

NAITSA EXECUTIVE COUNCIL VOTING OPEN FEB. 4

NAIT NUGGET

NAIT'S INDEPENDENT STUDENT NEWS

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NAITSA's PAWSS program temporarily expands



Rusty (left) and Tricks (right), two of NAITSA's PAWSS dogs, relax after one of NAITSA's Beagles and Bagels events.

Photo via NAITSA

By Will Dawson, *Media Intern*

Amy St. Amand, *Editor-in-Chief*

Students now have even more chances to de-stress with dogs. For a limited time, NAITSA has increased availability of their PAWSS program, making multiple dogs available when scheduling allows. "We understand that times of uncertainty can be stressful, and that sometimes a small moment of joy and connection can make a difference," said Ashleigh Stortz, NAITSA's HR director in an emailed statement.

NAITSA's Pets Assisting with Student Success (PAWSS) allows NAIT students to unwind by interacting with certified wellness dogs. Studies show that interacting with animals can reduce stress and overall benefit mental health.

"I definitely think it's like a place to de-stress and feel comforted by animals. They just have that sense to comfort you," said Rose Martin Baumgartner, NAITSA campus clubs manager. Her dog, Hemi, was the first unofficial PAWSS dog in 2006.

"I just saw that there were students that were stressed, and my little fella was just really nonchalant and really good at being with people," she said. "I kind of asked if NAITSA would allow me to bring him in so that students can interact."

The official PAWSS program began at MacEwan University in 2017, and NAITSA was quick to join.

But in 2024 when MacEwan paused the program, NAITSA needed to find a new avenue to certify their staff's pups as wellness dogs. After connecting with the trainer that did PAWSS certification at MacEwan, they worked together

to create guidelines for NAITSA's dogs — including sociability, tolerance, self control and team work.

During the certification process, the dogs are assessed on how they interact with students. "We do use the front lobby, we do use our Jasper room to simulate those interactions," said Stortz. "They bring in mobility aids to see how a dog would react to a mobility aid, unwanted touch and petting, and how the dog would react and how the handler works through those situations."

If a dog passes, they work in two-hour shifts, and students can meet with them in the NAITSA office, or in rare cases, CAT182. Despite students asking, the PAWSS dogs won't be making classroom visits anytime soon.

"It is our staff members taking two hours of their work day to sit, and they love that work, but also, there's capacity limits to doing that kind of thing," said Stortz. And now that Flynn, NAIT's long-time therapy dog, has retired, NAITSA remains the only place on campus for students to catch a break with a furry friend.

"Over the years I've had so many students who said 'I really needed that. I just needed that break to help me de-stress,'" said Martin Baumgartner.

NAITSA currently has nine dogs in the PAWSS program; their newest recruit is Trixie, a German Shepard-Corgi cross. Students can visit NAITSA's PAWSS page at www.naitsa.ca/pawss to see what dogs are available and learn more about them.

NAIT NUGGET

Informing and entertaining the NAIT community since 1964

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Academic staff association extends bargaining deadline



Photo by Noura Eltinay

By Amy St. Amand, *Editor-in-Chief*

Students can let out a collective sigh of relief for another week, as NAIT's Academic Staff Association (NASA) has extended the deadline to sign a collective agreement from Jan. 30 until Feb. 7.

Here's what's happened in the world of NAIT and NASA collective bargaining so far.

Jan. 15: Academic Staff support strike with successful vote

On Jan. 14 and 15, NASA held a successful strike vote, with 83 per cent of voting members saying "yes" to a strike. NASA President Shauna MacDonald called the results a "collective statement" in an email to members.

This vote gives NASA 120 days to call a strike with 72-hours' notice.

Jan. 16: NAIT's Board of Governors pass lockout vote

At an emergency NAIT Board of Governors meeting, the Board passed a motion to "delegate the President and CEO the authority to initiate lockout action with respect to the Bargaining, including the authority to take any steps required to initiate such lockout action."

The Board chair emphasized that NAIT wants to continue bargaining with the assistance of a mediator and minimize any interruptions to learning.

Jan. 19: NAIT and NASA return to bargaining, NASA sets Jan. 30 deadline for signed agreement

With the assistance of a mediator, NAIT and NASA returned to the table to continue discussing a new collective agreement. But to "maintain the

momentum created by the strike mandate," NASA set a deadline to sign of Jan. 30. President Shauna MacDonald called it a "definite" deadline, saying that if no agreement was signed by then, the NASA executive team would have a "very serious conversation."

Jan. 26: Progress being made, but bargaining stalls on topic of instructional assistants

Both parties say they made significant progress on multiple topics, but negotiations fell apart on the topic of Instructional Assistant IIs (IA2) — a type of support staff that can deliver technical lessons, but not theory-based ones.

NAIT said that NASA was "unwilling to engage in further discussion" regarding NAIT's IA2 proposal, and NASA said in their Jan. 26 update that NAIT's actions show that "they are committed to increasing the roles and usage of IA2s."

Jan. 29: Mediation resumes, NASA extends bargaining deadline to Feb. 7

Both parties agree to continue mediation with a new mediator. Three mediation dates are set: Feb. 2, Feb. 4 and Feb. 7. NASA has now said Feb. 7 is their new deadline to sign an agreement. Their executive team has "authorized the issuance of a 72-hour strike notice if it becomes necessary," but chose not to issue strike notice and instead continue bargaining.

NAIT and NASA both still say they are committed to signing a new agreement.

NEED TO CATCH UP? WE'VE GOT YOU.
visit the *Nugget* online for all the latest bargaining news



CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT



MEHTAB SINGH BRAR
CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT

I'm Mehtab Singh Brar, a 3rd year BTech student running for NAITSA President to be your reliable voice. I'll lead with **accountability, transparency, and purpose**, ensuring students input shapes every decision. As an experienced leader who has worked closely with students, faculty, and administration, I understand how important it is to **raise our voices** where it matters the most. Together, we'll build a bolder NAITSA!

I understand that a President's role is not about making promises that can't be guaranteed — it is about ensuring students are represented where decisions are made. As a President, I will **advocate for student interests** in conversations with NAIT administration and external bodies, making sure student voices are heard early and taken seriously.

I am committed to leading an **accountable** and **collaborative** executive council that works effectively in the best **interest of students**. **Clear communication** and **transparency** are essential to building trust, and I will prioritize keeping students informed about NAITSA's work, decisions, and use of student fees through reports and open forums.

I also believe NAITSA leadership must **reflect** and **support** the diverse realities of NAIT students- from traders to tech innovators. I will advocate for **inclusive** and **accessible** student representation from every group and ensure concerns from all student groups are brought forward with respect and urgency.

