing panel system fully replaces the alternative version.

Alternative hearing panels were governed in the same way as hearing panels, however, the alleged offense of the accused student did not have to be deemed minor and could be of any severity, according to the June 9 version of the bylaws. In the previous version of the bylaws, the purpose of the alternative hearing panel was to provide the UJC with a method to address an “influx of complaints” that the UJC would not be able to hear in a reasonable time through the normal trial process.

Article III, Section (C) (4) (e)

Added provision: The Voting Members of the Executive Committee may decide, in their reasonable discretion, to dismiss a Complaint at any time prior to the opening gavel of a Trial, subject to a four-fifths (4/5) supermajority vote of the Voting Members of the Executive Committee.

Davidson said that going forward, the UJC hopes to avoid situations where it accepts a complaint in which the complainant is acting in “bad faith” or new information may arise that would have caused the UJC to reject the case in the first place.

“We want to make sure that every complaint that makes it to trial is within our jurisdiction and has been handled appropriately,” Davidson said.

Prior to the bylaw amendments, Davidson said that once a complaint is accepted by the Executive Committee, the case must go to trial unless the complainant themselves withdraws the complaint.

“In the event that doesn’t happen [and] if it becomes clear to [the Executive Committee] that the case is no longer fit to go to trial ... This [amendment] allows us to intervene in those circumstances and dismiss the complaint,” Davidson said.

The revision process

Davidson said that the amendment process, which began over the summer, was completely student-run with no faculty oversight.

He credited two UJC members — Kessler Kreutner-Eady, UJC counselor and fourth-year College student, and Griffin Franseze, UJC vice chair for trials and third-year Engineering student — for spearheading the amendments to the bylaws.

According to Davidson, the UJC does not have a set annual schedule for revising its bylaws, however, one of the main tasks of the Policy and Project subcommittee is to review bylaws for revision when necessary.

After drafting the new bylaws but before enacting them, the UJC had to consult the Office of the University Counsel — a legal advisory team to the University appointed by the Attorney General of Virginia — for approval. Davidson said that since the UJC is an Agency Organization, the University Counsel makes sure that any bylaw changes are compliant with the law.

In an email statement to The Cavalier Daily, University Spokesperson Bethanie Glover wrote that Agency Organizations are delegated specific authority from the University Board of Visitors and function on behalf of the University.

Glover wrote that when Agency Organizations pursue changes to their bylaws or constitution, the organization must seek review and advice from the Counsel. However, beyond the Counsel having to ensure “legal sufficiency,” Glover wrote that Agency Organizations are free to amend their bylaws or constitutions as they see fit.

“[The review by the Counsel is] not really a feedback process. [The Counsel is] not making recommendations based on what they believe might be better or worse,” Davidson said. “They just let us know whether or not [the bylaws are] compliant with our obligations.”

In an Oct. 5 follow-up statement to The Cavalier Daily, Davidson wrote that the Counsel approved the bylaws Sept. 30, with the primary request that the UJC alter Article VII, Section (A) (10), Termination of a Hearing, alongside requests for minor technical changes. Prior to Counsel review, the section allowed the hearing panel to unanimously vote to send the case to a UJC or First-Year Judiciary Committee Trial. The prior version of the bylaws provided no further details about how evidence presented during the hearing would be handled in a full trial.

After Counsel review, the bylaws now require the student’s plea of guilt to be “deemed withdrawn” by the hearing panel and for the student’s UJC or FYJC trial to proceed de novo following the hearing pan-

el’s vote. The section states that the plea, statements related to the plea, the Hearing Investigator’s Report — a document compiling accounts of the event from all involved parties by a UJC investigator — or any testimony that occurred during the hearing can be admissible or referenced during the trial. Additionally, the section states that no UJC representative that served in the hearing panel is allowed to serve in the trial.

Davidson wrote that UJC recognizes that a student may have a different reason to plead guilty in a hearing versus a trial, as sanctions such as expulsion, suspension and permanent transcript notations cannot be issued in a hearing but can be issued in a full trial.

“Accordingly, if the hearing panel votes to terminate the [hearing] and require the accused student to resolve their case through a trial, we want to afford the student the right to reconsider their plea in light of the new process,” Davidson wrote.

Davidson wrote that while the Counsel completes the final check-over of the bylaws, the revision process is entirely “student-driven” from the beginning to end of the process.

Reflection on the new bylaws

The new hearing process was designed to help the UJC process the growing number of cases that have been increasing since the pandemic, according to Davidson.

Davidson also said that the increased number of complaints filed by students was a main motivator for the bylaw amendments.

“We view [increased complaints] as students really buying into the system and trusting what the UJC has to offer,” Davidson said. “We want to make sure that no matter how many students come to us with complaints, we have the ability to resolve them.”

Davidson said that after the bylaws have been finalized and support officers have been trained, the UJC hopes to have the new hearing process available for students to pursue in October. As for students whose cases are ongoing by the time the new hearing process is available, Davidson said that as long as the accused students meet the preliminary requirements, the student is eligible to pursue a hearing under the revised bylaws.

Discourse organizations reflect on free expression at U.Va.

Five years after the University adopted the Statements on Free Expression and Free Inquiry, students weigh in on the importance of free speech on Grounds

Nicolas Biernacki & Austin Stegerwald | Senior Writer & Staff Writer

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression recently ranked the University No. 9 out of 261 colleges and universities in its 2027 College Free Speech Rankings. The University rose from No. 21 last year but failed to regain its No. 1 spot held in 2025.

The rankings, along with federal pressure on free speech in higher education from the U.S. Department of Justice, have contributed to continued discourse over the state of free speech in the years since the University made efforts to formally address free expression in 2021. This was when Jim Ryan, Law professor and former University president, and former University Provost Liz Magill announced the creation of the Committee on Free Expression and Free Inquiry.

The 12-member committee included professors, deans, Board members and University vice presidents, and was tasked with crafting a formal statement on the role of free speech and free inquiry in the University community, and the announcement of the Committee came shortly after several controversies concerning free expression on Grounds. In September 2020, a student faced backlash from some alumni and staff after posting a sign that read “F—k UVA” outside of their Lawn room. That same month, some resident advisors reported feeling restricted in their ability to speak to the press about the University’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic in residence halls.

The creation of the Committee followed a growing trend of universities nationwide adopting official statements on free speech, expression and inquiry, with many inspired by the University of Chicago’s Chicago Principles, which were drafted in 2014 and adopted by the University of Chicago in 2015.

In June 2021, the University’s Committee presented the Statements on Free Expression and Free Inquiry — the University’s official document on free speech — to the Board of Visitors, which it unanimously adopted. The Faculty Senate also chose to later affirm the statements in 2022. The document remains the University’s official statement regarding free speech, according to University Spokesperson Bethanie Glover, and it is posted on the University’s free speech website.

Following the adoption of the Statements on Free Expression and Free Inquiry, several groups formed on Grounds by students and faculty with the goal of creating a space for open dialogue and free expression.

Many of these groups still exist today, including Think Again U.Va.,

Middle Grounds at U.Va. and the Civil Discourse Initiative. They, along with other civil discourse-adjacent organizations on Grounds, participate in the Civil Discourse Council, which meets twice each semester to offer discourse groups a space to share and collaborate, according to Manuela Kodwo, president of Think Again and third-year College student, and Henry Brown, fourth-year College student and president of the Civil Discourse Initiative.

Think Again was founded in 2022 by former Adjunct Politics Prof. Mary Kate Cary, who was also a member of the Committee on Free Expression and Free Inquiry. Think Again was created as an affiliate of the Karsh Institute of Democracy, and according to its website, hosts “student-facing” events to promote viewpoint diversity at the University.

Kodwo said she views the University’s adoption of the Statements on Free Expression and Free Inquiry in 2021 as a response to the changing political climate at the time.

“I think the idea of political polarization is something that we’re seeing a lot more in our political climate ... in which things can get very heated and violent and which we’ve seen in the news,” Kodwo said. “I think during [the adoption of the Statements], it was very important for the University to go ahead of that curve and assert itself as a space where people are able to freely and safely disagree without the fear of violence.”

Kodwo said that Think Again often partners with other civil discourse organizations on Grounds, including the Blue Ridge Center and the Heterodox Academy. Although she said she believes that students are interested in practicing free speech on Grounds, she pointed to two main threats to free speech on college campuses — external and internal “opposition.”

“I feel like there’s a lot of external opposition ... that you may be out-casted if you make your statements and beliefs be known,” Kodwo said. “There’s also an internal opposition ... maybe students don’t feel like they know how to make their belief be known ... and they don’t think that their viewpoint is important enough to say out loud or if nobody would agree with them.”

Kodwo said she believes that the creation of various student self-governed free expression-oriented organizations at the University shows that students are comfortable promoting free speech on Grounds, but she thinks students still want more action from the University commu-



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The University rose from No. 21 last year but failed to regain its No. 1 spot held in 2025.

nity to encourage free speech.

“I think ... students want more from U.Va. and their students and their University leaders in being able to promote free speech,” Kodwo said. “I think that’s what Think Again is trying to do to bridge the gap with professors and students ... and just more events and platforms for students to actually practice what free speech and open inquiry look like.”

Third-year College student Augustus Bryan is the president of Middle Grounds, a non-partisan, student-run CIO that aims to facilitate discussions across ideological and partisan boundaries. The organization is a chapter of Bridge-USA, a national nonprofit organization that focuses on combatting political division on college campuses.

Bryan said he views the organization as having a distinctive approach that separates it from other free speech-oriented groups on Grounds. Bryan said that other debate groups on Grounds are “good at what they do,” but he said the founders of Middle Grounds — Class of 2025 alumni Alex Friedlander and Juliana Paine — saw “barriers” that prompted the need for a more inclusive space. He said the founders wanted to create a newer organization, as Bryan noted the other free speech organizations are much older than Middle Grounds.

“A lot of [traditional speech and debate groups are] very high-brow,

serious. There [are] barriers to entry, there [are] certain standards,” Bryan said. “We were trying to be fresh and new, a little more Gen Z, you could say, unburdened by the tradition and the oldness.”

Bryan said he believes that although various student groups focused on free discourse and dialogue use slightly different approaches, they all ultimately want to create a comfortable space for open discussion.

“We all really want ... to create these spaces and really cultivate and push people to have interesting, meaningful discussions and talk about things because people otherwise won’t really have the chance to do that,” Bryan said. “Free speech is becoming more important than ever. It’s becoming increasingly hard to ignore. ... By having these clubs where nothing is recorded and nothing is on the record, so to speak, that’s also another reason why it’s good to have these.”

While student groups strive to foster open dialogue and expression, the University has still seen contention over free speech and free expression since the adoption of Statements on Free Expression and Free Inquiry five years ago.

