

NAIT NUGGET

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NAIT loses another VP; NAITSA upset at lack of transparency to students

By Amy St. Amand

An email sent on Oct. 25 to all active NAIT staff announced that Gerard Hayes, NAIT's Vice President of Students and Campus Life, was "no longer with NAIT." The email from Laura Jo Gunter, President and CEO of NAIT, highlighted Hayes' dedication to the student body and commitment to various projects across campus, along with his support of athletics and regular attendance to home and away games. The statement concluded by saying that he will be missed and that NAIT "wish[es] him the best in his future endeavours."

Many students left Hayes well-wishes on NAITSA's Instagram post, with some users saying they'll miss his bright smile, and others thanking him for getting ringette lines on the NAIT ice.

However, as of Nov. 12, there has been no official announcement of the change in leadership to the student body—and there likely won't be, according to an emailed statement from NAIT to the Nugget. NAIT informed NAITSA of Hayes' departure "as part of the internal communications process," but also explained that they do not inform students of when staff leave "as part of NAIT's privacy policy."

NAIT Students' Association called the lack of transparency to students "disappointing" in a statement on Instagram. "Upon learning of Mr. Hayes' departure on Friday, October 24, 2024, NAITSA's leadership requested immediate student communications to address the change; however, yet again students have been left in the dark on decisions that directly affect their campus experience," the statement said.

History of departures

Hayes is not the only executive to depart the institution in recent years. Some have chosen to move on, like Melanie Rogers, VP External Relations, who left in June 2024. But the reason for departure of others is unclear, including Nazim Merali, former VP Administration and CFO, who spent 19 months at NAIT.



Gerard Hayes addresses the crowd before the Diwali event in 2023.

Photo by Leigh Kovesy, NAIT Content Collective

While there are not public records of staff departures, the 2015 Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act requires public institutions like NAIT to disclose "the name, position, compensation, non-monetary benefits and severance for all employees whose total compensation plus severance exceeds an annual threshold."

According to NAIT's list, in 2023, the institution spent \$1,687,996.63 on severance. That amount reflects only those that are required to appear on the public disclosure list, and therefore could be a higher number.

Comparatively, the University of Alberta spent \$951,677.37 on severance in 2023. In the same year, NAIT spent over \$700,000 more than the University of Alberta, who employs six times more staff than NAIT. The U of A has 15,000 employees according to their LinkedIn page; NAIT has just under 2,500 according to the Quick Facts page on their website.

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Changes to post-grad work permit mean big changes for NAIT

By Amy St. Amand

New changes to policies about international studies in Canada have left NAIT needing to accelerate plans to rebalance their international and domestic student population. Announced in early September, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) said they'll be reducing the amount of study permits they give out in 2025 and 2026 by 10 per cent—from 485,000 in 2024 to 437,000. This reduction falls in line with their goal to reduce the number of temporary residents in Canada from 6.5 per cent to 5 per cent by 2026.

The most concerning change, said NAIT Vice President Peter LeClaire, is the adjustment of the Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) program. In previous years, once an international student graduated, they could apply for a PGWP and continue working in Canada. However, as of November 1, 2024, students will now only be eligible for a PGWP if they graduate from one of 5 eligible fields of study:

- Agriculture and agri-food
- Health care
- Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
- Trade
- Transport

The fields of study are linked to national labour market needs, but as LeClaire explained, the job landscape looks different in each province. "They painted everybody with the same brush ... the work requirements or the employment opportunities in this province look different than what they are in Ontario and BC," said LeClaire.

Still more clarity needed, says LeClaire

NAIT is currently still seeking additional clarity about which of their programs will fall under the five eligible fields of study, but LeClaire estimated about a third of NAIT's current offerings will count. However, in this current listing, the business program would not, despite similar programs at universities being eligible.

"Some of the confusion we have is we offer a Bachelor of Business Administration. Our degree program is not eligible, but if you're at a university, it is eligible," LeClaire explained. Despite ongoing advocacy seeking for understanding, LeClaire still anticipates major impacts on NAIT's programs.

How to sleep more in less

Editorial by Sukhamjit

Student financial debt is widely discussed. But here, we are going to talk about a different kind of debt—sleep debt. Even though students are pretty much broke in both, they're different. According to the National Sleep Foundation, half of college students sleep less than the recommended seven hours for adults. In addition, student sleep patterns are erratic. Speaking for myself, if my sleep duration was plotted on a graph, it would be more volatile than the price of bitcoin.

This irregularity can be linked to an overload of commitments in a limited time. But there are consequences. A lack of sleep has a high correlation with lower grades, lack of attention, high stress and behavioural and mental issues almost up to the point of suspected causation.

So, what's the solution? I wouldn't advise skipping the 8 a.m. class in the name of self-care or ditching work. But with limited time and lots to do, one solution would be to sleep better. Make the best use of the time you have left by focusing on sleep quality. Here are some ways students can practice sleeping better.

Setting a fixed sleep schedule

To fall asleep, you need to feel sleepy. The release of the sleep-promoting

"We're evaluating what that overall impact looks like as we better understand and get confirmation that the eligibility isn't going to be there," he said. "So, it's still to be determined, but it's going to have a negative impact on us, absolutely."

For the programs that may now see an increase in international students, LeClaire explained that the focus needs to be on figuring out how to scale effectively. "The biggest

piece is it's not easy to add another section, another intake, simply because of the restrictions in terms of lab accessibility and things like that," said LeClaire. "One of the things we're doing right now is we're going back to our strategic enrollment management plan and saying, 'Ok, under these circumstances, what does that plan look like now?'"

While NAIT's plan always was to rebalance the international student population so they "weren't overly dependent in one particular sector," the changes to the PGWP has accelerated that need.

"We're working with facilities, for example, and looking at how do we create capacity within programs ... there's a level of urgency that is there now that we may have had a little bit more flexibility or little more of a runway on it now."

"Now it's, yeah, we need to get on that and be a lot more strategic in a shorter period of time."

Incoming international students can expect a much more competitive landscape when applying to NAIT or other Canadian post-secondary institutions. But LeClaire doesn't anticipate large increases in tuition, given NAIT still needs to attract students. "It's already an environment where we're being challenged to attract the students in based on the narrative coming out of our federal governments ... that won't be well-received if suddenly tuition is doubled," he explained.



NAIT's International and Intercultural Community Centre. File photo by Skylar Boissonnault

hormone melatonin reinforces this. Our body's circadian rhythm controls the release of melatonin. Circadian rhythms are fairly regular cycles of 24 hours. So if you go to bed around the same time daily, you'll feel sleepy around the same time each night. This starts with having a consistent school and work schedule.

Getting natural light and exercising during the day

Studies show that increasing exposure to sunlight during the day can improve sleep quality. Every day, make time for some activities in the natural light, such as taking a walk, going for a run or other forms of exercise.