My goal as President is simple: to lead responsibly, represent students honestly, and strengthen the connection between NAITSA and the students it serves.

Thank you for your support - **Vote Mehtab to make it real!**

CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT



LILLY HOUCHER
CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT

Hello fellow students!

My name is Lilly Houcher, your current President! I'm excited to share that I'm running again for President in the NAITSA Executive Council election.

I am a third-year student in the Business Administration - Management program, and I strongly believe that education is foundational to growth, both professionally and personally. Like many of you, I chose NAIT because of its hands-on learning, career-focused programs, and the strong industry connections. Serving as your President has only deepened my appreciation for the responsibility that comes with advocating for students and ensuring your voices are heard.

To me, student leadership is about standing up for students when decisions are being made that directly affect your education, finances, and future. My role as President is to protect students and push for outcomes that actually improve the student experience at NAIT.

Over the past year, I have done this by:

- Opposing NAIT's 21 proposed Exceptional Tuition Increases
- Securing the forgiveness of approximately \$200,000 in fees for electrician students
- Advocating to both NAIT and NASA about the impact a potential strike would have on students
- Communicating consistently with students about negotiations between NAIT and NASA

In addition, the possibility of a strike is a real concern for students. By the time you are reading this, a strike may have already begun. Please know that I am actively

working to support students. Any disruption to classes or labs directly affects students' education, finances, and well-being. I have been, and will continue to be, clear with both NAIT and NASA that students should not bear the consequences of prolonged negotiations. I will use the strong working relationships I have built to advocate effectively on behalf of students.

If re-elected as your President, I will continue to:

- Communicate clearly with students
- Build on the relational equity with NAIT, politicians, and the contacts that I've established this year
- Advocate for affordable and predictable tuition
- Deal with issues and protect students

As your representative, I will continue to use my influence to advocate for the opportunities, resources, and support you deserve. **My focus remains on what benefits you most!**

Every NAIT student has a unique story, and I want to hear yours. If we don't get a chance to meet in person, please feel free to reach out via email at Lhoucher1@nait.ca. I am here to listen and learn how I can best advocate for you.

Thank you so much for your consideration; your support truly means a lot to me.

Vote Lilly for President!



CANDIDATE FOR VP ACADEMIC



DANIELLE LIBUNAO
CANDIDATE FOR VP ACADEMIC

Re-Elect Danielle Libunao for VP Academic: The right choice then, the right choice now

WHY I'M RUNNING AGAIN

My name is Danielle Libunao, and I've had the privilege of serving as your VP Academic this past year. What's been rewarding is learning and growing with my team through a hectic academic year and staying steady through whatever came our way. This year didn't just teach me the job, it deepened my understanding of how NAIT operates, how decisions get made, and what it takes to turn students' concerns into tangible solutions. Supporting students in navigating academic challenges has given me valuable insights into areas that need improvement.

As someone who prioritizes others, I've been a strong advocate for students and made sure concerns reached the right departments. It's been fulfilling to assist students in their academic journeys and provide them with the resources they need to succeed. I'm excited to continue supporting and advocating for our student community. I'm running again because I know how to move issues forward, and I'm not done. Students deserve someone who will keep showing up, follow through, and push for fair outcomes.

WHAT I'VE DONE TO SERVE YOU

Over the past few months, I have strongly and continuously advocated for students' academic interests. One of my successes was preventing tuition increases for several programs. Through collaboration with my team, we reduced the proposed increases from 21 programs to just 7. That is a real win for students and a clear example of my steadfast commitment to **student-first decisions**.

When I campaigned last year, I emphasized the need for stronger connections between students and instructors. I'm pleased to see NAIT has taken steps by refining the student feedback surveys to improve the academic experience. This initiative is a proven result of my advocacy and shows meaningful movement.

MY COMMITMENT TO YOU NEXT TERM

One key issue I'm passionate about is ensuring that students' time at NAIT is respected. Our time is valuable, as we are learning skills that will shape our future careers. When students need academic support or assistance from departments like the Student Service Centre, they are often bounced around, wasting time that could be spent in the classroom. I want to work with the Registrar to create a system where students' concerns are addressed at the first point of contact, ensuring their time is respected. My goal is to simplify and streamline processes, making them more accessible and easier for students to navigate, so their academic journey becomes less complicated.

AI is rapidly changing, NAIT must be ahead in how they teach and assess. Leveraging the rapport I've built with NAIT leadership, I will continue to advocate for clear expectations in the classroom, fair guidelines, and consistent approaches across programs. This will help ensure students aren't confused or treated differently from one course to another, while also upholding academic integrity.

Thank you for trusting me this past year. I'd be truly honoured to have your vote.

VOTE DANIELLE LIBUNAO FOR VP ACADEMIC!

CANDIDATE FOR VP EXTERNAL



VLADYSLAV BONDARCHUK
CANDIDATE FOR VP EXTERNAL

Hello Ooks,

NAIT students are balancing heavy course loads, work, family responsibilities, and rising living costs. When decisions feel unclear, support is hard to find, or students are left guessing, it affects academic success and mental well-being. I'm running for Vice President External because student concerns must lead to clear action, not just acknowledgement.

My name is Vladyslav Bondarchuk. I'm a current NAIT student with a 3.5 GPA and a serving NAITSA Senator. Through student governance and campus involvement, I've learned how NAITSA advocacy works behind the scenes—and how important it is to translate that work into results students can actually feel and understand.

The VP External represents students to NAIT leadership and to municipal, provincial, and federal partners. If elected, I will focus on the issues students raise most often and communicate progress in plain language so students always know what is happening, what their options are, and where to go for help.

First, affordability and access to financial support. Too many students miss scholarships, bursaries, and awards because information feels scattered or confusing. I will advocate for clearer student-friendly guidance, consistent promotion through the channels students use, and better visibility of deadlines and eligibility—so more students can access the support that already exists.

Second, transparency when major decisions impact students. Program changes and reviews affect plans, finances, and confidence. I will push for clear timelines, plain-language updates, and strong student input when decisions impact programs, learning delivery, or fees.

Third, practical everyday logistics that affect student life. Transportation is a key example. With U-Pass expanding into Spring terms starting May 2026, students need clear eligibility rules, deadlines, and simple steps to resolve issues quickly. I will prioritize clarity and coordination so students aren't left guessing.

Fourth, fair and workable online assessment practices. Students have raised concerns about online proctoring and technical barriers during exams. I will bring student feedback forward through the proper channels and advocate for balanced solutions that protect academic integrity without adding unnecessary stress.

I will be accessible, responsive, and consistent with updates throughout the year. If you want a VP External who is prepared, approachable, and focused on measurable progress, I would be honoured to earn your vote.

Vote Vladyslav Bondarchuk for Vice President External.