In May 2024, 27 people were arrested, including 12 active University students, after a pro-Palestinian encampment on the Lawn was declared unlawful. The encampment was part of a broader movement that swept college campuses amid the war in Gaza, putting a spotlight

on how colleges and universities handle controversial speech.

Organizations like FIRE attempt to quantify this climate by analyzing university policies, surveying students and tracking controversies. For Brown, rankings like FIRE’s are important but ultimately insufficient to fully encapsulate the state of free speech on Grounds.

“I find college rankings in general kind of misleading. I think it’s extraordinarily hard to categorize free speech in general,” Brown said. “I think [free speech is] a lot more nuanced than rankings often communicate, but I do think that they do serve some purpose in motivating universities to kind of rethink how they’re addressing free speech.”

Kodwo, similarly, said she agrees with FIRE’s mission but questions whether the University’s relatively high ranking is “truly felt by students.”

Overall, Brown said he believes that the University has a relatively healthy free speech environment due to the number of free speech organizations on Grounds.

“I think that having multiple organizations that can focus on different prongs of civil discourse with different connections to different places of the University allows those organizations to have more efficacy in general in their specific focus,” Brown said.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

The Virginia Dance Company puts community on stage

Talented, committed dancers of the Virginia Dance Company foster a love of dancing for the fun of it

Eloise Diffley | Staff Writer

Each fall, many wide-eyed first-year students visit the Activities Fair looking for an outlet to maintain or reignite a high school passion. For several dancers, that outlet may be the Virginia Dance Company.

The Virginia Dance Company is composed of a tight-knit group of dancers, most of whom have danced competitively and consistently throughout childhood and high school. This student-run Contracted Independent Organization, unlike some other dance groups on Grounds, operates on a single-audition basis. This feature means that once a dancer is invited to join the company, they have their spot for the entirety of their time at the University without having to audition again if they remain involved with the organization.

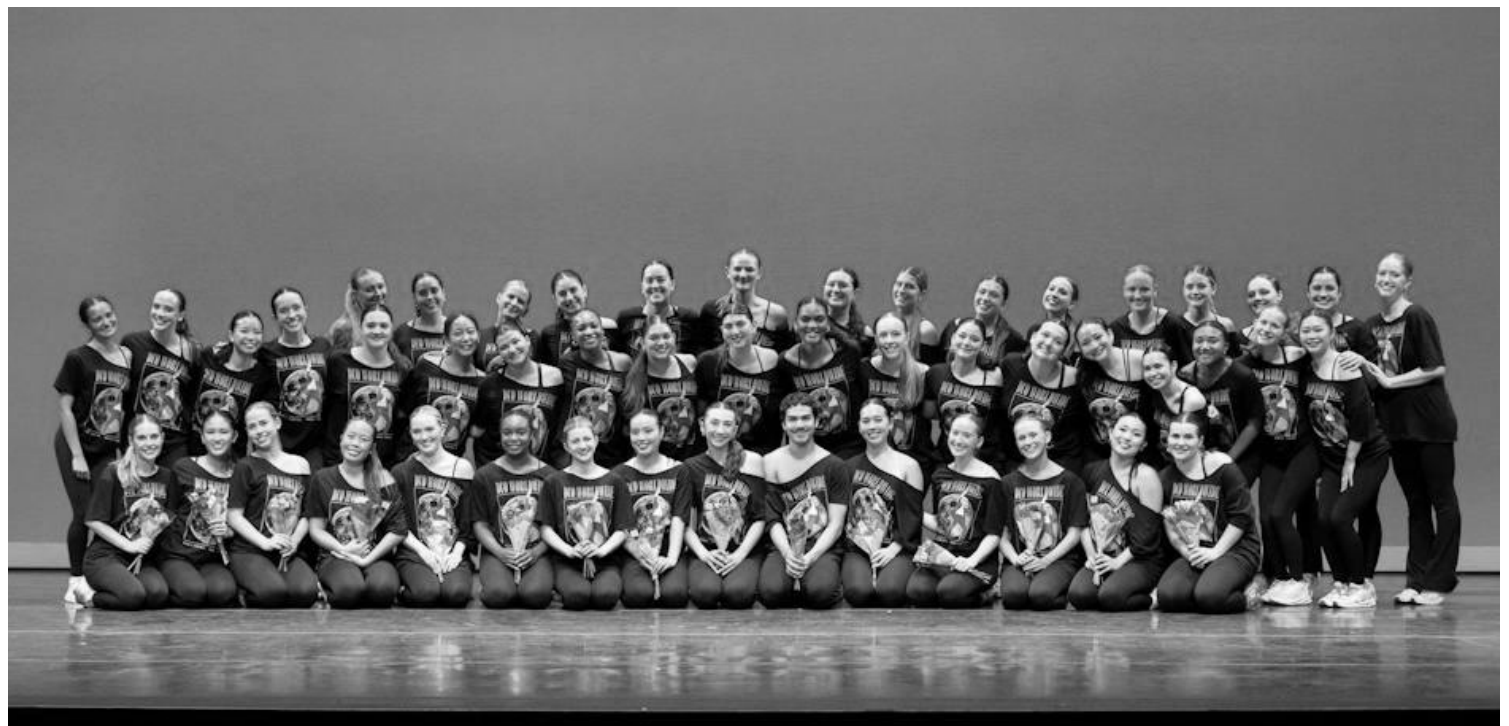
Currently, the club includes 52 dancers across all four years of undergraduate students, with 18 new members who joined in early September during the most recent audition cycle. Kendall Falconer, co-president of DCO and fourth-year Batten student, said the executive board aimed to keep the overall company numbers high for the semester by offering spots to more prospective dancers relative to the nine dancers accepted in her first year.

The company holds auditions at the start of each semester to continuously update its roster of dancers. Rebecca Mooney, secretary of DCO and third-year College student, said that she researched dance groups at the University before coming to Grounds and ultimately settled on DCO for the fulfillment provided by its community of dancers.

"I danced all throughout my middle school [and] high school career, and I really wanted some sort of outlet to continue dancing while in college," Mooney said. "I landed on DCO, and I am so happy I did."

Several DCO members said they came to the University looking for a way to continue to pursue their artistic interests without the pressures of competition. Falconer said she is fond of the freedom and relaxed environment of DCO created by the ability to tailor one's own experience in the organization and that she appreciates the opportunity to dance simply for the enjoyment of the art form.

As for their performances, the company showcases a myriad of styles from contemporary and jazz to hip-hop — even including the occasional musical theater song — in their shows, held biannually at the Paramount Theater on the Downtown



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A sense of community and camaraderie — one that extends beyond individual dances into the lives of the dancers themselves — that keeps DCO and its members united long after the music stops.

Mall for the past three years. Each show features dances choreographed by members of the company, which was a new experience to Falconer.

Falconer said that the company encourages each of its dancers to take the opportunity to choreograph, especially those willing to try jazz or hip-hop — traditionally more difficult styles to choreograph — to ensure a variety of numbers make it into the show. According to Falconer, anyone interested in choreographing a dance for the showcase attends a workshop at the beginning of each semester, where each prospective choreographer plays their chosen song and explains their vision for bringing the dance to life.

"I had never choreographed before coming to DCO, so that was a different step in my creative journey," Falconer said. "I would get to do all of these incredible choreographers' movements, but I had never been able to explore creating that on my own."

Prior to placing dancers in each piece, Falconer said that the company holds a showcase where each choreographer performs a snippet of their dance, and the rest of the company watches and considers which numbers they are the most interested in participating in. Each dancer then fills out a ranking form, highlighting their top choice and then listing all other dances they would like to be a

part of that fit their schedule for the semester. Falconer explained that the number of dancers per piece is set by the individual choreographer, and each group rehearses for one hour every week.

"The really nice thing about DCO is the flexibility of being able to pick how many dances you want to do based on your course load or what's going on in your life at that time, in addition to deciding whether or not you want to choreograph and contribute to the company in that way," Mooney said.

Maya Dunham, a member of the company and third-year Architecture student, said that she appreciates the flexibility of the company's operation, and that she came to Grounds in search of a way to continue dancing without the intense time commitment. She said that DCO, as a fully student-run organization, allowed her to change her hours of weekly time commitment each semester depending on her class schedule.

Beyond the dancer-choreographed numbers, the entire company comes together for a final performance as the finale of every show. The music for this dance is chosen by the co-presidents based on the theme of the show and is choreographed by the newest company members. The music for the finale is mixed by a member of the DCO alumni network, showcasing the degree of involve-

ment that extends beyond a dancer's time on Grounds.

On their biannual show days, the dancers gather at the Paramount Theater around 8 a.m. and spend the morning in a technical rehearsal. This is a chance for the company to watch all of the dances while working through lighting and spacing before the show that afternoon.

Falconer noted that, after being elected co-president, show days necessitated greater responsibility because the company does not have the staff that a professional dance group would traditionally have. As a result, Falconer said that she has to run around the venue throughout the performance to ensure that each number is cued and operates as intended.

"You feel so much more in control, which is almost scarier because [the other president and I] love DCO more than probably anything else at the school," Falconer said.

However, despite the competitive backgrounds of the dancers and the thrill of performing, the highlight of DCO for many members of the company remains the community and the freedom to dance for the fun of it.

"Everyone on DCO, we have that bond that we were all dancers," Dunham said. "It kind of gives you built-in friends, and it's nice to walk around and see people on DCO and say 'Hi' on Grounds ... Especially as

a first-year, it was nice to have that built-in group of people that you already have a bond with."

This community does not cease to exist after rehearsal, as the company holds various social events throughout the year. These include a final banquet, a "newbie" party at the beginning of the year — at which the company formally inducts all of their new members — and group outings to the Sunset Series at Carter Mountain. Mooney said that joining DCO is a great way to facilitate connections and meet new people, as well as get a view of the arts community at the University.

"You can really experience all sides of the art form, whether it be the behind the scenes ... or just performing," Mooney said. "But, at the same time, you're also creating connections and meeting new people — upperclassmen and underclassmen — and really just getting a great view of the overall arts community at U.Va., especially within the dance world."

It is that sense of community and camaraderie — one that extends beyond individual dances into the lives of the dancers themselves — that keeps DCO and its members united long after the music stops. DCO's fall performance will be Nov. 15 at the Paramount Theater.

The Hooligans break down barriers for student dancers

The breaking crew encourages those passionate about dance to explore the art form

Kelsey McIntyre | Staff Writer

The University is home to a myriad of dance and performance-based Contracted Independent Organizations. However, only one specializes in freestyle dance, a style independent of any choreography to dictate routines. Hooligans Break(dance)ing Crew is the only specialized CIO for breakdancing, but they also welcome other styles of freestyle dance like popping, whacking and locking. Through this encouraging environment, they aim to spread the love of freestyle dancing and welcome students passionate about their craft.