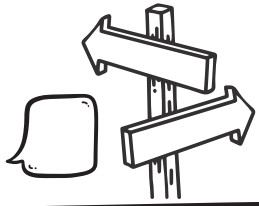
Put the screens and anxiety away 30 minutes before bed

Do something that you find relaxing before going to sleep—read a book (not an e-book), talk to a friend or do breathing exercises.

Be mindful of that caffeine

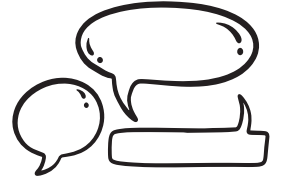
Coffee may be as effective in waking you up as an alarm, but it kills sleep. Try to limit your intake of caffeinated drinks, and drink them early in the morning or afternoon, at least eight hours before bed.

I have been owed one hour of sleep since March. I think there should be interest, but I'll take the principal for the time being. I would love to debate more about this, but I am too sleepy.



CLUBS CORNER

Let there be light in November!



By Sanjiyven Alfred Joseph

“Hello darkness my old friend.” Or foe, depending on who you ask. Yes, darkness has arrived in the form of the weather and assignments. Shorter days and shorter deadlines. Longer nights too, both literally and in student speak. However, culturally, we are brought up to believe that light overcomes darkness. Ask anyone, from a Christian to Chris Martin and they will tell you that “lights will guide you home.” Perhaps the vibrancy of NAITSA’s Campus Clubs can be the guiding light that leads us out of this gloomy phase.. As said by Claudia Basic, Campus Clubs Support Specialist: “It is cold and dark outside ... you are studying all the time ... join a club, go to an event, have some fun.”

A spark of something new

Good things come in threes. As such, there are three new clubs that have joined the long list of clubs available to students. You don’t need more drama in your life, but if you are looking for some and more, be a part of The Stage Dreamers.

If you need a pause from studying and would like to participate in “meaningful dialogue on issues such as fiscal responsibility, personal liberty and traditional values,” the Student Conservatives at NAIT is the club for you.

And for respiratory students who need to catch a breath, join the Respiratory Therapy class 2027 and collaborate for fundraisers and volunteering opportunities. Don’t panic, breathe. There is a place for every student, regardless of interests, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds.

As stated in the NAITSA Clubs handbook, “No matter who you are, there is a club waiting to be started or joined by you!”

Once broken, now aglow

What happens when you break a glow stick? It lights up. Well, these clubs and events stood out, breaking records and spreading light in the process.

Firstly, Punjab at NAIT transformed CAT into an extremely bright space (pun intended), an illuminating change that was more well received by students than the app itself. Jokes aside, the Diwali 2024 event organized by Punjab at NAIT attracted 430 attendees, making it the biggest club event of the academic year so far. The event also received a 4.7-star rating from the attendees.

Speaking of stars, two other clubs shone brightly in October too. The Club 5 Star (Hospitality Management students) and the Medical Laboratory Student Association donated 188.6 pounds and 190.5 pounds of food respectively to NAITSA’s Emergency Food Centre.

Finally, a record-breaking 29 clubs signed up for the Clubs Showcase held on Nov. 5 and 6, which also witnessed an all-time high for number of attendees. On Nov. 5, 300 students checked in, and 429 checked in on Nov. 6, giving a grand total of 729 attendees—NUM more than last year’s showcase.

In a month of darkness, it is sometimes okay to take things lightly. If you are at crossroads, take a leap of faith (not literally), watch out for the traffic light signals, cross the road and drop by the NAITSA office at O108. They are always ready to shed some light and guide you towards events or clubs that best suit your interests. And just like the traffic lights, slow down, stop and get ready to go again!

A new chapter blossoms: The Book Lovers Club at NAIT

By Sanjiyven Alfred Joseph

You could describe books in a thousand different ways, but Gia Amirie, the President of the newly formed Book Lovers Club at NAIT, would compare books to a peony. “Books are so beautiful ... they smell nice, too.”

Until now, Amirie felt a lack of spaces for book lovers on campus; there was no current book club for students, so she was inspired to establish the Book Lovers Club at NAIT. “I was pretty sure that there were lots of people, including myself, who like to read. So, I thought this would be like a great opportunity to establish a book club,” she stated.

In an era where everything is readily available online, Amirie believes that books are becoming more popular. “I think there’s just a certain nostalgia to you know, holding a book.” Amirie also explained that authors are taking advantage of social media platforms to present and promote their books.

The club meets monthly to discuss a new book that members help select. Amirie explained the club tries to make their selections relevant for students. “We just try to choose something that’s more current of what society is facing nowadays to just try to make it more interesting.”

They also focus on picking books that are accessible to all students and “not heavy reads,” which allows for easier discussion. Just like a peony, Amirie said that there are many layers to every book and readers can “interpret [them] in so many different ways.”

Their first read was *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig, which “talks a lot

about mental health.” Amirie described it as a good option for beginners as well. In the future, Amirie aims to collaborate with the Nîsôhkamâtôtân Centre to highlight a book written by an Indigenous author. “So, then we can put an awareness spotlight on Canada’s Indigenous issues that’s happening in our society,” she said.

For students interested in reading more often, Amirie said that there are “tons of books” to choose from, but she personally enjoys reading non-fiction.

“I wanted to experience something from another person’s point of view. And I want to read about their experiences, because sometimes reading about other people’s experiences can be very cathartic.”

She suggested the novel *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong. “It’s very poetic, it’s written by a person of colour and it’s also LGBT friendly.”

Students can look forward to the club’s upcoming book meeting event on Nov. 15. The chosen book for the event is *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro, which Amirie said is a book that everyone should read. “It’s a very classic read ... it’s so meaningful.”

So, if you love holding a book, enjoy its nostalgic scent or just love books in general, “petal” to the metal and share your experience with fellow students through the Book Lovers Club at NAIT. For more information, check out the club on Ooks Life or follow them on Instagram at @bookloversclubatnait.



Students play a ring tossing game at Clubs Showcase. Photo by Skylar Boissonault



There were 29 clubs in attendance at the showcase. Photo by Skylar Boissonault



Students watched dancers in CAT for the Diwali event. Photo by Ana Kostyrko



The Diwali event, hosted by the Punjab at NAIT club, saw record-breaking attendance, with over 400 attendees.

Photo by Ana Kostyrko

Work culture around the world

By Jess McLaren

What makes a good work culture?

Values, attitudes and legislation all affect the workplace culture. Considering the vast differences in norms and standards, it's no surprise that work culture varies all over the world.