CANDIDATE FOR VP INTERNAL

TEAIRA CURRENT
CANDIDATE FOR VP INTERNAL

Hi all! My name is Teaira, and I'm excited to be running once again for Vice President Internal of the NAIT Students' Association.

I have been a proud Ook since 2020, and during my time here, NAIT has provided many incredible opportunities and experiences that have shaped both my educational and personal growth. As a DMIT alumna now pursuing my studies in marketing, I recognize the diversity of our student population and how our experiences shape our time as students here.

Having served in this role for the past year, I am eager to continue representing the voice of the student body and supporting the growth and success of NAIT's campus. Throughout my year, I've had the privilege of working closely with students, NAIT administration, and campus partners to ensure student voices are heard meaningfully and considered deeply in important decision-making.

One of my main focuses this year has been continuous advocacy for improved food services on campus. I've worked to bring forward student feedback around affordability, quality, variety, and hours of operation, to ensure these concerns are part of ongoing conversations with NAIT and their food service partner. I am delighted to say progress has been made, but there is still a long way to keep pushing, and I don't intend to slow down now.

I've also been actively engaging in conversations regarding campus expansion projects such as residency and the new Advanced Skills Centre building. Student spaces and housing play a foundational role in fostering student success, community, and belonging. I hope to push for continued momentum on these upcoming projects to ensure students' voices are consistently represented and at the forefront of these conversations. At the end of the day, campus spaces should be built with students in mind.

As an individual, I am a strong advocate for equity, inclusion, and representation. I am deeply committed to continuously fostering an inclusive campus where all NAIT students feel seen, valued, and supported, especially those whose voices may not always be amplified. I will continue to echo these voices and initiatives through policy discussions, committee work, and day-to-day advocacy. I strive to continue to approach this role with care, accountability, and transparency.

Thank you so much for taking the time to consider my re-election. It has truly been such an honour to serve as NAITSA's Vice President Internal this past year. I am excited to the momentum, meet more students, and continue challenging how NAIT can be better for current and future NAIT students. I hope to earn your support!

The submissions included in this information piece were written by each candidate and are published as submitted. The opinions and positions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the opinions or positions of the Nugget or NAIT Students' Association.

Celebrate With Us

Tuesday, February 10 at the NAITSA Office (0108)
Join us for refreshments & snacks at 4:30pm, and the announcement
of unofficial election results at 4:45pm!

NAITSA
**EXECUTIVE
COUNCIL
ELECTION**
2026/2027



**CAST YOUR VOTE
ON FEB 4-10!**

**ONLINE VOTING USING YOUR
NAIT STUDENT LOG IN**

Feb 4 at 6am – Feb 10 at 4pm

For more information, visit
naitsa.ca/elections



**VOTER PRIVACY & ELECTION
VOTING INTERFERENCE**

Did you know that NAITSA's Bylaw 7.17 protects a voters' right to cast their vote privately during all elections and referendum? While campaigning all candidates need to leave the immediate area of a student at large who opens a device to log-in and vote in this election.

If you feel your right to vote in private has been violated, please email the Chief Returning Officer at cro@naitsa.ca.

**LEARN MORE AT ONE OF OUR
INFORMATION BOOTHS**

MONDAY

February 9, 3pm – 6pm

South Lobby, HP Centre, NAITSA Office

TUESDAY

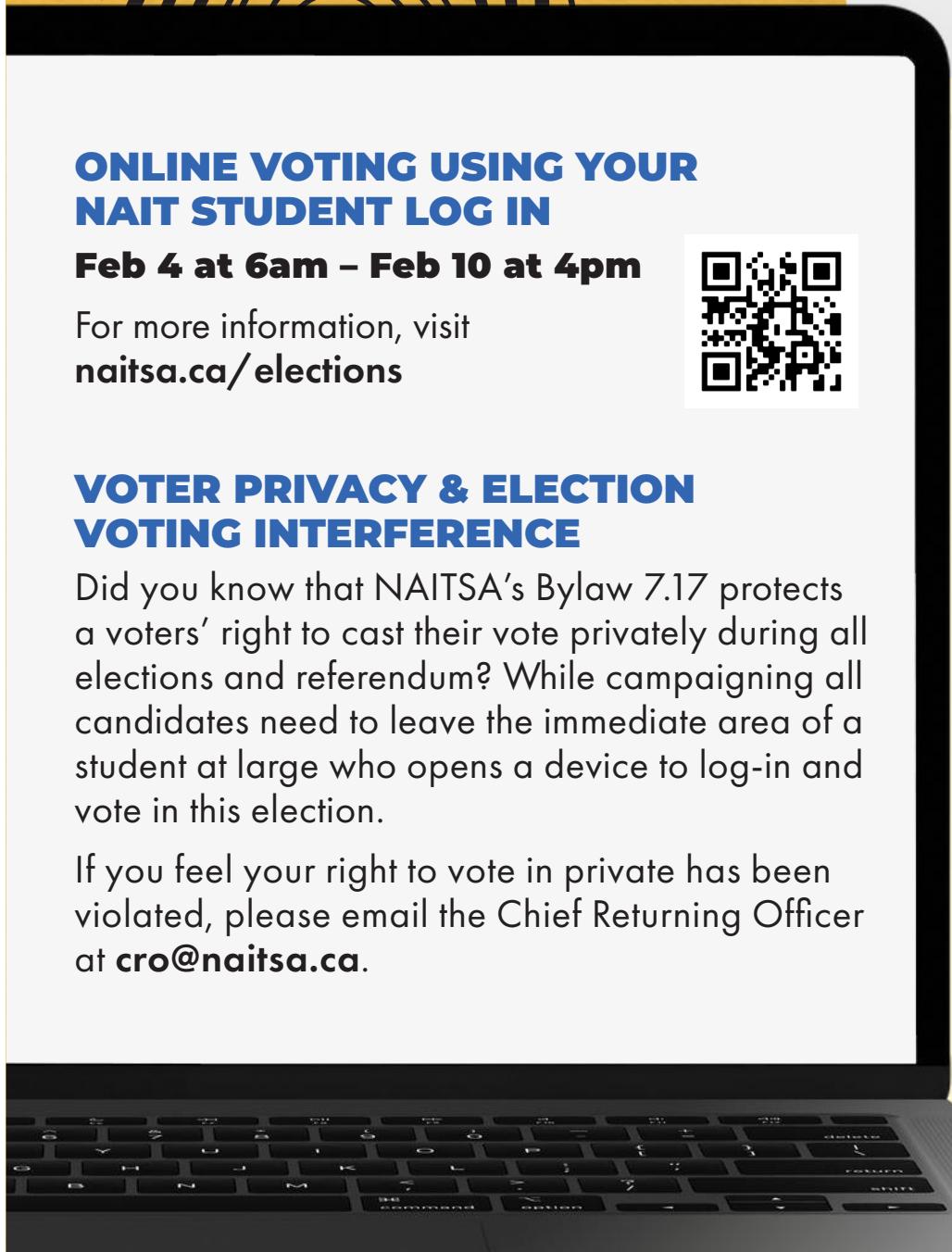
February 10, 10am – 2pm

South Lobby Kiosk, Fresh Express, X-Wing, HP Centre, CAT 1st Floor, CAT 2nd Floor, NAITSA Office

ONLINE VOTING OPEN

Feb 4 at 6am – Feb 10 at 4pm

Vote online at naitsa.simplyvoting.com or scan the QR code.