Hooligans does not hold auditions or require membership dues to encourage people to join and foster a welcoming community of breakers. Abby Selby, co-social chair of Hooligans and fourth-year Nursing student, said that this model also allows for people to feel less intimidated to join the club, which keeps the organization accessible to all.

“We specifically want to make sure that we’re a club that’s accessible to anybody,” Selby said. “We don’t want to have any sort of financial barrier that’s not allowing somebody to come to our practice spaces and learn some-

thing.”

Hooligans is a smaller group, which allows its members to tightly bond with each other. Long Wang, treasurer of Hooligans and second-year College student, joined the crew in fall 2025 despite having no experience dancing before coming to college. He said he went to an interest meeting for Hooligans with a friend and decided to continue with the club after feeling drawn to the supportive atmosphere. Jace Oliver, co-social chair of Hooligans and second-year College student said that, like other clubs, Hooligans also hosts social events for its members. It was this supportive, social community of dancers that Wang said attracted him to the organization and enticed him to stay involved with Hooligans.

“I just really enjoyed the environment there,” Wang said. “That’s kind of what just started the fire, clicked something in me, and I’ve been just going to practice ever since.”

The community created by Hooligans is welcoming, according to Wang, and he encourages anyone with a passion for breaking to join the club. Practices are laid-back and mostly self-guided, where dancers decide

what specific skills they want to learn. But according to Selby, Hooligans also hosts structured workshops for foundational skills — such as how to correctly perform footwork moves — in the fall when many new dancers join.

“We provide different lessons during the fall semester to build the foundations,” Selby said. “Then in the spring semester, it’s a little bit looser, where people can come and use those foundations that we taught in the fall to build on their own practice and their different styles that they want to learn.”

Throughout the year, Hooligans holds several jams — a type of collaborative battle where dancers riff off of each other’s moves — to attract breakers from across Virginia and interact with other members of the breaking community. Its main event is called Breaking Grounds, which takes place annually in the spring.

Last spring saw their 10th anniversary event, called Breaking Grounds X, which featured a \$600 grand prize. Oliver explained that despite the degree of professionalism of an event such as Breaking Grounds, the event is open to all experience levels.

“We also ... have these things called cyphers, which is pretty much just a giant dance circle and anyone can come in and pop their own moves,” Oliver said. “It’s [a] no judgment zone, except when we judge that the move looks awesome.”

Another jam that Hooligans hosts annually is Rotunda Sesh, where dancers and audiences gather at the Rotunda for a large cypher. According to Oliver, unlike Breaking Grounds, this event has no winners, but aims to promote Hooligans to the University community and beyond. Anyone can join the circle and dance alongside the members of Hooligans, or simply watch and cheer them on.

“This is completely non-competitive and really just having a fun dance event, usually behind the Rotunda, that anyone can watch over and see,” Oliver said.

Looking beyond their own club events, Wang said that Hooligans hopes to maintain a collaborative relationship with other dance organizations, whether that be inside or outside the University. According to Oliver, they also aim to ensure that their members feel connected to the

outside breaking community and understand breakdancing’s history.

“Every time we go to a jam, or every time we’ll break ourselves, is still another great example of the culture and community that has been spread ever since [those] starting days of dance where people were able to get together ... doing something cool,” Oliver said.

It is clear that Hooligans’ unique street style stands out among other dance clubs at the University. Despite this, they do not stop at simply teaching students breaking moves, but emphasize through their teaching how to center the original values of the dance style within the club community. While all of Hooligans share a common passion for breaking, they also share a powerful bond that they wish to share with the rest of the University, starting with this year’s Rotunda Sesh event Nov. 7.

“People dancing is an expression of togetherness because ... music helps bind us, and dancing is an expression of emotion and a way of communication,” Oliver said. “That’s why people do it in a dance circle.”

Writer’s Eye promotes reflective writing and art education

The Fralin’s flagship writing competition empowers students to combine artistic study with personal reflection

Cecilia Sherman | Staff Writer

This fall marks the 40th annual Writer’s Eye competition presented by the Fralin Museum of Art at the University. From Sept. 8 through Nov. 5, the museum welcomes visitors of all ages to explore its galleries and participate in a writing program inspired by selected visual art on display. Writer’s Eye fosters an accessible, inquiry-based museum experience that integrates artistic studies into classrooms and daily life.

The literary competition was introduced in 1986 by docents Carole Armstrong and Valerie Morris to bring practices of “ekphrasis” to the Charlottesville community. Ekphrastic writing, common in poetry or narratives, is used to describe or interpret a visual work of art. At the Fralin, the Writer’s Eye competition invites visitors to engage deeply with artworks through the means of creative writing — allowing selected gallery pieces to inspire works of prose or poetry.

To reflect on a single Writer’s Eye artwork, participants must write an original story of no more than 1,000 words or an original poem not exceeding two pages. These online submissions are due Nov. 12, and judged in elementary, middle and high school categories as well as a University student and adult division.

Eight Fralin artworks are careful-

ly selected for the contest annually, including pieces from the museum’s permanent collection as well as those gifted or on loan. According to Zora Heard, manager of school and teacher programs at the Fralin and Writer’s Eye lead, the selection process seeks to unite artwork that inspires thoughtful questioning in a collaborative effort among museum curators, educators and student docents.

A colorful example, “Flag Day” is a 1919 impressionist painting by Theodore Earl Butler that captures America’s patriotic spirit following World War I. Prompts developed by Writer’s Eye educators are specific to each piece, here encouraging participants to consider the question — “How can flags serve as a symbol of national identity?”

Hosting a wide array of artistic mediums — spanning from sculpture to video — and a diversity of timeframes and subjects, the artworks provide museumgoers with a robust source of inspiration. Nico Ching, Writer’s Eye chair and fourth-year Architecture student, spoke to the artworks’ ability to engage viewers’ senses. One selected work by Sky Hopinka, an indigenous visual artist and filmmaker, holds a “vividness” that translates into ekphrasis practice, according to Ching.

“We have Sky Hopinka’s work,

which is actually a video ... [Writers] actually have to experience the artwork, not just visually, but also temporally,” Ching said. “They have to sit with it, and there are all these different sounds and feelings that start to arise.”

Writer’s Eye tours are free for classrooms, seeking to inspire discovery amongst visitors. School groups who arrive at the museum prepared to be quiet observers find themselves participating in vocal group dialogues — prompted to reflect on their life experiences and share their perspectives. Individual museumgoers are free to view the eight works any time during the Fralin’s open hours.

Heard works throughout the year with K-12 teachers in Charlottesville or Albemarle County, helping them weave art into their curricula. Writer’s Eye is an extension of Heard’s educator development work, allowing teachers to bring their students to the Fralin to see artwork in person. Beyond sharpening critical thinking skills and helping students contextualize visual evidence, Heard emphasized art education as a means of community building.

“We can all look at the same thing and have completely different responses, have completely different understandings and see completely different things,” Heard said. “Having

conversations around works of art helps you establish a classroom culture of perspective taking [and] introspection.”

Accessibility is also central to Writer’s Eye programming and tours. For younger participants, docents balance complex artistic themes with tailored and approachable prompts. Working from an educator’s perspective, Heard noted the importance of understanding an audience’s particular needs when outlining learning objectives.

“How can we explore topics like hope? How can we unpack these bigger conceptual ideas?” Heard said. “Always what you’ll find is that kids have really deep ideas and understandings of the world, and you just have to ask them the right questions.”

On a recent Writer’s Eye tour, a group of seventh grade students gathered around “Caldarostaro (Chestnut Vendor),” a sculpture by Steven Allen Linn. The piece, constructed of stone, wood and metal, depicts a man roasting chestnuts on the street. The young museumgoers were asked to consider where they had encountered outdoor vendors in their own life and how they would feel in the figure’s position. For Ching, art’s power is derived from these personal connections between artwork and visitors.

“I think the most valuable thing that you get from these tours and from asking these questions is, ‘How does it apply to my own life?’” Ching said. “It all ties back into different aspects of how we perceive the world.”

Whether joining a docent-led tour, visiting the museum independently or viewing works virtually through “Spotlight Talks” on YouTube, there are a multitude of ways to witness and interact with the Writer’s Eye selected artworks. For writers ages 16 and older, Fralin educators and Writer’s Eye ekphrastic fellows host free creative writing workshops. During these 90-minute sessions, participants spend focused time sitting with and writing about a single artwork. Scheduled for Oct. 17 and Oct. 28, students are encouraged to reflect critically and make personal connections with the artwork.

Entries in elementary and middle school level categories are anonymously judged by Charlottesville community members and teachers, while high school, University and adult writers are judged by the museum’s ekphrastic fellows. This year’s winners will be announced in January, with five writers in each category receiving a prize of \$100 and being published in the annual Writer’s Eye anthology.

PUZZLE

Liam Pedersen | Puzzlist

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

ACROSS

- 1 Magic charm
5 Smoothie bowl superfruit
9 Flavor profile often found in scotch
13 Concern of Smith or Keynes, or perhaps Doyle (abbr.)
14 Charley horse, for instance
15 Six-sided object that is “hucked” in many college front yards on sunny days
16 Country with the capital city Nassau, one of only two that includes an article in its name
18 Site of C-Ville’s most beloved balcony
19 Spears on the table
20 Pop
21 Post-dinner pick-me-ups
24 Enclosure or writing instrument, or a crucial word in Ben Gates’ decision to steal the Declaration of Independence in “National Treasure”
25 Weld, say
27 The Mets’ div.
29 Ingredient that makes pot potent
30 Potential response from

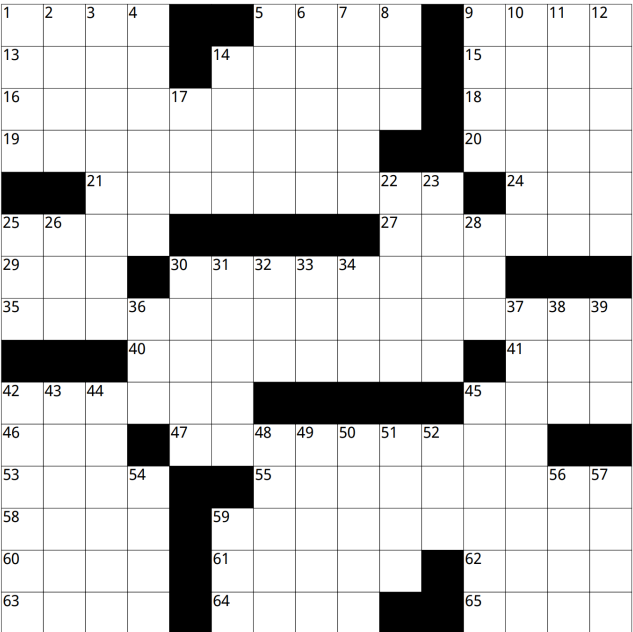
- Jimmy Two Times in “Goodfellas” when asked what type of moss he puts in his flower beds
35 Team whose minor league affiliate Michael Jordan had a stint with
40 Free, as with a crowbar
41 Verse opener?
42 Especially efficient method for hangover recovery utilized by Wags in “Billions”
45 Security guard’s viewing, for short
46 “Mamma ___!”, perhaps as expressed by Italians after burning their mouths on their 21-Across
47 Sports figure, like Ben Roethlisberger throwing for 12 touchdowns in two games
53 “Mambo No. 5” singer Lou
55 Feat enjoyed by Jordan’s Bulls twice ... or the sum of 9-Across and 30-Across
58 In the distance
59 “Well, well, well ...”
60 Medical state experienced by Beatrix Kiddo at the beginning