According to the HR tech company Oyster, while most developed countries have employment laws, they vary significantly in the levels of employee benefit, legal enforcement and employer compliance. In Canada, the Canada Labour Code and Employment Equity Act outline the responsibilities of employers pertaining to employment standards, workplace health and safety and workers compensation. They also cover laws to protect against discrimination in the workplace. Given our diversity and respect for individual health and dignity, these laws resemble our collective values as Canadians.

Many Canadian employers go beyond minimum standards to provide flexibility and healthy work-life balance, the latter being the number one factor influencing workplace happiness in Canada, according to a 2024 survey by ADP Canada. Businesses have also shifted priorities to include more social activities during work hours, encouraging group unity and morale.

Some work cultures prioritize personal wellbeing as part of their country's beliefs and attitude towards work. In Finland, it's believed that leisure time boosts workplace contribution. All levels of employees hold strong family values, and these values are respected to help Finns stay balanced. In the office, a wholesome and trusting environment is typical. Finnish CEO Miika Mäkitalo explained in a Newsweek article that hierarchy and micro-management aren't highly valued in Finnish workplaces, so employees are encouraged to work independently and be free to express their opinions.

Belgium and Sweden share similar attitudes regarding a firm separation of work and personal life. Both countries also offer a four-day work week—Belgium made it law in 2022 according to Euronews.

Many countries outside Scandinavia and Norden have implemented elements that cultivate good work culture, boosting the overall happiness ranking of employees. According to the 2024 Life-Work Balance Index by Remote, New Zealand and Ireland hold the top spots for the best work-life balance.

Some employee research firms also show that Spanish and French employers boast some of the most generous employee benefits. Spanish employers

highly value time off to spend with family, and offer flexible work options and long breaks. They're also one of the highest pension paying economies in the world. Although France has a more formal and hierarchical work culture, it also cherishes personal health through generous time off, a strict 35-hour work week, five week per year vacation and many office celebrations for milestones and holidays.

In contrast, other countries have a very traditional workplace culture, placing value on hierarchy and professional achievement. Japan's unique work culture is based on deep respect for elders and superiors, so hierarchical relationships are very important. Japanese workers believe that overtime is necessary and is a symbol of dedication and a good work ethic. Yet, suicide due to overwork is so common in Japan, they have a term for it explained in various online mental health and occupational journals: *karo jisatsu*. There is little consideration for employee wellbeing or personal happiness because traditions of honour and legacy are most important, according to Vantage Lens' report on Japanese work culture.

Some work cultures present unhealthy employment beyond just overwork. North Africa, the Middle East and Central America are the most dangerous regions to work in. Many employers in these countries regularly deny worker's rights, violate safety protocols and force long hours with little pay. According to an article by the Ethical Trading Initiative outlining violations of worker's rights, 22 unionists have been killed in six countries of these regions. In these particular areas, a combination of corruption, poverty and job scarcity contribute to highly dangerous employment.

Of those countries that prioritize personal health in workplaces, many are deemed the happiest places to live. The top 20 countries on the 2024 World Happiness Report include Ireland, Belgium, Canada, New Zealand, Sweden and Denmark, with Finland coming in at number one.

Although a few middle eastern countries are included on this list, it clearly contributes to the idea that more modern work cultures may very well correlate to a country's happiness as a whole. The ongoing success of employee-focused companies also shows that it's possible—and advantageous—to care for workers and achieve business goals at the same time.

Heritage, culture and us

Editorial by Pregadeesh R. Krishnamurthi

The little things we feel and cherish, the thoughts of our home and family, the strong connections we have with our motherland, the stories our grandparents used to tell us and the food our mom makes—these things are all so close and important to many people. But are we truly appreciating the ideas and history behind them?

Culture and heritage may seem like words that have faded in this modern world, but they have always been a part of our lives, and they will continue to be for generations to come.

In a rapidly globalizing world, people might not see the importance of culture and heritage. But what exactly do culture and heritage mean? Are they different or the same? Culture encompasses the customs and ideas that a group of people or a society follows. Talking to someone who shares your culture can feel comfortable, like a feeling of home. Heritage is born from culture, and it evolves over time. Our ancestors developed a heritage,

the next generations shaped it, and now we are reshaping it without even realizing it!

A paper released Richard Balon outlines the characteristics of each generation. Silents (1925–1945) are known for stability, early marriages and pioneering civil rights movements. Boomers (1946–1964) shaped modern politics and social attitudes but faced rising mental health struggles. Generation X (1965–1979) is defined by cynicism, individualism and navigating early internet culture. Millennials (1980–1994) are highly educated, individualistic and tech-savvy, but struggle with adulthood dissatisfaction. Generation Z (1995–2012): is highly connected through social media, prioritizes safety and inclusivity, but faces increased loneliness and mental health issues. And finally, Polars (2013–2029), are still developing, but shaped by technology and shifting social norms, with speculative future trends.

These categories show how ideologies change throughout history. We already know how the

internet can influence the new generations. Today's society moves fast, but young people may regret giving up on the culture or heritage their ancestors built for them.

Instead, heritage is meant to be reshaped, so let's ensure it is done right. Upcoming generations should not only follow trends and fit into society, but also respect traditional ways. Dressing according to their cultures occasionally, making family recipes, and keeping in touch with family can provide a new perspective. They'll see how their cultural background connects to the world today, leading to a healthy environment where different cultures understand each other,

Every country has its problems, but maybe taking steps to follow and teach about culture and heritage will make a difference. Here at NAIT, let's appreciate the opportunities we have, to observe, respect, and learn about different cultures and grow with the strength of multiculturalism.

Financial Literacy Week at NAIT returns for a fourth year

By Sukhamjit

November is promoted as Financial Literacy Month in Canada. NAIT's JR Shaw School of Business is contributing to this national campaign by organizing Financial Literacy Week. The three-day event commences on Nov. 19 and wraps up on Nov. 21. The event is scheduled for two hours daily from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. with simultaneous and successive info sessions on different money lessons. The school is hosting the sessions online and welcoming all participants inside and outside NAIT.

In the words of Thomas Varghese, Chair of the Finance program at the JR Shaw School of Business, "In the same way we are health conscious, we want people to be financially conscious." Varghese explained that traditionally, Canadians are not good at saving; there's a temptation to spend rather than save—especially for students, said Varghese. "Canadians as a whole are not good ... personally, I would think students will be worse because the general temptation is if you have 10 dollars, spend 10 dollars," said Varghese.

This is the fourth time the event is happening and it has previously been rewarding for both participants and organizers. Reviews about the event have been positive: "I have more financial knowledge and know how I can budget/save for the future. The activities were fun and engaging and Fin Lit Week is helping me be more mindful about spending" read one review. "The sessions were well put together - interesting and informative," said another.