NAIT Conservation Biology student self-publishes debut sci-fi novel

By Ibrahim Basim, *Masthead Contributor*

A NAIT student has turned a long-kept passion for writing into a published science-fiction novel, blending imaginative storytelling with real-world environmental themes.

Forrest C. Richard, a second-year Conservation Biology student from Stony Plain, self-published *Ver'Nova: Evergreen Sunlight — Part One* in November 2025. While Richard is nearing the end of his academic program, the book represents an idea which took root years earlier.

“Since high school I always liked writing,” Richard said. “I kept that hobby pretty secret. I didn’t really tell any family or friends that I was a writer because I didn’t really know if my stuff was good or not.”

Ver'Nova follows Joel Robson, a forestry technician struggling to find purpose in his own world as alien species preserve and study life in the vast universe.

As a long-time fantasy and science-fiction lover, Richard was drawn to big, imaginative stories. The story and characters in *Ver'Nova* developed gradually from Richard’s days in high school and into adulthood.

“And then about ... two and a half years ago I finally was like, ‘You know what? I’m kind of sick and tired of just imagining this story and I want to put it into words,’” he explained. His goal was to get published, so he started writing. “I just had to find that little push to start writing the story.”

Although the concept was there before he entered NAIT, Richard said his Conservation Biology studies played a significant role in shaping the novel’s environmental and science fiction elements.

“When I came to NAIT, Conservation Biology helped me fine-tune the details that I needed for those environmental story parts, which was awesome,” he said.

According to Richard, incorporating real biological aspects helped add more weight and relatability to his writing. “I thought that writing my book that I would like to introduce a lot of environmental and wildlife aspects that we find in our own homes, especially in Alberta,” he said.

But with six classes a semester and heavy lab and fieldwork requirements, Richard’s program was demanding.

“We had a botany class, we’re collecting, like 40 different plants, and we had an entomology class, we’re collecting 15 different types of bugs, and then I was working a summer job,” he said. “Anytime I found that I had free time, I was writing. So, if I had a break between classes and I had no homework, I would go to the library and I would just write.”

For his first book, Richard chose the self-publishing route rather than traditional publishing, which he said gave him “a lot more creative freedom.” He worked



Forrest C. Richard, pictured above, used his Conservation Biology experience to shape his novel.

Photo supplied

with a local printer called PageMaster Publishing, describing the process as relatively accessible for first-time authors.

One of the biggest challenges, he said, has been getting the book into readers’ hands as a self-published author. He hopes to pursue traditional publishing for future work, but that comes with its own challenges.

“I feel like sci-fi is a very niche genre,” he said. “Whichever publisher takes on my story, I feel like they really need to believe that it’ll fit in with their home.”

Richard had doubts about his writing at first, but reader feedback has been encouraging. “So far, my first book’s been well received,” he said, adding that initial reviews were mostly given by his family and friends. “But I don’t take them to be liars, so it’s nice for a little bit of honest feedback,” he laughed.

For students interested in pursuing creative projects, Richard recommended building confidence

by not letting self-doubt take over and just going for it.

“I found the internet can make it very intimidating ... it’s like this pit of information that can kind of drown out the creative process,” he said. “The moment I figured out you kind of have to just start writing and don’t write for any specific person, you write the story you want to write, then it makes the process so much easier.”

Richard said he is finished writing part two of his series, *Static: Evergreen Sunlight*, and is currently writing book three.

Looking ahead, Richard plans to focus on his Conservation Biology career while continuing to write. “I would like the writing to be just a hobby for now,” he said. “I am pretty pumped to start my career as a conservation biologist.”

NAIT students can look forward to seeing *Ver'Nova: Evergreen Sunlight — Part One* in some local bookstores in February, but until then, it can be purchased online and through PageMaster Publishing.

Capstone project tackles takeout containers at NAIT Artisanal Market

By Rafael Luis Flores, *Opinion Editor*

For those that regularly visit NAIT's Artisanal Food Market, a new container has appeared on the shelves with a message to return once done so it can be reused. But the sustainable endeavour didn't start with NAIT — rather, it's a capstone project from four Bachelor of Technology students that's grown into something bigger.

The management students are currently working with DishZero, a sustainability-focused non-profit.

Andy Do, Yaksh Bhardwaj, Ahmed Maalim and Taylor Van Velsen were given options by their instructor for the project to take on realistic industry challenges presented by industry sponsors.

"We were to choose the ones that we most affiliated with. And then from there, they assigned us to the ones based on our backgrounds," said Do.

On its website, DishZero describes itself as "an Edmonton-based nonprofit that offers reusable takeout containers and mugs to participating vendor locations." The initiative was the result of a 2023 merger of two student-led sustainability programs at the University of Alberta (U of A). DishZero's overall goal is to "reduce the single-use waste associated with takeout dining."

Initially partnering with businesses within the U of A, the non-profit has since expanded to businesses outside of the university — including the NAIT Artisanal Food Market.

NAIT students have worked with DishZero before, but this is the first time students have implemented the program within NAIT.

The DishZero containers are pre-packed with food from the Artisanal Food Market. "You go there and you take those containers with the food. There is a QR code on every dish. You scan that, you sign it out, and then they know that this [container] is used by this person. And then after eating your food, you go back," said Bhardwaj.

The containers are dropped off at designated bins, then cleaned by NAIT Artisanal Food Market staff before being used again.

According to Do, initial figures were encouraging. "We were surprised," he said. During the first two weeks of the program's implementation, the student group saw a 100 per cent return rate. DishZero's target is to prevent 20 per cent of containers from being thrown away, Do explained.

"At that point ... we had about 50 to 60 dishes lent out," said Do. "Considering that there was no losses, aside from two damages, we were actually really impressed with it."

The DishZero containers are built to withstand 1,000 uses, making them ideal for reuse.