- of “Kill Bill”
61 Those following ifs in Rice Hall
62 Red-wrapped Dutch cheese
63 Site of SpongeBob’s patty-flipping, The Krusty ____
64 Ran, as colors
65 Q followers

DOWN

- 1 Zuckerberg-led Magnificent Seven company
2 Folk singer Phil
3 Funny (like a clown)
“Goodfellas” Oscar winner
4 “He gets _____!” (Billy Beane’s simple reason for liking many players)
5 In _____ (furious)
6 Absurdist writer of “The Stranger” and “The Myth of Sisyphus”
7 Stockpile
8 Computer addresses (abbr.)
9 Loan figs.
10 Moon of Jupiter or a classic of Santana’s
11 Puts up with
12 Lessee

- 14 Blacken on the barbecue
17 Dada artist Jean
22 Three Dog Night declaration: “_____ the loneliest number”
23 Blackboard material
25 Consumer protection agcy.
26 “Not sure...”
28 Summer in 30-Down
30 Site of the treaties ending both the Seven Years’ and the American Revolutionary Wars, 20 years apart
31 Country home to the oldest of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World
32 Early Yahoo! competitor
33 Famous number of concurrent girlfriends for perennial Sixth Man of the Year candidate Lou Williams
34 Oft-mispelled Vietnamese soup
36 EMT specialty
37 Follows, as Tiberius to Augustus in 14 A.D.
38 Toronto’s prov.
39 Numerals for the Steelers’ fourth Super Bowl win or Louis,



- the Sun King
42 Succinct phrase announcing Michael Jordan’s return from retirement
43 Try to get
44 Explorer Vasco, first European to find an ocean route to Asia
45 Encryption
48 Ring-shaped reef

- 49 The ones over there
50 Rubbed the wrong way
51 Número de trofeos de la NBA por Michael Jordan
52 Garment named for its shape
54 Riyadh resident
56 Smell _____ (be suspicious)
57 Chinese budget shopping site
59 Beirut loc.

CARTOON

Studying for Midterms

Jackson Xiang | Cartoonist



Burger Wars

Agnes Zhou | Cartoonist



**FREEDOM
FORUM**

**FREEDOM
FORUM**

**FREEDOM
FORUM**

**FREEDOM
FORUM**

arguing about the Honor system at brunch. Trick-or-Treating on the Lawn. Gathering at the Lighting of the
awn with friends. Handing in an op-ed twelve minutes before deadline. Singing the Good Old Song. Playing
ne same three chords outside Clemons. Wearing a Tech shirt in November on purpose. Emailing the Board of
visitors. Filing a correction. Praying at Jumma between classes. Ranking every Beyoncé album in group chats
that did not ask. Starting a GroupMe for a cause. Ending a GroupMe for a cause. Reading the letters to the
ditor first. Naming your intramural team after a professor. Sitting in on a meeting you have no business in
asting for Yom Kippur during syllabus week. Making a sign for someone else's rally. Booing a call
streaming
ifferent
Writing a
aragraph
out the
assing
obody
ainting
omebody
st night at Beta Bridge. Painting over what they painted over. Streaking the Lawn. Debating the ref, the coach
nd the AD in one thread. Sharing a Diwali plate with your hall. Asking a question that makes the room quiet
correcting the record in the comments. Photographing a march from the middle of it. Getting ashes on your
rehead before a 9 a.m. Circulating a petition about dining hall hours. Circulating a petition about the petition
Wearing a pin. Wearing three pins. Defending Kendrick's verse to somebody twice your age. Founding a rival
ub two weeks
urpose. Writing
eviewing a
obody stops at.
n a stairwell.
Publishing the
arguing about the Grammy snub at 1 a.m. Apologizing in the group chat at 2 a.m. Standing outside in February
or a cause. Running a Chappell Roan fan account with 400 followers. Making a documentary about
parking lot. Reading three opposing op-eds on the same topic and agreeing with all of them

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rights.
Find your
voice.**

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later. Applauding at the wrong moment or
to your representative from a dorm bed
restaurant you go to anyway. Setting up a table
Setting up a table everyone stops at. Meditating
Learning the whole Bad Bunny bridge phonetically
thing the administration would rather you didn't

LIFE

Sarah Deloney's path to — and from — her diagnosis

A diagnosis by a U.Va. Nurse kickstarted one student's medical and personal journey

Astrid Cheng | Staff Writer

When fourth-year College student Sarah Deloney was in high school, she was a high-achieving athlete and student, attending Governor's School in the morning and running track in the evenings. As she prepared to come to the University, she hoped to continue her demanding schedule on Grounds.

What she did not expect, however, was a subset of symptoms — headaches, pelvic pain and nausea — that eventually became too frequent and intense to ignore. After three years of persistent pain, Deloney was finally able to find an answer — Nutcracker Syndrome.

As festive as its name may sound, Nutcracker Syndrome has nothing to do with Christmas. It is a rare vascular condition that bears a superficial resemblance to a nutcracker — a vein that carries blood away from the left kidney is caught between the sharp angle created by two major arteries, which squeezes the vein just as a nutcracker squeezes a nut.

The rarity of the syndrome contributed to Deloney's initial difficulties in receiving a diagnosis. When she told her pediatrician about her headaches and fatigue in 2020, her symptoms were put down as psychosomatic. Deloney, acknowledging her own stress about COVID-19, accepted the idea and did not pursue it further.

"I think for women especially, [we] don't always pursue treatment if [we're] told that [our] symptoms are psychosomatic," Deloney said. "So I didn't for a while. I said okay, I'm going to manage that, and I'll be fine."

However, while attending the University in April 2023, Deloney also began to experience abdominal and pelvic pain. Instead of seeking help, Deloney dealt with the mixture of pain and fatigue by sleeping through her days, unable to attend classes or complete assignments. She took several incompletes that semester, and struggled to view them as a reflection of circumstance instead of a failure of her own effort.

"There's a part of me that thinks if I just worked harder or if I just really applied myself more, then maybe I could have at least finished the work that I had outstanding, because of [University] culture and because of my previous experience and the expectations that I've set for myself as a student," Deloney said. "But being a good student should never come at the expense of your health."

Deloney's concerns about the stigma surrounding women's pelvic pain led her to delay seeking treatment for six months. Although the Journal of Pain reports that approximately 26 percent of women around the world suffer from chronic pelvic pain, re-

search in the Practical Pain Management journal shows that it is frequently dismissed and left unaddressed by medical professionals.

"I found [pelvic muscle pain] embarrassing and hoped it would go away with time," Deloney said. "I didn't realize [it] came from my pelvis tightening drastically to compensate for the weight of the distended veins bearing down on it."

When Deloney decided to seek help, she contacted Ashley Rogan, a Family Nurse Practitioner at Student Health and Wellness. Having previously met Rogan for a consultation about tension headaches, Deloney felt that Rogan was personable and pleasant to talk to. Rogan noted that Deloney came with a complex set of symptoms which did not seem inter-related, and said she did not initially have a clear answer, but was committed to investigating Deloney's case.

"Nurse Rogan [...] was the difference between me getting a diagnosis and not," Deloney said. "She was so attentive. She wasn't dismissive of what I was saying ... [When] I told her that I was having fatigue as a main symptom, she didn't just say, 'Oh, well, you know, some people handle anxiety by sleeping.' She wanted to figure out if there was a physical cause for it."

Initially, the syndrome was not on Rogan's radar. It took multiple appointments, several blood tests and two imaging scans before it was even a possibility.

"Bodies are complicated and nothing is always 'by the book,'" Rogan said. "[It's good to] spend time listening to patients and getting a good history, and have multiple meetings if necessary to allow enough time to be thorough."

The imaging scans ordered by Rogan uncovered a shape the size of a chapstick in Deloney's abdomen. Initially, the shape was concluded to be a cyst. Three months later, however, radiologist Gia DeAngelis, M.D. realized that it was not a cyst but a vein — compressed and swollen due to obstructed blood flow.

The compressed vein led Rogan to read about Nutcracker Syndrome and convinced her that was the cause of the pain. She scheduled another appointment with Deloney and over an open anatomy book, Rogan explained the syndrome, trying to help Deloney visualize what was happening inside her body.

"[Ashley] actually brought out a textbook," Deloney said. "She said [that] in all of the years ... practicing as a nurse, she hadn't seen anything like this. But she had the textbook ready and she wanted to explain to me what happened."



COURTESY SARAH DELONEY

As festive as its name may sound, Nutcracker Syndrome is not about Christmas. It is a rare vascular condition where a vein that carries blood away from the left kidney is caught between the sharp angle created by two major arteries, which squeezes the vein like a nutcracker squeezes a nut.

According to Deloney, receiving the diagnosis was a huge relief. Aided by her mother, Deloney began to search for a Nutcracker Syndrome specialist. Since there were none in Virginia at the time, they contacted Dr. Khanjan Nagarsheth, a vascular surgeon then practicing at the University of Maryland Medical Center. After more medical examinations, Nagarsheth discovered another case of Nutcracker Syndrome in a second renal vein, as well as a compression in Deloney's iliac vein, a related condition known as May-Thurner Syndrome.

Deloney decided to undergo a renal autotransplant, which removed her left kidney from its original spot and placed it under her right kidney. Moving the kidney left more space for her remaining renal vein, as well as the iliac vein which had been compressed as a downstream reaction to her renal compressions. At the same time, she needed venous repair that targeted three veins with two different venous conditions. The surgery took six hours and 30 people across three medical teams.

"They repaired the veins that needed to be repaired," Deloney said. "And they detangled the kidney. In [my] patient notes, it says they worked on it on the back table, which is really funny to me because it sounds like they took out a car part, and they're repairing

the car part before they put it back in."