The sessions will include opportunities for participants to ask the presenters questions and do some engaging activities. As Varghese explained, "We want the presenter to be engaged with the participants, [and] the participant to engage with the presenter."

For NAIT students, this is not just an info session; it can also be a good

networking opportunity. As Varghese revealed, "I have one thing specifically for our students, all these presenters are industry professionals. Some may be hiring managers we don't know. So, when you attend these sessions, make sure that you get their connection, connect with them through LinkedIn." He proceeded to share the student experience at previous events, "I know at least for two instances where our students got connected with these presenters and later, they got jobs."

Since many sessions on different topics will be running at the same time, participants may not be able to attend all the sessions. "Choose one session that you would like in the first set, then choose the next one that you like in the next set," recommended Varghese. All the sessions in the event are going to be recorded for the participants to refer back to. "Even if you miss any session, it is all going to be recorded and you can watch it later on," he explained. The recordings for sessions from the last events can be accessed on the NAIT JR Shaw School of Business Experiential Learning page.

Every year new topics are added, with new presenters or new strategies. Participants can also make suggestions for topics they want to learn more about. Some of the suggestions made in last year's event include ADHD-relevant financial tips and getting out of debt, among others.

All participants will be entered to win a \$50 One at NAIT gift card. Three cards will be given away each day, but participants must attend the whole event and be present at the time of the draw.

To attend the Financial Literacy Week at NAIT event, register through EventBrite or visit bit.ly/3NTpqxE

4 tips to improve student spending habits

Editorial by Matthew van Erp

Being on your own for the first time has several new challenges, and one is knowing how to save money. You may have heard of making an income and expense statement to track earning and spending, however, budgeting is only one aspect; some other core habits must be understood first. Here are some tips I've learned over the years to manage my money.

Talk to others about money

As inspirational speaker Tony Robbins says, "Successful people ask better questions, and as a result, they get better answers." Learn and seek financial knowledge from others, including from your instructors. As NAIT students, we have access to our instructors who might have experience as investors, entrepreneurs and business owners. There are many resources on campus you can utilize, such as the Finance Club of NAIT. However, as with any advice shared, do your own research.

Pay attention to your bank account like it's a loved one

Do you know what payments are made on what day? How much income has been recently deposited? What is the balance of your account at this moment? It's the little movements of money that will slowly reduce your account balance without you knowing. Unused subscription fees, interest fees on unpaid bills and account fees will all add to the slow decline of your available funds. Knowing what impacts your account balance is one of the ways to control it.

Always keep an emergency fund

Dave Ramsey, author of *The Total Money Makeover* says that "an emergency fund turns a crisis into an inconvenience." The worst time to need money and have to start a budget is when an emergency happens. That is why you need

a set amount of funds that can be used in these emergencies. This emergency fund is dependent on your lifestyle and needs. For example, if you don't have a car, you don't need an emergency car fund. But if you do have one, this fund should grow to match your lifestyle and any changes you make in it.

Is it a need or a want?

This is a question I ask when I make everyday purchases. Do I need that \$3 Americano from a popular brand, or will a \$1 cup of joe get me through the day? Do I need the [insert latest and greatest] or do I just want it because [insert personal values]? By taking this brief pause to ask these questions, you will find yourself making less impulse purchases. Remember these decisions; the reward of making the correct choice will empower you before your next purchase.

Bonus tip: Get a credit card

Robert Kiyosaki, author of *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*, states that a credit card has benefits over using a debit card, such as protection against fraudulent purchases, a means to build your credit score and the capability to rent hotel rooms and vehicles when you go on a holiday. Some credit cards give rewards and cash back on purchases. You must pay off your balance every month to avoid credit card debt and interest fees—remember to pay attention to your bank account. I would suggest getting a credit card with good, free features with a credit limit you can pay off based on your income. By making these budgeting tips core habits, you can start feeling empowered when making money decisions as a student.

Metal and mosh pits: Meditation for the mind, movement for the body

By Matthew van Erp

Different types of music are listened to for different reasons. Lo-fi to chill and study, dance to get your body moving and even classical or traditional for meditation. However, does heavy metal music have some profound benefits as well? What about its aggressive dance style?

Heavy metal, known for its hard-hitting riffs and fast pace, covers many different genres, such as power metal, grindcore and even pop-metal. The different styles allow anyone to have favourite metal songs, whether it's hockey game themes, classic covers, or something to make you feel strong while walking down the hallway.

Thrash metal singer Vèronique “Ronnie” Caron sings for the band Kill Witch, a female-fronted Edmonton thrash metal band. Caron is also a full-time NAIT student in the Animal Health Technology program.

As a full-time student in the local music scene, she is glad that her “band mates are very understanding of that, and flexible” when it comes to practices and shows. In addition to managing school, practices and performances, Caron takes care of the band's social media, merchandising and event bookings. For busy students like Caron, metal can be a stress reliever. And there's more to metal than just the music—moving your body is also a large part of the culture.

Metal movement

At metal shows, mosh pits are the area in front of the stage where attendees “mosh” or dance. This style of dance involves jumping and pushing others. From the outside, it can be seen as very rough. “Someone starting, you know, hardcore, dancing or karate or whatever in the pit, you see the pit kind of dissipate,” said Caron. Even though movement in the pit is chaotic, protocols and etiquette helps keep moshers safe.

“If someone falls on the ground, doesn't matter who it is, everyone goes and picks them up and keeps going. No one tramples that person ... everyone picks them up,” Caron explained. “Once you attend a lot of shows, most of those people are your friends, you know these people, you've seen them at shows before. So, going in a pit, you are kind of just pushing each other around, but doing so in a friendly setting with all of your buddies.”

Moshing is the extreme sports version of dancing, where bruises are a scorecard and the next day's sore muscles are a reminder of the wonderful concert you attended.

A mosh pit can be a great way to relieve stress and get some fitness in while at the event. As social creatures, having this close contact and rough, but trusting, form of play provides moments of clarity and stress relief. In an environment where no training or special equipment is required (unlike sports), all that matters is the music and the people. And if you fall, there will be someone to catch you.

Getting out to a concert and getting into the pit is known as “mosh pit therapy.” It's not just about jumping into a group of people and going wild; it's about the community of the event. As someone who has been to many concerts, I've seen this therapy in different forms. I've experienced “circle-pitting” at Nine Inch Nails, crowd surfing over 100 people to Matthew Good



Vèronique “Ronnie” Caron singing at a Kill Witch show.

Photo via IG @justinthephotographer @altyegmusicmagazine

Band and even Viking-style mock rowing on the floor to *Put Your Back Into the Oar* by Amon Amarth. There is something to say about the bonding of these experiences, where no one is excluded or judged. It's just the passion for this style of music, the enjoyment of belonging and the action of pushing and being pushed.