"The point is really to have something that's a little bit better quality than what we're used to. Because we're used to just getting those plastic containers that, once we're done, we maybe use it personally once or twice and then throw it out. The idea of this



L-R: Yaksh Bhardwaj, Andy Do and Ahmed Maalim pose with DishZero containers.

Photo supplied

is to have that commercial reuse," said Do.

While the Artisanal Food Market does the actual handling of the reusable food containers, Do's group has a two-phase role in the program's implementation. During the fall term, their role was to launch the program, promote it to the NAIT community and monitor its progress. Now that the winter term has begun, they are shifting their efforts towards actual sustainability, which is the second phase.

Bhardwaj clarified that throughout the past term, there was no added cost to the buyer to use DishZero products. "But in the future, we have to make it sustainable for the non-profit organization so that it should be a long-term thing. So for that, we have to come up with the pricing model that we are working on," he explained.

The students also act as consultants to DishZero and the Artisanal Food Market. This involves exploring other suitable on and off-campus businesses where the program can be implemented and suggesting ways to make implementation at the

market smoother, like analyzing if there is a need for more strategically placed return bins.

Do shared that the staff at the Artisanal Food Market have been very supportive of the program. "The staff have been really good at helping us out with the education piece to the people that are purchasing, as well as trying out for themselves and putting in suggestions where necessary," he said.

Both Do and Bhardwaj are personally invested in sustainability and encourage NAIT students to participate in the DishZero program.

"Sustainability is something that we need to work for. We know it's the right thing to do, so the challenge is to change our behavior, and that's always going to be the hardest thing because we're going from something that we're used to, to doing something that we're not," said Do.

Bhardwaj agreed, offering a practical suggestion for improved sustainability.

"It takes time to change our behaviour, to step into something which is new for us, but if we cannot go for a big thing, just try to do or go with small steps."

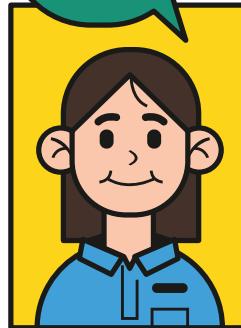
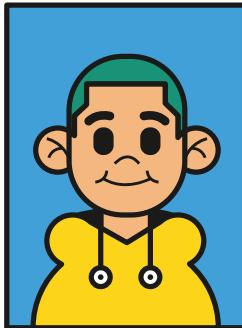
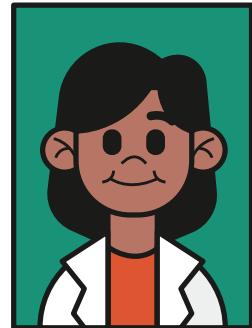
**Looking for a job on campus?
NAITSA is hiring students to be a part of the team!**

*Must be a NAIT student until at least April 2027

NAITSA Student Job Fair

February 24 | 10:00 am – 1:30pm | South Lobby

Gain experience, skip the commute, boost your budget, and get a flexible role that works around your classes.



naitsa

AV & The Inner City: Edmonton's rising soul stars

By Mathieu Durnford, *Masthead Contributor*

Alleah Boisvert, *Senior Editor*

From porch concerts to topping charts, soul music group AV & The Inner City is a local, “all-female, vocal-centric” band like no other, and they’re bringing a new and unique flavour to Edmonton’s music scene.

Climbing to number seven on CKUA Radio’s top 30 and receiving awards including Edmonton Folk Festival’s Emerging Artist Award for their haunting acapella performances, the group is a band to watch. *The Nugget* sat down with lead singer and songwriter, Ann Vriend, to talk about their band, music and their upcoming EP release at the Roxy Theatre on Feb. 7.

AV & The Inner City was founded from humble roots during the pandemic in the inner city of Edmonton. It started with concerts on Vriend’s porch (with proper social distancing, of course) to bring the community together during a period many found filled with boredom and isolation.

“Because my tours were cancelled and postponed a lot, as everyone’s were, I decided to just put my keyboard on the front porch one Sunday afternoon and sing songs for anyone walking by,” said Vriend.

Vriend saw lots of foot traffic in her McCauley neighbourhood, so the performances eventually attracted crowds, as well as other singers. “It kind of got to be a new tradition suddenly,” said Vriend. Once she figured out how more artists could sing together two-metres apart, a new soundsystem helped turn the idea into something “like a little mini festival.”

The artists who gathered there eventually ended up forming AV & The Inner City. Once restrictions

were lifted in 2021 the group began performing local shows at venues other than Vriend’s porch.

“I had no intention of forming a band by doing that, that first Sunday ... it just sort of morphed into that,” said Vriend. Now, the band also consists of Mira Angela, Laurelle K, Crystal Eyo, Alenka Lundell, Jenn Dahlen and Stéphanie Odayen.

The whole point of going to school isn’t really to get a piece of paper that says you passed a thing, but it’s that you learned a whole bunch and that you’re ready for the career that you’re going to do.

Since then, the band has been hard at work performing at local venues, festivals and showcases around the country, culminating in their Feb. 7 EP release and a future full-length album.

Having seven members creates a challenge, but in the creative process, Vriend focuses on making use of everyone’s voice. Their voices blend to mimic a string section, while piano and body percussion put a spotlight on their harmonies.

“Other than me at the piano, there is just all us singing and body percussion,” said Vriend. “It’s a challenge ... it still sounds like a full sound, because there’s six [others] doing stuff.”

For new listeners, Vriend recommends the track “The Failer,” a song that teaches the audience that embracing failure is not a negative thing, but a way to learn and grow. “Anyone who is successful is

someone who has learned how to fail” is a quote Vriend said inspired the track, and trying your best and showing resilience through challenges is an empowering message.

“Sometimes even if you try your best you might fail and make a mistake, but it doesn’t mean that was a waste,” said Vriend. “It just means you learned a lot.”

“The whole point of going to school isn’t really to get a piece of paper that says you passed a thing, but it’s that you learned a whole bunch and that you’re ready for the career that you’re going to do.”

The band also uses audience participation, creating unique atmospheres at their performances. “We really love singing together and we find that to be really powerful and cathartic, but also moving emotionally,” said Vriend. “So we kind of want other people to also get that chance to do that with us and feel that too.”

“It’s a really healthy thing to do together, and powerful.”

AV & The Inner City hopes their music “might pique the interest” of students and encourages anyone interested in music or theatre tech to listen (and participate) live.

“I just hope that people want to see a show like our show,” said Vriend. NAIT students who find empowerment through faith, community and amazing soul vocals might just find what they’re looking for on Feb. 7 at the Roxy Theatre on 124 Street.

Students can purchase discounted tickets at theatrenetwork.ca and can follow @avinnercity on Instagram to keep up with the band.



L-R: Ann Vriend, Mira Angela, Laurelle K, Crystal Eyo, Alenka Lundell, Jenn Dahlen and Stéphanie Odayen make up AV & The Inner City.