Deloney successfully underwent surgery in December 2024, four years after her initial symptoms began. Although Deloney's case concluded favorably without complications, her experience nevertheless alerted her to the importance of patient self-advocacy in the face of misdiagnoses.

"It's okay to push the system a little bit," Deloney said. "If you're seeing a doctor, and they're telling you [that] your symptoms are really just anxiety or they just don't know what you have yet, don't be afraid to seek out another doctor. Don't be afraid to get a second opinion because it might be the difference between catching something early and suffering for months without knowing."

For Rogan, Deloney's case is a good reminder to medical practitioners. She said that uncommon conditions like Nutcracker Syndrome are easily missed, potentially leading to serious consequences that could be avoided by slowing down and paying more attention.

"One constant issue in healthcare is having enough time to be thorough," Rogan said. "When the clinic is busy and things feel rushed, it can be easier to dismiss complaints that don't fit a pattern rather than take the time to fully understand what a patient is experiencing."

Deloney believes that the delay

between her diagnosis and treatment was also due to institutional and logistical barriers within the medical system. She noted that barriers to proper treatment could be as big as the lack of an in-state specialist and the impossibility of fixing a surgery date, or as small as logging into a system to transfer medical records from one hospital to another one.

Academic pressure was also on the table. Deloney initially struggled to accept that her medical condition has made it difficult for her to perform academically at the same level as before, but her medical journey has been instrumental in changing her perspective.

"In having chronic pain and recovering from it, I think my goal has shifted a little bit," Deloney said. "I really just want to be healthy. I want to be academically successful, but I also want to be happy and healthy."

Another of Deloney's new goals is pushing for more comprehensive treatment options and raising awareness for rare vascular diseases like Nutcracker Syndrome. As she settles down for her last semester at the University, Deloney said she hopes her struggles will inspire others to advocate for themselves in the examination room, in the classroom and beyond.

College Mentors for Kids instills confidence with friendship

For Little Buddies and their mentors, the program's weekly sessions create relationships built on trust, curiosity and mutual growth

Claire McGinn | Staff Writer

On Wednesday afternoons, fourth-year College student Gus Mokrzycki has somewhere to be — and someone waiting for him.

"It really is like two hours of being like a kid again," Mokrzycki said.

As a mentor and vice president of programming with the University's branch of College Mentors for Kids, Mokrzycki spends time each week with his Little Buddy, a local elementary school student paired with him through CMFK.

CMFK is a national organization with 29 chapters in eight states, and has been a Contracted Independent Organization at the University since 2015. On Grounds, this CIO brings together nearly 230 University students and 200 elementary schoolers from five Charlottesville-area schools.

By pairing college-aged students in mentorships with third-, fourth- and fifth-graders, CMFK creates lasting friendships that give both mentors and Little Buddies a chance to learn and grow from one another.

"It's just such a safe and welcoming space for these kids to just let loose, and build a good bond and relationship. It's so special, and it's hard to even describe it until you're [experiencing] it with those kids for an entire year," Mokrzycki said.

This indescribable bond is at the heart of CMFK and is fostered through the quality time mentors and Little Buddies share together. Once a week, these dynamic duos partake in a wide range of activities, from arts and crafts and outdoor games to dance parties and field trips.

Because the University's chapter of CMFK is entirely student-run, mentors and executive board members also raise the funds needed to keep the program operating. Besides coordinating transportation and organizing programming, the mentors facilitate fundraising campaigns and donations from friends and family.

Fourth-year College student Lucy Miller joined CMFK during her second year and has had a new mentee each year, both of whom have been first graders. Miller said that while her Little Buddies learn from her, they are actually the greater teachers — at just seven years old, they have had plenty of wisdom to share with Miller.

"[My Little Buddies] teach me so much ... every single time I see them," Miller said. "I do learn a lot



CLAIRE MCGINN | THE CAVALIER DAILY

By pairing college-aged students in mentorships with third-, fourth- and fifth-graders, as well as an occasional younger student, CMFK creates lasting friendships that gives both mentors and Little Buddies a chance to learn and grow from one another.

with them, and I like to think that I teach them things, too, but I definitely think I learn more from them than they do from me."

This notion of reciprocity is one of CMFK's core tenets. Ling Ling Xu, president of the University's chapter of CMFK and fourth-year College student, emphasized this mission, noting how children can often provide perspectives that college students may have forgotten about or overlooked amidst the everyday stressors of University life.

"I think there's so much to learn from kids. They look at the world in such a unique and forgotten-about way," Xu said. "We were all kids once, and we all probably looked at the world the same way, but then you kind of forget, because you have assignments due, and you're busy, and you're trying to make it in this world and get internships ... but [kids] really ground you to appreciate the present."

These relationships are cultivated in CMFK's weekly sessions, which typically consist of activities and guest speakers. Sessions occur Monday through Thursday from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. at Ern Commons, and students choose one day each week to attend with their Little Buddies.

Each weekly meeting follows a

different theme, kicking off with a guest speaker — ranging from engineering organization representatives to the Virginia Dance Team — before mentors and their Little Buddies break off into activities. The themes span across various topics, including science, medical training and movement.

Miller said that these sessions give the Little Buddies more than just a space to explore new subjects — they also give them a space to try something new without feeling the pressure to immediately get it right.

"It's just so lovely seeing [the Little Buddies] interact with everyone because it's such a breath of fresh air ... most of these kids aren't worried about embarrassing themselves or anything. They're always so ready to put themselves out there, and I admire that," Miller said.

While CMFK provides a much-needed moment of respite for elementary schoolers and University students alike, for some of the Little Buddies, the program is much more than just an after-school activity — it is a space to build confidence in unfamiliar places and situations.

"My first year, I had a Little Buddy who had just moved to Charlottesville from China. Despite not knowing a ton of Eng-

lish, she never let it get in the way of connecting with other buddies [and] mentors," Xu said in a written statement to The Cavalier Daily. "When we toured [John Paul Jones Arena] and the training facilities, she didn't think twice about playing football with the other buddies and student athletes. I really admired her for her bravery."

Echoing this sentiment, Danielle Love, vice president of programming for the Wednesday program with Tall Oaks Elementary School and second-year College student, said that the consistency of both the program and relationships Little Buddies build with their mentors provide Little Buddies with a space to share things that they might have otherwise kept to themselves.

"There are a lot of kids that come to us without the ability to articulate their emotions and what they're feeling," Love said. "A lot of kids [may] have had a tough day at school or [are] having difficulties at home, and a lot of them feel very closed off or feel like they won't be understood if they tried to explain it."

For Love, one of the most meaningful parts of CMFK is seeing the Little Buddies come out of their shells. She explained how over time, the mentors become

trusted confidants for the Little Buddies — giving them someone they know will listen when they need it most.

"We have kids opening up to us constantly about just what's going on in their lives, but also just as simple as saying, 'I'm actually sad today, I didn't want to tell anyone, but that's why I'm in the corner,'" Love said. "And I think that's really, really special that we, having known these kids for as little as we've known them, can be that safe place for them to come forward."

For mentors like Xu, Love and Mokrzycki, seeing the impact the program has on Little Buddies inspires them to prioritize this two-hour slot in their schedules amidst all of their classes, career pursuits and extracurricular commitments. In time, these hours spent together become a formative relationship built on the simple knowledge that someone is there, someone is listening and that someone will be back at the same time next week.

"We're all busy, but we make the time for College Mentors, and it shows. We absolutely love it," Mokrzycki said. "Hands down, it's all about passion."

The world kept scrolling

What two weeks without social media taught me about connecting with others

Aditi Burra | Staff Writer

There was nothing I loved more than sinking into the corner of my bed, a blanket pulled up to my chin, letting one video bleed into the next. There was something reassuring about scrolling on social media — something allaying about my reflexive ritual of liking, commenting and refreshing my feed.

It gave me a sense of comfort knowing what all my friends were doing on Friday night, keeping up with the latest trends and always having a relevant, pop-culture-based icebreaker to start new conversations.

Social media made the rest of the world feel within my reach. It was a way to soothe the itch of not knowing what was happening without me.

And while it made me feel connected to the people and world around me, I also felt like that connection was something I constantly had to maintain. If I didn't check my feed, I was worried I would miss something — an inside joke, a new fashion trend or some piece of information that everyone else would know and I wouldn't.

But the more I scrolled to stay connected, the more disconnected I felt from myself. I had access to so much information about what other people were doing that I was persistently reminded of the ways I felt I didn't measure up. I became hyperaware of

the way I looked, worried my interests weren't "cool" enough and whether my personality was secretly off-putting to others.

I found myself subconsciously counting every like and every comment, and would feel a small sting whenever they didn't come. I'd wonder if I had done something wrong, turning the numbers on a screen into a measure of how people felt about me. Without realizing it, my habit of passive doomscrolling had slowly chipped away at my sense of self.

I knew something was off when I realized opening Instagram or Tiktok felt like a chore — something I had to do to ensure I wasn't becoming a social recluse. But committing to a break from social media felt truly impossible. Everyone I knew was constantly scrolling, and I was terrified that stepping away would make me seem boring and disconnected. It seemed like social media was so intertwined with how people interacted that leaving felt like voluntarily removing myself from a conversation I desperately wanted to be included in.

It was during one of my usual nighttime scrolls that I realized I wanted to reconsider my relationship with social media. I came across a video of Gabriel Basso explaining why he had deleted Instagram. He described that

he saw a video of the top of Mount Everest, and felt like he hadn't earned the right to see a summit that he hadn't worked to reach. This realization was enough to make him delete all his social media.

It occurred to me that I was feeling something similar. I had become so accustomed to having all this information at my fingertips that I had never questioned whether I needed access to all of it. I started to consider that maybe there were things I didn't need to see, know or keep up with — whether it was clothes going out of style or events I was missing. Before I could talk myself out of it, I deleted all my social media apps and turned my phone off for the night. I told myself I would see what happened if I stopped trying to keep up, for once.

The real struggle, however, came after I deleted the apps. I never noticed how much I used scrolling on my phone to fill the small, mundane moments of my day. I kept instinctively swiping through my home screen looking for something to open, only to remember that it was all gone. I had no idea how to wake myself up in the mornings without reaching for my phone, or how to fill the odd pockets of time I had in between classes.

For a while, I felt helpless without it. I was impatient and restless, as if I

had somehow forgotten how to exist without constantly giving my brain something to consume. I felt like I was missing semester dumps, hard launches, spam stories and all the arbitrary updates that made me feel connected to the people in my life.

Slowly, though, those worries began to fade. I realized that I had built up this fear of missing out into something much bigger than it actually was. I was still seeing my friends, still having conversations and still felt included in other people's lives. Without social media as a constant reminder of what everyone was doing, I found myself more inclined to reach out to others by making plans or simply asking how they were doing. Instead of checking for updates through a screen, I could just find things out naturally through conversations or stories. My life wasn't smaller just because I no longer knew everything that was happening online.