A community to ‘Express Yourself’

Kill Witch has a new tradition that they started after this year's Loud as Hell Festival. They have a short song that they tailor the lyrics to depending on the show they're playing. At their latest show on Sept. 28 at The Starlite Room, the renamed song *Express Yourself* was written and dedicated to Caron's coworkers from the veterinary clinic who attended the show.

“They paid to come in even though it's not their thing and they were there to support me. I just kind of wanted to give them something and be like ‘Thank you for joining us,’” Caron shared.

NAIT Animal Health Technology students, this joke's for you.

“*Express Yourself* is about expressing anal glands in a dog. I just thought it'd be like a funny topic to write about, and I thought they'd find it funny, and they really did ... we joke about it all the time and it's kind of like an inside joke at work.”

Anal glands aside, metal shows and mosh pits are a great place for self-expression. While there are dangers with any rough activity, the release of body tension from school or work says that if I can survive a night in the pits, I can survive what the week has for me. It doesn't have to be a big concert, either. Smaller venues around Edmonton featuring local or smaller-named artists like Kill Witch happen all the time. Where there's heavy metal being played live, there's most likely a mosh pit with even as few as two people enjoying themselves.

Dating in the modern age: Is cupid using algorithms?

By Sunny Lee

According to a Stanford study—in which thousands of American couples were asked how they met—the change in dating trends is eye-opening. Up until the mid-90s, the reported percentage of couples who met online was virtually zero. At that time, the most common way to meet romantic partners was through friends (at roughly 33 per cent). However, by 2020, meeting through friends would drop to 15 per cent and meeting online would shoot up to a shocking 50 per cent, which means one in two people are now ending up in relationships thanks to online dating.

It is undeniable that dating apps have drastically changed the dating landscape. Dating apps have made dating more accessible, particularly for those who were historically suppressed, like the LGBTQ+ community, or for older adults who are getting back in the dating market. Yet, half of all Americans say that dating is harder today compared to just 10 years ago. Dating apps were supposed to revolutionize dating and make it easier, right? Let us look at some potential explanations as to why dating in the modern era feels more frustrating.

The paradox of choice

This is a psychological effect in which too many choices mentally overwhelms us and causes choice paralysis. Think about how long it would take to meet 100 potential mates in real life. Now, think about how quick swiping through 100 people is on dating apps. Logan Ury, a behavioral scientist, discusses this concept in her book, *How to Not Die Alone*. With so many choices at our fingertips, filtering out people has become stricter and increasingly unrealistic. Have we become shallower? In terms of dating, yes. Not because we are shallow people, but rather, dating apps encourage this behavior. Getting the vibe of someone through an app is entirely based on a couple of photos and a body of text. How are we supposed to share our sense of humor or personality within a couple sentences and a few corny back-and-forth messages? This is why we tend to focus more on concrete details: their height, how much they make, where they went to school, or what they look like. Compatibility with someone has been reduced to a list of checkboxes.

Gender skew in dating apps

According to Medium, almost two thirds of users on Bumble are men, with only a third being women. This seems like it would be beneficial for women, however, this heavy gender skew creates problems for both sides. On one hand, women have a ton of options. From a numbers standpoint, they get many more choices for a partner, with 45 per cent like-to-match success ratio. But because of the paradox of choice, women do not get the necessary quality time to choose the right person. As for the men, it is quite dire. Given the high competition with other men, their average like-to-match ratio is a measly three



per cent. These numbers can be explained by the fact that men become more desperate for a match, liking one out of every three profiles, whereas women only like one out of every 16 profiles. By trying to cast a wider net, they catch even fewer fish.

The algorithm of love

Each dating app uses its own secret algorithm, so it is not entirely clear how they work. Two things are certain, at least. First, their algorithm is designed to make money. Even though only six to 10 per cent of their users pay for premium app features, these users are the ones where most of the revenue comes from. The remaining 90 per cent of existing users or new users are enticed to return to or start using the app so paying users feel like they are getting value from the service. Secondly, these algorithms are matching people of only similar interests or likes. While this is a larger problem of the internet in creating echo chambers and in-groups, when it comes to romance, it is especially worse. Your partner is supposed to be someone who is willing to face challenges with you. Dating apps are training us to distance ourselves at the first sign of conflict and return to online dating. After all, there are so many other easily accessible partners who will check off that one last box, causing us to constantly chase that elusive 100 per cent compatibility dating app score.

Dating online is not all doom and gloom, as evidenced by the sheer amount of people continuing to use it. There is a growing sense of dating app fatigue though, as people are starting to realize it might be the very roadblock stopping them from finding the love they deserve. Perhaps now is the time to put down that phone and be our own matchmaker again.

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Women's volleyball team aim for playoff return in 2024/25

By Geono Aloisio

NAIT's volleyball teams are trending in very different directions entering 2024/25. Last year, the men's team ended a 47-year streak to win their first ACAC title since 1977 and first national title in program history. Meanwhile, the women's team missed the playoffs for a fifth consecutive season—all Alberta Colleges Athletic Conference (ACAC) sports were cancelled in 2020/21—and they haven't won a title since 2012/13.

However, the women's program may be entering a new era.

Hiring former Olympian Erminia Russo Thorpe as the team's Head Coach in the summer of 2021 has drastically changed the Ooks' trajectory; the program is now finally past the "ground zero" stage from when Russo Thorpe started.

"From when I took over three years ago ... it's been a rebuilding process. And it's really a rebuild from 'ground zero.' And so that's why I feel really good about last year," Russo Thorpe said. "We have steadily improved, not by a ton, but I think we may be at the point now that we're again cautiously optimistic about where we sit in the league."

Players who remain from Russo Thorpe's first year of coaching—Jessica Zlinksy and Anna Atcheynum—are now in their fourth and fifth years and are crucial parts of the team's lineup. The players from her first and second recruiting classes are also in their second and third years. With more players becoming familiar with the team's system and the coach's recruiting classes starting to adapt to the collegiate game, the Ooks roster is in great shape for 2024/25.

A closer look at the roster

There are 11 returning players this year, giving the Ooks some continuity heading into 2024/25. With only five new recruits, a more reasonable amount than last year's nine, the challenge of finding a program only signed five new recruits this offseason.

With 11 returning players, the Ooks roster will maintain some continuity through 2024/25. The success of retaining talent from last season, when they originally had nine new faces, makes this year's challenge of finding a balanced lineup that much easier.

Three players made a name for themselves in 2023-24: now third-year outside hitter Charlotte Vandenzelen and second-year setters Lexi Gedny and Egypt Trydal.

Vandenzelen was a force on offence for the blue and gold. She recorded a team-leading 136 kills—nine more than the team's second-highest kills leader, Anna Atcheynum—and finished 13th in the North Division.