Photo by Mathieu Durnford

Am I a hypocrite?

When the threat of a strike hits close to home

Editorial by Rafael Luis Flores, *Opinion Editor*

On Jan. 15, the NAIT Academic Staff Association (NASA) held a strike vote where 83 per cent of the votes cast were in favour of authorizing a strike. Although this does not necessarily mean a strike is imminent, it is the closest NASA has gotten to an actual strike after more than a year of bargaining with NAIT. This was a bargaining process characterized by delays, disagreements and impasses.

I would like to think that I am supportive of the right of workers to strike. I know the labour movement's history. I am aware that many of the basic rights enjoyed by workers today, as well as advances in labour legislation, are owed to organized labour — particularly militant movements — since the Industrial Revolution.

Moreover, I believe a vibrant labour movement strengthens democracy. I come from a country where any movement that identifies with the political left is culturally demonized due to obsolete Cold War-era politics. In the Philippines, labour activists even risk being killed.

I've seen how workers go against their own interests because of intimidation and an irrational distrust of labour unions. All this has resulted in a relatively weak labour movement that is, in many ways, powerless in preventing the erosion

of democracy as corrupt oligarchs continuously dominate national politics.

And so when this news of a looming strike reached me, I admit to feeling disappointed in myself because my first thought was, "This will potentially ruin my graduation."

In fact, I must have thought of five other potential inconveniences before I remembered that I am supposed to be supportive of organized labour.

This is the first time that my pro-labour inclinations are put to the test, and I'm afraid I might have discovered that I'm a hypocrite.

The idealist in me has this desire to see NASA give their 72-hour notice and watch pure democracy unfold as their strike progresses. On the other hand, the part of me who is a struggling international student hopes they will not go that far. One of the challenges international students face is that they need to abide by a precarious schedule that extends beyond graduation. A schedule that, if disrupted in a major way, might result in a worst-case scenario: leaving Canada or facing deportation proceedings.

This is the first time that my pro-labour inclinations are put to the test, and I'm afraid I might

have discovered that I'm a hypocrite. In my home country, it was so easy for me to be vocal about my support for unions and strikes because I've always found myself in jobs without unions; there was nothing personally at stake for me. Now that I am in a situation where a strike might actually affect me, I suddenly find myself hesitant to give my full support, and this hesitance annoys me.

In response to the recent developments, NAITSA released a statement expressing that while they respect NASA's right to strike, they are urging both NASA and NAIT to "get back to the table" to negotiate.

The me of three years ago would have been turned off by this because I would have seen NASA as the obvious underdog in a "David vs. Goliath" battle, and that they needed to be supported. Actually, I still do see it that way.

But now that I am an international student who is vulnerable to the real-life consequences of a strike, I find myself agreeing with NAITSA's message of safeguarding the students' interests. This is the best possible statement they could have made, regardless of how anyone feels about the situation: "Get back to the table, stay at the table, and show students and Albertans that you're capable of getting this done."

Hand-necklaces and the Brontë sisters

Editorial by Samantha Lajeunesse, *Masthead Contributor*

Spicy scenes, BookTok boyfriends and masked men. That's what the classics are battling against to engage today's readers. Readers used to talk about *Wuthering Heights*' Heathcliff and *Pride and Prejudice*'s Mr. Darcy. Some might have even fallen in love with the darkness and edginess of Edgar Allan Poe.

These classics, some of which are nearly 200 years old, are harder to read. But once you grasp the old-English style, you can easily start dreaming about one of the men (or women) in your book of choice. So, what has readers so infatuated with the more modern dark romance section of the local bookstore?

If you are on social media, chances are you've seen some kind of reference to BookTok and the dark romance stories capturing the interest of hundreds of thousands around the world. The increase of interest in all things romance has even allowed a specialty store to open in Edmonton — the Book Boudoir is a store entirely dedicated to every sub-genre of romance.

The positivity around sex and the reinforcement of mental health is one possible driving force for this new era of romance. Romance pulls on the hopes of happy endings, and dark romance adds a touch of

modernization and "bad boy vibes" to the journey.

I liken this to a common human desire. Many readers tend to crave those happy endings — so badly that maybe we moved on from the classics to stories that are easier for readers to get to that satisfying conclusion.

Dark romance grips at your heart strings and is written in a way that is so effortless to read that it can easily turn a classic-loving, old-English-translator into a BookTok-girlie. It starts with one, just to see what all the hullabaloo is about, and suddenly you're imagining Mr. Darcy in a leather vest and ripped jeans.

One can argue that the classics have always and will always be there. *Pride and Prejudice*, *Little Women*, *Wuthering Heights* and even poems like *The Raven* are always there to hold our hand and be the familiar, comforting stories we know and love.

But we're adults now, and it's okay to love the classics while still exploring new things. As someone who used to read the classics in my downtime, I am the person who now wants to read romance books that are easier to understand. Dark romance now fills my shelves as Heathcliff sits and waits for me to come back to him.

I found happiness in modern dark romance when *Wuthering Heights* set the tone for isolation and



NAIT Student Life's little library.

Photo via NAIT

solitude. "A perfect misanthropist's heaven" is not the life for me, so when users on BookTok blow up a romance novel that is accessible for everyone, I find relief and comfort in knowing that I am not so alone after all.

People gravitate towards a relatable language and writing style, even when many OG romance classics also have their fair share of spice. But it's easier to participate in book communities when you don't have to decode what is being said. I, for one, will continue to love "thee" and "thy," but maybe throw in some "yes sirs" to keep things spicy.

She-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named just won't go away

Editorial by Liam Salmon, Masthead Contributor

The Book Lovers Club at NAIT is hosting a Harry Potter Reading Adventure, and I have complicated feelings about it.

I'm a Queer millennial who falls somewhere on the nonbinary spectrum, so for me the J.K. Rowling of it all has been a constant source of disappointment.

I went through pretty much every stage of grief when Rowling began to reveal herself. I think I can chart the beginning of her descent when she began tweeting about wizard poop and that Dumbledore was in fact gay the whole time, probably for "woke points" back when that was desirable.

She-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named has been vocally anti-trans for a while. She's part of a wave of political types that have made the transgender identity a talking point, distracting from pertinent issues like the ongoing cost of living crisis. She's even set up a women's fund described as "a legal fund for women protecting their sex-based rights."

Translation: the dollars spent on her books go straight to making the lives of an extremely vulnerable group even harder.

The facts are, folks on the transgender spectrum are a vulnerable minority group statistically more likely to die by suicide. Sources like the Mental Health Commission of Canada cite that 1 in 3 trans youth may attempt suicide yearly and are up to four times more likely to experience violent hate crime, according to the Williams Institute.