Occasionally, someone would mention a meme from "Love Island" or a photo from last weekend's festivities, and I would have absolutely no idea what they were talking about. But in the grand scheme of things, it didn't really matter to me.

I began to find a sense of peace in not knowing. I felt so much more at ease with myself and my life, all because I deleted a few apps on my

phone.

Maintaining that peace doesn't mean I have given up social media entirely. It has been six months since I first deleted those apps, and every once in a while, I still redownload them to check up on whatever I missed. But for the most part, I am more comfortable having less information at my fingertips. I've learned to let some things pass me by, letting relationships and connections reach me rather than chasing them down myself. There is a certain freedom in letting the world carry on without me — but still knowing that I'm a part of it.

Sometimes, certain choices can feel like cornerstones of being in college or youth in general, and it can be hard to discern whether or not those habits are actually self-serving. When everyone seems to be keeping up with the same things, it can be easy to assume that means we have to as well. And while it can be uncomfortable to step away from them, it's important to make choices that feel right or best for yourself. While my original "social media cleanse" has turned into something more semi-permanent, ultimately, it's been a decision that's left me more present, fulfilled and just more myself.

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SPORTS

While playing in the back, Mia Abello is always looking forward

The field hockey captain has built her game around preparation while keeping her love for the sport at the forefront

Eleanor Lynch | Senior Associate

On a penalty corner in field hockey, one player pushes the ball out from the end line, another stops it at the top of the circle and defenders come charging off of the goal line at whoever is about to shoot. The whole thing is over in a couple of intense seconds.

For Virginia field hockey, a player who regularly steps up to take that shot is fourth-year back Mia Abello. Her routine is built to ensure that by the time that high-pressure moment comes, nothing feels new. Her position, however, is the odd part — being a back, Abello's official job description is to keep the ball as far as possible from her own goal, a task that she completes with an edge.

"As a back, I'd say I'm a very aggressive and threatening defender," Abello said. "But as far as goal scoring goes, that is more from our corner set plays ... I get to take corner shots, and those [are] something I've trained since high school and worked closely with [Coach] Ole [Keusgen] and the stick stopper and the inserter."

She also leads the team in goals scored this season, having made six so far, and sits on 24 career goals — meaning that opponents have to keep an eye on Abello at all times on both ends of the field. The attacking side is not a departure from her usual play.

"As a defender, I love to attack," Abello said. "That's just part of how I play."

That instinct has followed Abello since she first picked up a stick in fifth grade. Years later, it has become part of what makes her an unusual and strong combination of defender who wants to attack, captain who aims to continue learning and high-level athlete who remains motivated by the enjoyment of playing.

Her skills are the result of much hard work. Abello describes years of reps, starting in high school and continuing under the Cavalier coaching staff. Long before the lights turn on at Turf Field for a match, Abello builds her composure through thousands of invisible repetitions to master the small details until her body can react on its own when the game is on the line. Weight room circuits, recovery work with Assistant Athletic Trainer Kat Barnes and analyzing film all help Abello compete at her highest level with the strongest feel for the

game.

"My ability to read the game and make more sound decision-making has definitely grown," Abello said. "Overall awareness and when to go for it and when to possess the ball, when to slow down and when to speed up — all that has grown."

The international stage tested that awareness when Abello played in the 2023 and 2024 Junior World Cups with the U.S. under-21 team and traveled to places like Canada, Barbados and Chile. She won gold at the 2023 Junior Pan American Championships in Barbados, and has been through training with the national team. Those experiences raised her standard for what competing means.

"The national team provides a whole other standard and way of representing our country," Abello said. "It's an honor. I love being able to compete."

What she noticed and had to rapidly adjust to at that level was how little time there is to react. In a game on the national pitch, when a player stops to process what she is seeing, the action has passed her by.

"You don't have time to hesitate or question your decision," Abello said. "The game is a lot quicker, and you really just see the play and act on it ... that speed of the game is something I definitely try to implement here."

These are the circumstances she is faced with in penalty corner opportunities. Years of studying the movement of the defenders, the position of the ball and the shot she wants to take have made it so her instincts kick in, and her decision to act has been made before the ball even gets to her stick.

As captain, Abello has now had the opportunity to put technical lessons she learned into practice, alongside her understanding of the game's mental component. Her time on the national team showed her that leadership is most visible when things are not going as planned. After a mistake or a difficult game, Abello would look around at her teammates to see a melange of grit and empathy as they responded with a competitiveness to demand more and an empathy to keep one another looking forward. That experience helped shape the kind of captain Abello wants to be at Virginia — someone who can hold high



COURTESY VIRGINIA ATHLETICS

Abello, a fourth-year back, is the team's captain and leading goalscorer.

standards without losing sight of the people working hard to meet them.

It is why the captaincy fits her. Abello said she looked up to the role from the day she arrived at Virginia, and she has come to define her own version of leadership through a combination of work ethic, encouragement and boldness — challenging her teammates to raise their standards and making sure they know she is alongside them as well.

The responsibility fits naturally into a program like Virginia's, with a roster that includes several players competing across various national teams. Second-year forward Riley Savage, for example, has progressed through the U.S. U16, U18 and U21 Junior National Teams. Other Cavaliers have arrived in Charlottesville after developing in field hockey systems around the world. Abello sees that representation as strong growth for the program.

"What I've found culturally is that we continue to raise standards, and every year you see some type of development," Abello said.

That mindset extends through parts of Abello's life beyond the turf as well. Much of her preparation happens where nobody is watching in places such as the

treatment and weight rooms. There, Abello uses tools like rehab, activations and ice baths to reach peak health and explosiveness in every game. She finds joy in learning new ways to study the game through film or training, as well as her academics.

The culture Virginia has built around those standards is organized around five pillars — compete, heart, joy, accountability and gratitude. These pillars are ideas that Abello sees reflected in the way the Cavaliers approach competing and building relationships with one another. Abello values all five, but the third pillar is what really transforms the high-pressure athletic environment into one she is excited to return to every day.

"That joy and the love of the game will always be there," Abello said. "And the love for the team. That's why I play."

Abello is a student in the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, and she treats that side of her life with as much intention as she does her athletics. She uses her academics to explore new ideas to come back to her game with a refreshed mind, and spends time with friends to step away from the field and maintain a life not defined entirely by her

sport.

"As much as we can create balance as student-athletes, the more you're able to be present on the field," Abello said. "It can't all just be field hockey."

What makes it all work and all worth it is not the film, the sprints or the drill reps. For Abello, all the training that goes into being elite and making competing feel natural only matters if it leaves room for the reason she started playing in the first place — the joy of the game and the people she shares it with.

"How much we enjoy playing and enjoy being around each other makes the game even more special because those bus rides, the way we laugh in the locker room, our warm up, all those details where there is true joy add so much more value when we play," Abello said.

The next corner she takes will start the way they always do — one player will push the ball out, it will be stopped at the top of the circle and the defenders will begin to run. Abello will be waiting, surrounded by the noise and movement she has spent years learning to read. And when the work she has already put in has done its job and the noise around her is at its loudest, she will be having fun.

Virginia begins backslide with Florida State loss

The Cavaliers looked hapless, foreshadowing possible struggles for the rest of the season

Joe Schwiesow | Staff Writer

Last year, the Cavaliers' home victory over No. 8 Florida State can be pointed out as the moment Virginia established themselves as an ACC championship caliber team. Hopes and expectations shot up nearly as quickly as the fans that stormed the field that night. Now, a season later, a loss at the hands of those same Seminoles may spell the return to modest expectations and fair-weather football.

Florida State was picked to finish in the bottom half of the ACC in preseason polls, with Coach Mike Norvell's job security under serious question. Florida State was a team that many fans feel has recently misused its bounty of talent due to questionable discipline and coaching, with the Seminoles cheating themselves out of nearly 70 yards a game due to penalties. Norvell took the program from a 2023 ACC Championship and talks about leaving for the Big 10 to utter collapse, posting a two-win season the next year. The disorder and tension in Tallahassee makes Florida State a should-win game for any team touting conference championship aspirations.

Coach Tony Elliott's mantra "ABC 123" outright declares Virginia's hopes

to win such games, with the 1-2-3 signifying a goal to win a third conference championship. On Oct. 3, that goal was severely dampened.

Through much of the first quarter, Virginia established themselves well, forcing punts on Florida State's first three possessions, pushing a drive of their own into the endzone and silencing a hostile home crowd. The second quarter, however, could only be described as a meltdown on every front. The Cavaliers totaled negative 12 yards while the defense collapsed, surrendering 218.

The loss in Tallahassee featured several issues previously seen in Virginia's first loss of the season to West Virginia. An inability to contain a run game featuring a capable running quarterback, an offense that sputters when the run game is slow to get moving, dropped passes, crippling penalties and an inability to mount momentum while behind in the game. In the week between losses, the Cavaliers put a beatdown on Delaware. The 42-3 victory was a "get-right" opportunity following the loss to the Mountaineers, but evidently, whatever they got right did not carry over to ACC-level

opponents.

"We knew it was going to be a hard-fought battle," Elliott said. "We missed some opportunities, when we needed to fully flip the momentum we couldn't, missed some tackles, missed some plays on offense, a couple of dropped balls and before you know it, we couldn't get it flipped."

Virginia's issues are proving to be systemic, and center around pillars of any great team. The ability to win at the line of scrimmage, which many thought would be a strength behind one of the most experienced offensive lines in college football, was nowhere to be seen. Fifth-year quarterback Beau Pribula was sacked an eye-popping 10 times and the rushing offense totaled 37 yards all game. The defensive front similarly struggled, failing to contain graduate quarterback Ashton Daniels who rushed for a school record five touchdowns.

"We knew that [Daniels'] legs would potentially be a problem, we were hoping we could keep him in the pocket and not let him extend plays," Elliott said. "A couple times we lost contain ... unfortunately misfit the run there on the long one, and he took it

the distance."

The offense was unable to adapt or push the ball downfield when behind. Pribula completed just 44 percent of his passes, a number that dropped to 34 percent once Virginia was behind. Collapsing pockets, dropped receptions and offline passes all played a role in the fruitless air attack.

Finally, the Cavaliers could never swing any momentum. After their first touchdown, the Seminoles scored on more than half their drives, staying in excellent offensive rhythm and continuing to wear down the defense. Virginia entered the game having gone 11 for 13 on pivotal fourth down conversions. They failed to convert on any of their four fourth down attempts in Tallahassee.