Lexi Gedny and Egypt Trydal were also critical to the Ooks' offence. The duo led the team in assists with 246 and 219, finishing seventh and eighth in the division.

The trio will be expected to maintain their production from last season for the Ooks' offence to thrive this season. If all goes right, Russo Thorpe believes that with this lineup, the Ooks are on their way to making it further than they have in years.



Photo via NAIT Ooks

"I think it [playoffs] is a possibility. There's no question," she said. "We play 19 games; I want us to win ten of those 19. Can we? I think we can. But you know, I like to say we like to take it one match at a time."

"Our goal is obviously to qualify for playoffs; that's a no-brainer. But for me, if we can just continue to improve steadily at each match ... we could do that and break .500."

A bright future ahead

Although the program still boasts a very young roster, Russo Thorpe is confident that the players she has recruited can lift the team to the levels of success it has not seen since the early 2010s.

"I think that we have the players right now [to win a championship]. But, it's about individual performance and finding the right six or seven players that have chemistry as well," she said. "If you look at our lineup, we're going to have some youth, and we're going to have some veterans. So it's going to be a combination of how do the younger ones respond to playing at a higher level and whether or not the veteran players can handle more responsibility."

As any coach does, Russo Thorpe has big plans for the program. "Five years down the road, I hope that people will be like, not only is NAIT always in the top four or five [of the division]." She's also focused on making the women's volleyball program a destination for talented players, like NAIT has seen happen with the men's team, when "players realized it's a good program."

So, while the men's and women's teams start the season in two different spots, the women's program is poised to begin the next chapter of its legacy—one it hopes will end similarly to what the men's team has experienced.

The road to that point will not be easy, but this is what the team has been building towards over the past three seasons: the opportunity to take the next step and contend for a playoff spot.

Nineteen games stand between them and achieving that goal. With a talented lineup filled with young stars and trusted veterans, the Ooks women's team is in a great position to raise the bar in 2024/25 and beyond.

Letters and love from afar

By Sanjyven Alfred Joseph

Distance is painful. Whether it is two or twenty thousand miles away, not seeing your family for a period of time can be heart-wrenching. I have not seen mine for more than a year and the absence of a familiar voice or a comforting hug is painful. Thankfully, video calls have somewhat eased the pain. I can still see my mother's smile and hear my sister's loud cackles without worrying about internet coverage. I count my blessings as although they are not here physically, I can still enjoy their presence virtually.

Now imagine the absence of the internet. Imagine not seeing your loved ones for 14 years. Imagine not knowing who or what your youngest sibling looks like. I am terrified to think of what I would do if I was in that situation.

These letters are for all of you who miss your family. Words might not heal, but it is a reminder that no matter where you are, there are always people back home who have you in their minds, cherish you in their hearts, and believe in you with all their souls. Stay strong, the day will finally arrive. Remember, you are loved, from afar.

Dear child,

We miss you. The calls have been getting less frequent, but we understand that you have been working and studying so hard. We know you are doing this for us, but we want you to take care of yourself, too. Eat regularly and get enough sleep. You might not like it when we repeat the same advice, but we are your parents, and we care very much. Besides the barking of the dogs, the house is very quiet without you around. The bathroom misses your singing, the kitchen misses your sniffing around and the hall misses your screaming whenever soccer is on. And we, my son, we miss you the most. We watched *The Lion King* the other day as a family, and we teared up because we missed our "Simba." But just like Simba, you are now on a journey of your own, discovering new things, embracing the world and going through the difficulties of balancing work and education. We truly believe that you will also come home a king. "Remember who you are, you are [our] son, the one true king."

This is the longest time you have been away from home. But this will always be your home, and we will be waiting for you. We want you to know that we are very proud of you, more than words can describe. When you arrive, it won't be just hugs and kisses, but also your favourite goat curry and rice waiting for you. If not us, hopefully that makes you return faster. If we don't say it often enough, we hope this letter reminds you that we love you very much. You are indeed our hope.

Love,

Your parents

Dear sibling,

How is it going? Thank you for the birthday present, I loved it. I wish you were here to give it to me personally. Although we argue and annoy each other constantly, there is nothing else I would prefer right now than for you to be here.

I have not told you this before, but every time you annoy me, it makes me feel better in a weird way. I miss your silly jokes, too. I was laughing to myself the other day when I reminisced about the joke you made about washing multicoloured socks together. It was so lame, but hilarious at the same time!

Speaking of socks, you have none left here. The dogs have ripped them into pieces. Mom and I have made your room ours now. Mom's excuse is the air-conditioning in her room is not working, but we all know that she just misses you terribly. And although we still watch soccer with dad, he keeps calling me your name. I get it, you are the favourite child, I am not jealous at all.

Jokes aside, we are all so proud of you and everything you do for us. We know you miss home too, and we can't wait for you to come back. But like you always tell me, everything happens for a reason. See, I do listen to your advice, even if you think otherwise. I know you are busy, but make time for yourself. Don't worry too much about us.

If you can, call more often, but if you can't, we hope this letter makes you feel better. I have more space for myself now, but space also means emptiness, and you not being here feels kind of empty. Okay, I think I have used up my emotional capacity, but you get what I mean. The dogs send their love, too. They were barking loudly when I mentioned your name earlier, although it could mean they were just hungry. Either way, we all love you and miss you very much.

Love,

Your sibling

The internet is dead, and we have killed it.



By Sunny Lee

Have you heard of this thing called the Internet? It's that place you go to when you really don't want to do that assignment and end up procrastinating. Jokes aside, even though we know what the internet is, it's hard to describe. Is it the one stop destination for all your funny memes? That place where you get to see pictures of cute kittens when you're feeling down? Whatever your answer, I'm sure you have some personal tie to the internet. For most of us, it's kind of like a second home. It's a place of organized chaos, where you can interact with random people all over the world in the most unexpected ways, both good and bad.

What if I told you the internet is dead? The people you thought you were talking with are actually bots, the pictures and videos you see are reposts of reposts, and we are stuck in a loop of repetitive content. The Dead Internet Theory is a conspiracy that's been ping-ponging the corners of the internet for a while. It suggests that much of the content we see is generated by bots, as is the illusion of human activity and engagement. Sounds crazy, right? Surely, you'd be able to tell apart comments made from living people to those of soulless software. With today's AI and its ability to respond and write

like humans, it may be almost impossible to tell.

Faced with this shocking reality, you may be feeling one of two things: an existential crisis realizing that maybe your "second home" is an inorganic, cold void of nothingness. Or, you may be nodding your head because you sense that the internet always felt fake, which explains the endless pit of mindless clickbait and regurgitated content. Whether you believe in this theory or not, it introduces a terrifying question: what if all the good, original ideas have already been told? Even if the internet is essentially dead and kept artificially alive by churning out rehashed versions of the same old idea, what hope is there that originality still exists?