Scare points lobbied against this community are baseless at best. According to the United States Sentencing Commission, most sex offenders are white men. In fact, Statistics Canada states that transgender Canadians are more likely than cisgender Canadians to be victims of violence and unwanted sexual behaviours from others. There's a higher chance the kind of crap agitators like Rowling are worried about is happening in their church than from a transgender person.

One of the best takedowns of Rowling's hypocrisy comes from the singular Jinkx Monsoon, a drag performer and actress. She said, "I know that oftentimes, female authors use initials so that people assume it's a male writer. So I have to presume that J.K. Rowling was unsatisfied with the way that the world saw her, and then she transitioned herself into a new personality so that the world would perceive her the way she wanted to be perceived."

The series can be your personal comfort while being morally questionable to purchase given the bad acts of its author.

Almost 20 years after Rowling published the final Harry Potter novel, most of her identity now revolves around questioning the identities of others. The series comes with a lot of baggage now, to say the least.

So, is it okay to read her books? Great question. The short answer is "yes."

My brother once asked me a similar question about the Harry Potter video game. My advice for him was the same that it is for you: buy a used copy.

That way you're not contributing to a real, actual fund engineered to further the disproportionate suffering of a marginalized group.

The more interesting question is: can you separate a work from its author? It's a question that has been written about for as long as we've had literary theory, and as you can imagine, every possible opinion exists.

Sure, the content of the book itself can be questionable, with racist overtones in characters like Cho Chang and the child abuse Harry continues to be subject to every summer from the Dursleys.

The stereotypes and cruelty makes me wonder what kind of person Rowling is.

But what if the series is your comfort book? Maybe sometimes you read it in the wee hours of the night, after a particularly stressful accounting exam, and it just feels like home. It's nostalgic; it reminds you of a time when things were simpler and it gives you a small spark of joy.

That's fine. Finding joy in the present circumstance is important. No one can, nor should, take that away from you.

We exist in a multifaceted world where both of those things can be true.

The series can be your personal comfort while being morally questionable to purchase given the bad acts of its author. In other words: maybe you can separate a work from its author.

But by the same token, I'd rather not contribute my hard-earned-dollar to a billionaire with some seriously unresolved issues.

I'm sure there's no malicious intent behind the book club organizing this reading event. Still, I can't help but sit back and scratch my head and think: it's 2026 in the year of our saviour *Heated Rivalry* and we're still platforming her?

There are so many other series out there. Off the top of my head, some series with a similar vibe might be *Bridge to Terabithia*, *His Dark Materials*, *Redwall*, *The Worst Witch* and *A Wrinkle in Time*.

So, if you ask me, and if you really want my honest opinion, I think it's far past time we let the wizarding books go. Bye, Felicia! Don't let the door hit you on the way out.

At the same time, I know it's hard to close the door completely. I've kept my childhood copies on my bookshelf. But maybe 2026 is the year we start reading different magical series; ones that will give us that same cozy nostalgia when we look at our college-aged bookshelf years later.



Photo via Canva

Sustainability spotlight

Jack59

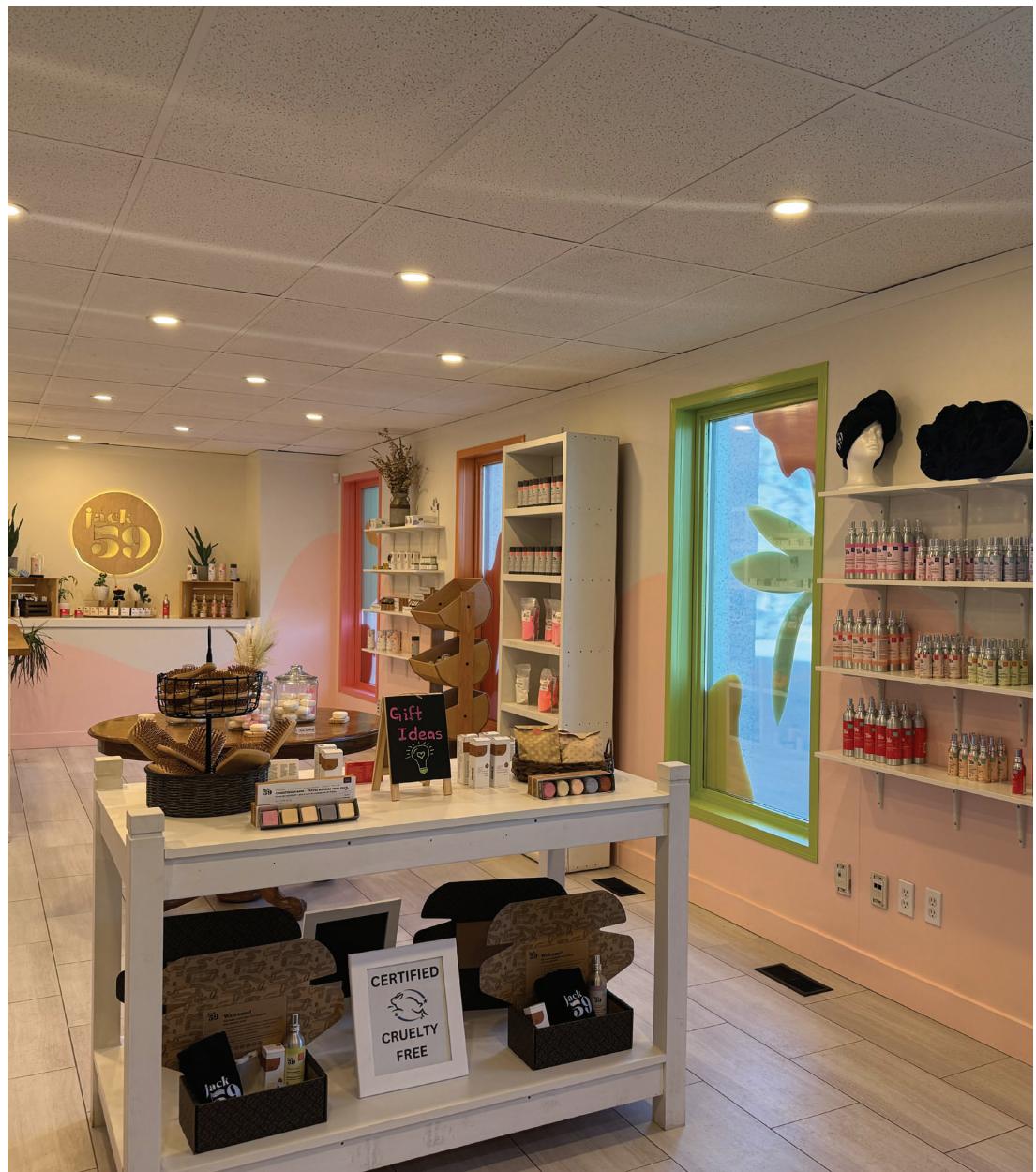


Photo via Jack59

Sustainability Spotlight is a collaboration between the Nugget and NAITSA's Sustainability Committee. Each month, the committee interviews a sustainability expert to learn more about their journey. This month features Vanessa Marshall, owner of Jack59, a Canadian company focusing on plastic-free and natural haircare.