The traits the Cavaliers lack lie at the bedrock of almost any playoff hopeful team, yet they have been exposed in both losses thus far in the season. Meanwhile, the quality of their earlier loss against West Virginia hangs in question as the Mountaineers just suffered a loss against an Iowa State team that was picked to finish dead last in their conference and returned zero starting players outside of their

kicker from 2025.

The remaining teams on Virginia's schedule continue to shape up better with each passing week. The Mustangs are currently ranked in the AP top 25, Wake Forest has a pair of conference victories and played national power house Miami to their closest margin of the year, Duke remains undefeated and Virginia Tech has the second-best offense in the ACC behind the aforementioned Hurricanes.

Ultimately it comes down to the coaches and the players to make the corrections needed to get the season back on track.

"First it starts with me," Elliott said, "So I got to do a better job from a leadership standpoint ... We got young men in there who care, that want to do well. They'll come in on Monday wanting to fix it, They'll be looking for answers."

Virginia could not "get-right" between their first two losses, and now they lack much breathing room and time to right the ship. The clock is ticking on those answers and on the ACC championship window.

Sometimes dreams come true. Chris Messmore's has this year.

From communications intern to kicker, this fourth-year walk-on is living his dream

Cierra Lyles | Senior Writer

It was peak July — warm and sunny, a beautiful day. Then-rising fourth-year athletic communications intern Chris Messmore was sitting on the bus, ready to travel to his club ultimate frisbee tournament. Chatting with friends, Messmore suddenly felt his phone buzz with a surprising notification.

"Hey, are you still in town this summer?" it read.

It was from Virginia Football's General Manager, Justin Speros.

Messmore replied saying that he was in town, prompting Speros to invite him to try out for the football team. July 23, only a few days later, Messmore got the call that he had made the team.

A few weeks later, Messmore stood on the field at Scott Stadium in front of thousands of fans ready to kick his first career extra point. As the ball went through the uprights, he celebrated with his teammates, putting Virginia up 59-3 over Norfolk State. The moment felt straight out of a movie, a testament to how one can live out their wildest of dreams — but in all actuality, the journey to that extra point was a lot more complicated.

Messmore was not randomly selected to become a part of the Cavaliers — kicking had been a part of his life long before. Messmore played

soccer and football throughout high school, and was highly accomplished in both. In football, he not only received First Team All-State honors as a junior and senior, but was named the Bishop Brady High School's Special Teams Player of the Year in both 2022 and 2023. Messmore went on to receive football offers from several schools, but his senior year he decided it was time to make a hard decision.

"I wanted to kick in college and knew I wanted to pursue that as a dream, [but] once I got into UVa., compared to the schools that I got [into] for football ... it [was] just an absolute no-brainer," Messmore said. "[I was] like, 'All right now, time to be a man, time to get a degree and be an adult.'"

So, Messmore gave up that dream and began pursuing his Bachelor's Degree. However, he just could not stay away from sports.

He began his first year cold calling and emailing different communications offices across the University in the hopes that someone would give him a chance to stay around college athletics. Eventually, he found the right person's office and was given a job his first year from Assistant Athletic Communications Director Patrick Boling, the Sports Information

Director for football and lacrosse.

Although he thought he would be sitting courtside at games, Messmore instead started by doing the standard intern grunt work — transcribing podcasts and crunching numbers. But over his first and second years at the University, he started to build his reputation and Boling's trust by doing game statistics and interviews with players.

"[Boling] started letting me come to away games and ... go to all these cool bowl games," Messmore said. "Last year was a really cool year ... I got to go to March Madness for basketball, [and the] ACC basketball tournament."

But being this close to Virginia sports was not enough — Messmore still had an itch for more. What was the way to scratch it? Attempting to walk on the football team as an incoming second-year.

Messmore had a great kicking day and walked out of the tryout feeling good about his performance. Still, the team did not need another kicker, so they cut Messmore.

"[They] said, 'It's good to know we have a kicker on Grounds ... if something terrible goes wrong, we'll call you. So just be ready,'" Messmore said. "I kind of took that as, like, they're gently letting me down ... And I kept

running into that same guy, now my coach, in the press box at all these games. It was kind of awkward, like 'Good to see you, you cut me.'"

Messmore continued working his way up in Boling's office. However, he still found time to kick, going out once or twice a month on Mad Bowl to kick into their uprights — mostly for fun, and partially out of the hope that maybe he really would get the call.

So on that warm day in July before his fourth year when Speros texted him, it was a couple years in the making. Just like he had been told a couple years prior, Messmore stayed ready — something that paid off when he had his first career point against Norfolk State.

"I remember a couple frames of it, but I think survival instinct and just the routine kicked in — like this is what I'm supposed to do," Messmore said. "Once I looked up and saw that I hadn't shanked it and that it had gone down the middle, [it was] just pure ecstasy ... I was trying to play it cool on camera, but I was geeking out."

Messmore was not the only person celebrating after the kick — his friends up in the press box were jumping up and down with him.

"There may have been some cheering in the press box," Boling said.

"Not generally socially acceptable etiquette in the press box, but I think we kind of made an exception for that circumstance ... It was a really cool moment and one that I'm proud to have played a small role in behind the scenes and have been able to witness."

Messmore's journey with the Athletic Communications office is not over. The fourth-year plans to return for one last semester in the spring if Boling lets him. Despite the excitement of being on the field, Messmore also finds himself missing the birds-eye view of the press box. More than that, he said he misses the work he was able to do.

"I look back fondly on those memories," Messmore said. "Getting to stay late after games and research all the notes because I really did have a passion for finding those little tidbits and those little nuggets of information."

But for now, Messmore is dedicated to the team and getting to spend time with his new teammates.

The same guys he spent the past three years watching are now friends. He is no longer the interviewer, but is now the one at the microphone. Instead of jotting down stats, he now has his own section in the book. Messmore is living proof that sometimes, dreams really do come true.

OPINION

LEAD EDITORIAL

EDITORIAL: Prevent drug overdose tragedy from repeating

The horrifying drug overdoses at college campuses must prompt the University and its members to promote a safer climate and culture for substance use

On Sept. 21, two students at the University of Mississippi, Aidan Hamilton and Robert Strang, passed away from suspected drug overdoses. No words can touch the horror of these students' accidental deaths. No outpouring of emotion can frankly face the disturbing reality of parents outliving their children. Nevertheless, we hold our hearts in profound empathy for the friends, families, classmates and teachers of these students.

There has been no confirmation of what drugs were involved in the Ole Miss overdoses. Kratom, a plant-based drug which is marketed for purposes as varied as stimulation and sleep, was found during both investigations. Equally concerning, rumors that cychlorphine — a synthetic opioid several times stronger than fentanyl — was involved have proliferated across social media, despite zero confirmed evidence. The combination of these realities at Ole Miss — unsafe drug use leading to overdose and death, coupled with specious social media speculation — represents a microcosm that we must be cognizant of at our University, where drug use is common

and drug education is not sufficiently provided. It is a much-maligned component of society that institutional change is often a response to morbid tragedy — still, the University must improve its education, communications and culture around drugs to prevent a similar tragedy from occurring here at our institution.

Undoubtedly, the University does provide some resources around drug usage for its community. The Collegiate Recovering Program hosts REVIVE! trainings for opioid overdose and naloxone education every semester. There are myriad recovery and counseling programs offered, from Hoos In Recovery to Counseling and Psychological Services. However, it is consistent that these resources place the burden of action on students — an impractical onus when the forces of social cohesion are likely to prevent many students from initiating an education in substance use and intervention.

For other health concerns, by contrast, the University has taken up the mantle of action more vigorously. For example, all first-year, transfer

and new graduate students must take Alivetek inc.'s Alcohol Module before the start of the year. These technology-based preventative programs help to reduce substance use. Similarly, the University could mandate courses that give guidance on bystander intervention and emergency health involvement in drug use cases. By developing and prescribing informational drug courses, the University can elevate the level of drug education offered to students, reducing the risk of uninformed substance use and ensuring that student bystanders take deliberate actions should an emergency arise.

Yet structured, static courses are not sufficient when considering a topic as disturbingly dynamic as illicit substance use. The White House's drug policy office issued its first national public health notice for cychlorphine April 30 — thus, rarely updated courses that provide generalized substance guidance are outdated and unhelpful for dealing with a drug that does not show up on fentanyl test strips and is thought to require several doses of naloxone, should a tragic overdose occur. In line with the need for real-time up-

dates, the UVA. Health Blue Ridge Poison Center issued a warning Sept. 29 for orphines like cychlorphine, proving that the University has the capacity to help students become aware of drug changes. While students should endeavor to keep updated on the deluge of dangerous drug developments, it is critical that the University ensure the Poison Center updates are disseminated consistently and directly across the student body.

To be clear, no student at our University should be judged for taking drugs. Nevertheless, it is inarguable that every institution and person should try to reduce the risk involved in substance use. To this end, the University must ensure that dormitory halls are stocked with naloxone and that Resident Advisors are trained to use it, and the Inter-Fraternity and Inter-Sorority Councils should ensure the same for Greek houses. Further, it is imperative that all students understand the signs of an overdose and the steps to take in an emergency health situation. Strang's Ole Miss roommates were aware that he had taken Xanax on the day he overdosed and

that he used nitrous oxide regularly — while they should feel no culpability for his death, the notion that tracking a friend's health may be lifesaving must be ever-present in every student's mind.

On Aug. 31, 2013, second-year University student Shelley Goldsmith took an MDMA pill with members of her sorority and a fraternity on a bus ride to a concert in Washington, D.C. Shelley passed away that night. The thought of this tragedy is excruciating, as are the tragedies of Hamilton and Strang and countless other victims of substance use — but our mourning and compassion are hollow feelings without action to prevent the heartbreaking cycle of loss. It must be an imperative for all of us to engage in responsible behavior and minimize the chance of another tragedy at our University. No one else will do it for us.

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HASNAIN: The mental health taboo and its adverse effects

Amidst a sludge of mental health misinformation, college students' mental health struggles deserve more attention than ever

From pseudoscience expert and Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s proposition of "wellness farms" for the mentally ill, to skeptical parents who believe "mental health" to be a hoax, there is no shortage of astute mental health advice available. Unfortunately, if it were as easy as simply touching grass or being less soft, there would not be the mental health crisis that there is. Just in the last year, almost 70 percent of college students reported some form of mental health concern. In 2024-25, 37 percent and 33 percent of college students screened positive for moderate to severe depressive and anxiety symptoms. It is likely these statistics are higher at the University due to its work hard, play hard culture. Evidently, University students' mental health, and particularly the stigmas surrounding it, deserve more discussion.