Perhaps it's easier to notice when we look at other forms of entertainment. Think about all the reboots, remakes and sequels of shows or movies. Think about that new video game—basically the same, but with a fresh coat of paint. Think about that book that made you wonder if you were experiencing the longest déjà vu ever. Evidence from a rare book found in 2022 shows even Shakespeare was retelling folklore of long ago. Sorry to break it to you, but every adventure story is just a modern narrative of the Hero's Journey, a

concept relating to Greek mythology that probably dates back to Ancient Greece.

Now that I've buried you under so much hopelessness and despair, let me be fair and leave you with some optimism. So what if there's no "original" thoughts left? Consider the sheer number of stories, perspectives and experiences you have the potential to explore. It would likely take you multiple lifetimes to get through it all. There's always going to be some niche genre you hadn't encountered, a new angle on an old story you hadn't considered, or a story that's old to someone else but brand new to you. In the chain of a repost of a repost, at some point in that chain, the idea was once novel—maybe even meaningful—to someone. Your favorite story? It's probably been around in some form or another for hundreds of years, yet it doesn't detract from your enjoyment of life any less.

If the pessimistic thought of the hollow, bot-filled internet or the idea that we are stuck in a loop of derivative content ever creeps back, don't be discouraged. Embrace the familiarity and simplicity of old ideas—there's still plenty of room for you to be surprised, even by a well-worn tale.

How sexy cosplay and sexual harassment lawsuits changed the girl gamers' world

Editorial by Taylor Winnie Hughes

I am a lifelong gamer who found her start in consoles through cartridges and PC games that came on disks.

My adoration for video games as a child left me isolated from girls in my class. My first best friends were two boys who also loved video games, anime and other things considered nerdy. Nearly all of my friends were boys, even after high school ended. Meeting new people came with the constant fear I'd have to prove my identity and justify my belonging in nerd spaces. Have you ever seen those "Name three Nirvana songs if you like them so much" memes? I wanted to avoid disheartening conversations like those at all costs.

It isn't all doom and gloom, though. Since my childhood, I have seen a huge increase in girls who game, and a shift in the way girl gamers are treated. A few things really shook the gaming community which I believe changed the world for girls like me.

Let's start with girls in cosplay. There are an unimaginable number of us, but Jessica Nigri is one of the biggest names in girl cosplay. Nigri's bold, and often sultry, costumes helped put nerdy girls on the map. The talent in her costume creation appeals to those interested in cosplay, and her suggestive style caters to others. Because of her suggestive style, some see Nigri as a controversial figure. But I think this publicity was good; it allowed the world to appreciate female fans of video games, even if some of them weren't there for her hobbies and talent.

Shake-up number two came when Riot Games released Valorant in 2020. Riot's previous game, League of Legends, has continued to be one of the biggest games in the world since shortly after its release. The player base of League of Legends is notorious for being incredibly toxic and unwelcoming. Many of these players hopped onto Valorant and continued that behaviour. Valorant's voice chat allows for easier detection of a girl player, so gender based harassment was much easier to commit. Riot Games' management made a couple statements against in-game harassment after a video went viral of a female Riot employee being harassed by players using the Valorant voice chat function. This caused an uproar amongst viewers, and change had to happen for the sake of the company. Riot promised to work harder on reducing sex-based bullying and toxic culture in video games. Still, some members of management are afraid of playing the game alone in case they face harassment themselves.

Disruption number three is a two-parter involving lawsuits. Blizzard Entertainment, known for World of Warcraft, was sued in 2021 for gender discrimination and sexual harassment. They were sued again in 2022 by the parents of Kerri Moynihan, who claim their daughter's suicide in 2017 was largely due to Blizzard's discriminatory work environment and the sexual harassment she faced. Blizzard paid out nearly \$60 million for the 2021 suit, and Moynihan's parents ended up dropping theirs. The huge cost and public outrage made it clear that this culture was unsustainable and unacceptable.



Photo via X, @Wowhead

Here's part two, though. In 2018, Riot Games—yes, the same one—faced a nearly identical lawsuit that ended in a payout of over \$100 million. So, why wasn't that point two if it happened first? Simple. Nobody seemed to care when this news about Riot broke in 2018. But only three years later, Blizzard faced constant criticism after their lawsuit. The discrimination and sexual harassment suit was all people talked about when Blizzard or one of their games was mentioned—a change from Riot's 2018 lawsuit. I'm happy to see this stark shift in mindset between these two companies and their lawsuits, but it feels unreal to look back at it.

Around 2021 is the first time I truly clocked the change in attitude towards my presence, as a girl, in the gaming sphere. I started befriending other girls who enjoyed gaming. All of a sudden, they existed! A lot of them picked up the hobby from a previous ex or current boyfriend. They didn't have the childhood start that I had, but this didn't make them any less passionate about gaming. I was so excited to have girl friends with similar hobbies, and even the men changed starkly. They stopped asking me questions in a demanding tone but rather an inquisitive one:

"What rank are you?"

"What are your computer specs?"

My love for LEGO and curiosity about Warhammer were met with kindness and excitement rather than distrust. Today, I can speak about who I am and what I love without feeling any sort of judgement, anxiety or isolation from my peers.

I can't know for sure that these events changed the world for those who relate to my experience as a girl gamer, but I can assure you that there is a place for the nerdy girls out here. I'm sure you'll bump into at least a few in the halls here at NAIT.



There are more and more women becoming involved in the esports and gaming scene, according to the Global Esports Federation. Tweet via X, @GE_Federation

Biohacking 101: Your body is a machine, and nutrition is its fuel

By Matthew van Erp

Biohacking has been a long-time interest of mine. However, all I knew at the start were basic trends. Once I started diving into this weird science, I learned how many believe that aging acts like a disease and that the best body I wanted wasn't as unobtainable as it once seemed. The only excuse I had was me—the excuse of not trying, not learning and not caring.

So, what exactly is this cyberpunk-sounding “biohacking” thing?

Biohacking can range from having technology implanted into your body to being an amateur self-biologist doing non-lab tests on yourself. It could also mean being a food nerd and studying how nutrition affects your day, to even being a naturalist embracing a simpler time.

However, I believe the core value of a biohacker is to discover a means to interact with your biology in a personal or unconventional way, by modifying oneself or one's surroundings. The idea is to hack the body's everyday actions and reactions into something more desired, controlled or just outright awesome. This might go against the prescribed norm, but your body is the best testing ground you will ever have. You can monitor if some small change is working, and you have full control of continuing or changing the process. Some biohacking methods are complicated, but I use what works for me: easy and effective hacks that take up little time. It can be as simple as changing your nutrition.