Answers have been edited for clarity and space.



NAITSA Sustainability Committee: What inspired you to start a sustainability-focused business?

Vanessa Marshall: I think it was kind of a few things, partially the way that I was brought up. My mom is Indigenous and my dad is like an old hippie type. So sustainability was really enforced in our upbringing — kind of the basic care for the earth and thinking a little deeper about the choices that we made and the products that we buy.

As a consumer, I was really struggling with products that made sense and trying to reduce the plastic in my life. And we went through early phases of creating products and ending up really purchasing a bunch of plastic packaging that wasn't making sense. So we did this big pivot and chose to do fully plastic-free products.

I think a lot of people often purchase products because of the packaging. And we wanted to switch that mind frame and actually just try to get rid of the packaging altogether.

Obviously, that was a little difficult through COVID-19. We had to pivot and create some compostable or at least recyclable packaging. I think that's really

the drive, was wanting to do better, be better and have people focus on the products themselves as opposed to the packaging.

NSC: What is the core mission of your business?

VM: We are certified B Corp, so we actually had to change our incorporation documents to include that we put people and the planet ahead of every decision that we make. And a part of that was my experience in the corporate world. I was a dental assistant by trade and really never had any say or influence over the decisions that were made at my work.

So we want our mission to take care of people on the planet. That includes the people that work for my company, the people that are outside of my company, our community, the people that are supporting us.

NSC: How are your products different from traditional ones in terms of the environmental impact?

VM: So traditionally, as I'm sure everybody is mostly aware, shampoo comes in a plastic bottle and it's about 70 to 90 per cent water. So what we wanted to do was eliminate the water, first of all.

We're trying to reinforce to people that the transportation of water in cosmetic products — including shampoos, conditioners, lotions, face creams — that has a huge carbon footprint in the world.

That water has a heavy weight, obviously it's being shipped across the world. And that adds a lot of greenhouse gas emissions to a product.

The second piece of that is the plastic bottle itself. So we wanted to get rid of the plastic so that when you consumed your shampoo in the shower, when it's done, there's nothing left, there's nothing to be thrown away.

And sometimes we get some feedback like, "Oh, I don't think the shampoo bar is ever going to work for me."

I think it's because we're taught our whole lives that shampoo comes out of a plastic bottle. And to see it in a different form, people are skeptical as to whether that works or not.

NSC: How do you balance sustainability with profits?

VM: That's really hard to kind of nail down into one or two sentences. You have to look at it sort of as the sum of the whole.

I'm sure everybody's heard it. It doesn't take one person doing sustainability perfectly. It takes the community doing it imperfectly, but the more people that you have doing that, the more the impact is.

So we're not perfect by any means. We're a very small team. Our management team is literally three people. So we make mistakes and we grow and our community will hold us accountable as well. So it is an absolute balance, but we're getting better at it.

It is absolutely a balancing act.

And for the last few years, I really felt the need to be on Amazon because so many people shop on Amazon. And we've finally decided that it's actually not necessary, that we can do this without them. I think we've built a big enough community that have people that support us outside of Amazon that we can now make that choice.



To learn more about Jack59, visit the website at <https://www.jack59.ca>.

Catch up on other Sustainability Spotlight interviews at oakslife.ca/organization/naitsasustainabilitycommittee



Photo Credits:

TOP LEFT: Dirty bingo at the Nest by Mathieu Durnford; TOP RIGHT: NAIT Hiring Fair by Ash Wijesinghe; BOTTOM LEFT: Ping pong tournament by Ana Kostyrko; BOTTOM RIGHT: Snow tubing by Ana Kostyrko

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HARD

THE ANSWERS YOU NEED ON THE NUGGET ONLINE.

(if what you need is answers to sudooku)



MAIN CAMPUS OFFICES AND SERVICES

↑
north



SYMBOLS

- Student Service Centre
- Parking
- Motorcycle Parking
- Bike Lockers
- ETS Station
- Bus Stop
- Pick-up/Drop-off
- DATS Location
- Bike Tune-up Station
- Emergency Meeting Point
- AED
See Main Campus AED and Muster Point Map for detailed locations

LOCATIONS

EDMONTON
Main Campus
11762 - 106 Street nw
Patricia Campus
12204 - 149 Street nw
Souch Campus
7110 Gateway Boulevard nw

BUILDINGS

- A** Industrial Building
- B** Centre for Manufacturing Solutions
- C** Gateway Mechanical Services Centre for Building Environmental Technology
- CAT** Feltham Centre
- D** Alternative Energy Centre
- E** Technical Building
- F** Medical Wing
- G** Centre for Chemical Studies
- H** Electronics Wing
- HET** Distribution Centre
- J** Centre for Electrical Technology
- L** Continuing Education and Industry Training Centre
- N** Sandvik Coromant Centre for Machinist Technology
- O** Central Building
- PIC** Productivity and Innovation Centre
- S** Activities Centre
- T** Administration Building
- U** Learning Resources Centre
- V** Industrial Technical Building
- W** Centre for Information and Communications Technology
- X** South Learning Centre
- Y** Spartan Centre for Instrumentation Technology

OFFICES AND SERVICES

Arena	S-221	NAITrium	J-104	Student Service Centre
Athletics	E-131	NAITSA (NAIT Students' Association)	0-108	Admissions and Enrolment Support
Centre for Community and Belonging	E-134	Nest Eatery	S-110	Advising and Career Development Services
Corporate & Continuing Education Welcome Centre	L-159	Nisohkamâtotan Centre	E-121	Funding and Financial Aid Services
Ernest's	U-121	OneCard	CAT-180N	Pre-Admission Immigration Advising
Fitness Weight Centre	S-006	Parking Services	CAT-180N	Student Awards
Gymnasium	E-140	Protective Services	D-104	Student Study Lounges
Health Services	S-105	Reflection Rooms	CAT-406	CAT-200
International and Intercultural Community Centre	W-101	GJ-209		
Learning Services	E-105	L-024		
Library Services	U-310	Shop AT NAIT	X-114	Study Commons, CAT
		Student Artisanal Market	O-120	Study Commons
		Student Counselling	W-111PB	NAITSA

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