But before offering a laundry-list of places to get help, the hesitations towards seeking such services must be addressed. For example, therapy is commonly viewed with an unhealthy skepticism, thought to be reserved for those with more "extreme" cases. Such stigmas severely downplay the variety of services therapy offers — and the large number of people it

can positively impact. Importantly, the benefits of psychotherapy affect not just simply those diagnosed with mental illness. In fact, therapy can alleviate day-to-day stressors that affect anyone. Much like how one visits their primary care provider for annual checkups, seeking a 30-minute Counseling & Psychological Services therapy session should be similarly

Evidently, University students' mental health, and particularly the stigmas surrounding it, deserve more discussion."

seen as necessary maintenance for the body and mind.

In the same vein, psychiatric medications often fall victim to fear-mongering. The Make America Healthy Again movement insists on dealing with the elusive "root cause" behind one's issues — as opposed to taking the easy way out and popping some magic pill. By chalking up mental health to a matter of self-reliance, many become more hesitant. Such rhetoric is not only insensitive towards those who actively rely on medication to ease symptoms, but it is dangerous towards those who are

struggling and would perhaps benefit from a pharmaceutical push. When someone wears contacts, we do not shame them for their near-sightedness and propose they toughen up their flimsy corneas. Thus, when someone takes an anti-depressant, we should be open-minded instead of concluding incompetency. Indeed, psychiatric medication is not

immune to scrutiny — and not all is harmful rhetoric. The marvels of modern medicine would not be here today without the many criticisms and concerns of the scientific community. Yet, let this criticism come from those educated to do so, instead of self-proclaimed experts and gurus.

In a school that prides itself on productivity, perfection and amassing the most LinkedIn connections possible, my complaints regarding mental health culture may seem tone-deaf. However, it is precisely this "grind-set" that, whilst fueling work ethic, exacerbates stigmas and

in turn discourages students from seeking help. I understand "deep self-reflection" is the last thing someone wants to type into their beloved Google Calendar. Nonetheless, the benefits of taking care of one's mental health are worth the time. Indeed, my suggestion of simply taking care of yourself may sound banal and vague. Yet, I write this not to propose

some novel solution on finding inner peace, and instead hope students capitalize on existing reliable resources.

Namely, the many on-Grounds resources available right now. CAPS offers a plethora of services such as individual or group psychotherapy, psychiatric consultations and medication prescriptions. Given that financial costs are a huge barrier towards receiving proper care, CAPS has clinical care managers who make referrals to providers outside of the CAPS system and generally handle anything accessibility-related — as certain services do eventually require

insurance. The Maxine Platzer Lynn Women's Center, aside from also offering individual and group psychotherapy, hosts designated wellness spaces, educational mental health workshops and specialized counseling. And, despite its name, the Women's Center is welcome to anyone. While not technically a mental health service, Well-Being Coaching can also be a great place to drop by between classes for an ear and advice on any stressors.

I do not attempt to encapsulate the full range of help available in Charlottesville — or to omit Telehealth services and emergency hotlines. Rather, by offering a non-exhaustive list of easily accessible, free services, I hope to push the University's students to consider — even briefly as they rush past Student Health and Wellness to get to class — that stopping by or scheduling an appointment might be worth it.

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ANDERSON: Why I am 'dark woke' — and you should be too

The dark woke movement can lead the Democrats to victory ahead of the 2026 midterms

What is woke? For a term that has blitzkrieged its way into our political lexicon over the last decade or so, its meaning is unclear. If you ask a historian, they will tell you that the term comes from 20th century African-American vernacular, meaning to stay alert to racial injustice. If you ask a conservative, they will say something along the lines of “non-binary critical race theory in the pronoun kitty litter boxes,” in which case you will have to awkwardly cough and pray the Uber ride ends soon.

The real answer is that woke has been juiced so hard by the right-wing propaganda machine to score points against liberal “soy boys” that it is meaningless. Woke is now a dying husk of a term that occasionally whispers something about progressive politics. Even Republicans, who originally hijacked the term, do not seem to want to call things woke anymore. Democrats now have the opportunity to pick up the word and come away with “dark woke,” an ideology that asks Democrats to be a bit more sassy, straightforward and morally righteous. Arising from an internet meme, dark wokeism offers Democrats a youth-powered way out

of the hole they find themselves in.

The best thing about dark wokeism is that it solves the Democratic Party’s identity crisis. Ahead of the 2026 midterm elections, instead of building a unified front to earn the voters’ confidence, Democrats are infighting. Are the Democratic Socialists of America the future of the party? Are Democrats losing the youth vote? And the most

issues too far — something that they never actually did. Dark woke puts Democrats back on offense by embracing the label of woke and recalibrating it to win back voters.

One way dark wokeism wins back voters is through effective communication. Right now, most Democratic politicians are terrible at talking to voters, especially young voters. Take a peek at your average

said it best — “You don’t change stigma by changing words. You change it by changing hearts.” Dark woke aims to change hearts.

Once in power, Democrats need to prove themselves effective — something they have not been able to do in the past. Dark woke is fundamentally a results-based movement, demanding a ruthless, unapologetic style of progressive politics. One

minimum wage. Young people have taken note of her policy, helping to deliver her to victory and keeping her approval ratings high. Despite being from opposite ends of the Democratic Party’s ideological window, both Mamdani and Spanberger embody the compelling, upstanding governing style that dark woke lends itself to.

If all this sounds good to you, there is actually a way you can help out. Become dark woke! As we all know, the Democratic Party, aptly represented by a donkey, is the most stubborn organization on Earth that will not change unless it is dragged kicking and screaming by its voters. So let us make it abundantly clear — both by outspoken support of dark wokeism and direct support of dark woke candidates in the ballot box — that we will not tolerate the same old feckless, broken establishment politics. Together, we can save three things in one — wokeism, Democrats and the nation.

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Dark woke puts Democrats back on offense by embracing the label of woke and recalibrating it to win back voters.”

obnoxious of them all — did Democrats go too woke? This hand-wringing is not only profoundly unhelpful because it leads to division, but also because it gives in to conservative mythologies — like the one that there was some kind of far-left hysteria ruining the country during periods of Democratic rule. Powerful grumps within the party have become so terrified of being perceived as woke that they have gotten stuck playing political defense, admitting wrongdoing for pushing cultural is-

Democratic politician’s social media pages, and you will find pleading paragraphs that sound less like voter outreach and more like me emailing a professor for an extension at 11:52 p.m. Dark woke recognizes what Trump’s success has made devastatingly clear — voters want their leaders to sound like them. Democrats should never over-intellectualize or obfuscate a clear, righteous liberal message of equality and justice. Andy Beshear, Democratic governor of Kentucky and dark woke soldier,

promising example of this is New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, who has taken the country by storm via his highly tangible governing and communication style. The man just gets stuff done, and young people are picking up on it. Also, one certainly does not have to be a democratic socialist to see results. In Virginia, Gov. Abigail Spanberger, whose vibe screams moderate suburban wine mom, has taken results-based stands on contentious issues, such as redistricting, gun reform and raising the

HUMOR

U.Va. to host first annual Club Rejection Fair

Getting rejected from CIOs just got easier

Editor’s note: This article is a humor column.

The University announced that it will host its inaugural Club Rejection Fair following another competitive fall recruitment cycle. It will give students the opportunity to meet representatives from selective organizations that will reject students on the spot. The fair will occur at the beginning of the Spring 2027 semester.

“We heard that the current rejection process can take weeks,” Student Council President Noah Chance said. “By bringing all of these organizations together in one place, we hope to make rejection more efficient.”

The Club Rejection Fair will feature tables staffed by representatives from participating organizations. Rather than signing up for email lists and attending interest meetings, students will be able to approach each table and receive an immediate decision.

“We wanted to cut out the middleman,” Chase Sachs, fourth-year Commerce student and Jefferson Capital management president said. “We figured we could let them be rejected in person, with awkward eye contact and candy bowls.”

For students who prefer the traditional recruitment experience, participating organizations will also offer full-service rejection packages. Applicants can submit a resume, attend interviews and wait to business days before receiving the same decision. Commerce organizations said this option was necessary so members could retain the coveted “Recruitment Co-Chair” line on their resumes, a qualification widely understood to be essential for employment after graduation. A cappella groups insisted that rejection without at least three callbacks would undermine decades of University tradition.

Several clubs will also offer express rejection lanes managed by Coepylot Aygent, fourth-year Student Council rep. and College student, who will review resumes, tossing out any that don’t list one of to pre-approved high schools. Organizers said the lanes will save students from spending weeks discovering that networking was a prerequisite they were supposed to have completed.

Any students hoping to maximize their time will receive a complimentary punch card upon arrival. After collecting rejections from five organ-

izations, students will earn a free Bodo’s bagel. Ten rejections qualify students for a quarter-zip reading “U.Va. Club Recruitment Finalist.”

Organizers said the quarter-zip is intended to help students demonstrate their continued interest in extracurricular involvement while ensuring that passersby know they were considered.

The fair will also feature several selective community service organizations, allowing students to compete for the opportunity to volunteer their time for free.

“We believe everyone should have the opportunity to serve the Charlottesville community, which is why our application is open to everyone,” Gina Rosity, third-year College student and Hoos Helping Hoos president, said. “For students we reject, I’m sure there are other ways to volunteer. There’s probably a website or something.”

In addition to booths, the fair will feature a Rejection Translation Center to help students interpret language used in decision emails.

At the center, “We were impressed by your application” will be translated to “You have been rejected,” while

“We encourage you to apply again next semester” will be translated to “We are willing to reject you twice.” Students who receive an email stating that “This decision does not reflect your qualifications” may meet individually with a trained peer counselor to determine what the decision does reflect.

Fair programming will also include workshops titled “How to Tell Your Parents You Didn’t Get Into a Club They Didn’t Know Existed” and “Leveraging Rejection into a LinkedIn Post.”

For many first-year students, the fair comes just a few months after their first encounter with the University’s competitive club recruitment culture, which has already deflated their spirits.

“I totally choked during my fifth-round interview for Wahoo Strategy Group when they asked me how many blenders are purchased in the United States each year,” first-year College student Mark Etsize said. “I didn’t even think to separate personal and commercial blender sales.”

Etsize said he plans to attend the fair to expand his options.

“I’m trying to diversify my rejection

portfolio,” Etsize said. “Right now, I’m way too concentrated in consulting.”

Fourth-year College student April Cation, who was rejected from seven organizations during her first year, encouraged students not to take rejections personally.

“At the time, I thought getting rejected meant I wasn’t accomplished,” Cation said. “Eventually, you learn that there are more important things. Like internships.”

Cation reminded first-year students that selective organizations are one way to get involved and encouraged them to consider clubs that welcome students regardless of experience.

Fair organizers said that only one of the application-based participating organizations — The Cavalier Society — has declined to reject any interested students.

At the time of writing this article, no students have preregistered to visit its table.

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