I cannot perform intense exercise if I do not have a good fuel source to draw energy from. I have no hope of longevity if I am not giving my body the proper building blocks it needs.

The human machine is an interesting design, capable of doing many things. One of those things is the ability to run off different types of fuel. It can even create its own forms of fuel (such as ketones) or convert one type of fuel to another. For example, gluconeogenesis is the process in which the liver turns proteins and fats into glucose. Many of these incredible actions are done all on their own without your thought or direction, but can be influenced and persuaded. A primary way to achieve this is through food.

For me, learning to be mindful while eating was the key. We are in a society where it's go-go-gone, and we just end up stuffing food into our bodies without being aware of it. I am sure you can recall rushing through a drive-through before school—the only evidence that you ate was the wrapper and crumbs left on the seat.

Taking time to sit down and eat consciously is a lost art, but it is a re-learnable skill. By doing so you allow your stomach to realize it has been fed, starting the digestion process. This information goes to your brain to say “ok, I'm full, stop



feeding me.”

Being aware of how I ate gave me time to look at what I was eating and how my body felt about it. The body is good at saying no to harm (and does so subconsciously) but the mind is powerful enough to override this programming. I started a list of foods I wanted to avoid (note: avoid, not abstain from) and tracked them with a “what” and a “why.” Writing the details down serves as a reminder of ingredients my body does not agree with and allows me to have an action plan to avoid them.

After discovering which foods worked for me and which ones did not, I first cut processed foods from my diet. Processed foods are one of the hardest habits to give up, and there are days I still fall for it.

It's easy, fast and fixes the craving immediately, and it's EVERYWHERE. I was an addict, and once that realization hit, I started to treat it as an addiction. I knew I had to be aware and on guard; even the simplest food sometimes has hidden processed ingredients.

If I did not know what was in the item, how would I know its effects on my body? Removing processed foods and eating mostly whole foods was like driving through a city using only bumpy, bad health back alleys, and then finding the on-ramp to a smooth, good health freeway. My mood improved, I was sleeping more soundly and my weight started to melt away. My body was changing rapidly for the better and I wanted more.

These were the three major changes I made to improve my nutrition for a healthier body. It is a starting point from where all the other biohacking items stem from.

I cannot perform intense exercise if I do not have a good fuel source to draw energy from. I have no hope of longevity if I am not giving my body the proper building blocks it needs. And when it comes to the crazier biohacking methods, I now have a foundation.

This article is only a summary of the things I learned and is by no means an in-depth guide to biohacking. This is on purpose, as I would prefer you do your own research and confirm ideas with your health professional.

My hope is to show you a path to spark that child-like curiosity to be your own amateur biohacker. You and only you are the ultimate expert in your body and life.

K-pop fans aren't as toxic as you think

By Jalyn Dalke

Since the 90's, the Hallyu, or Korean Wave, has hit western culture like a storm, whether it's movies, K-dramas, or, most recently K-Pop. Korean pop music has been popular worldwide since the late 2000s/2010s on websites like Tumblr, but recently exploded with worldwide critical acclaim due to the rise of pop powerhouses like the South Korean BTS. Over the past decade, K-Pop culture has changed significantly because of this influx of fans, and with the increase in fandom, there are both pros and cons to how the community runs.

K-Pop has been a major part of my life since I was a tween, and it's still a major part of my life today. I've seen the community change and grow for over a decade, and it's been a shock for me. Everything is so accessible now! When I was younger, I would have to wait until I was on vacation in the United States to be able to get some of the newest album releases at a tiny music store inside a Korean supermarket. Now I can just drive to London Drugs and get albums there, or I can drive to one of the multiple stores in the city dedicated to K-Pop to get practically any Korean CD I could wish for. It's crazy to me how much K-Pop has grown in the west. To be honest, I'm unsure if this growth is a good thing or a bad thing. I'm glad that some of my favourite artists are getting the worldwide fame they deserve, but the increase in fans has brought out a lot of bad apples, and I feel that these toxic fans represent the current perception of K-Pop culture.

Now, virtual K-Pop culture was never sunshine and rainbows. Online fan-wars and arguments about who's the better artist have existed for a long time, but in recent years, it feels like all fans do on sites like Instagram or X is argue.. Normal conversations are overcrowded by rage bait and arguments hoping to get a reaction out of other fans, and as a fan myself, it feels miserable. Everything about K-Pop online focuses on who has the better sales, who has the most YouTube views or who has the most music streams, and fans will try and pressure you into spending every waking hour contributing to these

leaderboards. You'll see people watching YouTube videos on ten different screens, and dedicating hours of their life making sure their favourite artist gets as many views or music streams as possible. It stops feeling like an interest and more like a chore. Toxicity is so prevalent in these online communities; they can feel like a warzone.

I've talked to a lot of people who are not fans, and this was what they thought all K-Pop fans were like—destructive and frustrating. But online K-Pop culture is much different compared to interacting with local communities. Being a K-Pop fan has never been more enjoyable as it has since I've found a space to interact with local fans here in Edmonton. For the past couple years, I've been attending a local K-Pop market that happens around every three months called K-Pop Up, and it makes me so happy to be a fan! Everyone there is so sweet and it's a treat to hang around them. A staple in the community is called a "random play dance," where the group will play random K-Pop songs and if you know the choreography, you join in. There are many other activities, such as trading photocards (trading cards with K-Pop idol selfies). I have such a blast interacting and hanging out with people in my community who have the same interests as me. I'm glad to have somewhere to nerd out with others without being bombarded with weird and annoying posts online.

While the arrival of Korean pop culture in the west has brought in more toxic fanbases, without it, I wouldn't have these places where I can hang out with people offline, and I'm very grateful for that. If it weren't for this push into the west, I wouldn't have been able to see some of my favourite artists in concert or buy their merch more easily. While I believe toxic fanbases are especially popular in the K-Pop fandom, I think that's the case with all sorts of fandom spaces over the recent years. The K-Pop community is great; you just need to know where to look. I've met some of my best friends in K-Pop spaces, and I'm hoping to meet many more, whether they're an older fan like me, or new.

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HARD

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(if what you need is answers to sudooku)





MOUTHING OFF: WHAT'S THE BEST PART ABOUT YOUR CULTURE?

"My family comes from Sri Lanka ... [it's] definitely the food. We've spent hours intensely cooking egg hoppers for big curry meals at the lake."

-Alicia Gavigan
Conservation Biology

"The way we treat our elders and big celebrations not only for holidays, but as well as birthdays and big family/filipino celebrations."

-Joseph Tolentino
Landscape Architectural Technology

"I am a very crafty person and love that in my culture creativity is encouraged. We do lots of beading so it's a perfect way to be creative."

-Tyra Cardinal
Business Administration, Management



Photos by Skylar Boissonnault



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