

# INSTRUCTORS HOLD STRIKE VOTE AMID CONTRACT TALKS



# NAIT PROPOSES 9 EXCEPTIONAL TUITION INCREASES

# Nîsôhkamâtotân Centre undergoing renovations, still open to students



Photo by Amy St. Amand

By Ibrahim Basim, *Masthead Contributor*

The Nîsôhkamâtotân Centre is undergoing a major renovation designed to expand and brighten their space. The centre provides support services, cultural programming, advising and welcoming space for Indigenous learners and NAIT students across campus.

Kaitlyn Menard, Indigenous Liaison Specialist at the Nîsôhkamâtotân Centre, focuses on serving NAIT's growing Indigenous student community. "I think we just kind of outgrew the space with the amount of students that were providing services to," she said.

The renovations have been in the works for some time, and although the project was originally expected to finish for September, the adjusted schedule now means most of the work took place over the winter break. The new completion target is February.

"We just needed a newer, fresher space and more room for the students," said Menard.

One big change is the expansion of student

seating and gathering space.

"The wall has been taken down. So it'll almost double that student space out there where we have tables and stuff where they can just sit and eat their lunch and study," Menard said.

The centre is also adding a new office for the Recruitment Specialist, and their previous office will become a quiet study room.

Menard said the renovated centre will be a "brighter, warm, welcoming space for new students to come in."

While the physical layout is undergoing a major transformation, the services and roles remain the same. The bigger space will also help the Nîsôhkamâtotân centre continue to host student events such as Monday Morning Smudge and Drop in Beading.

Menard said students who frequent the centre are excited about the renovations, but she wants NAIT students to know they can still access the space and its services.

"If people walk by, it does look like we're maybe closed a little bit ... but we are still open."

For now, the elders' room serves as a temporary study and hangout space, complete with a microwave and small fridge, while all regular support remains available in person or online.

Menard emphasized the purpose behind every improvement at the Nîsôhkamâtotân Centre is to make students feel like it could be "their home away from home."

"It's always been a very welcoming, community-centered space, and our renovations are focusing on that to make them feel more welcome here and like there is a space for them."

The Nîsôhkamâtotân Centre hopes to unveil the renovations in February, and students can look forward to a larger, brighter and more inclusive place to gather, study, connect and grow. Students can visit the Nîsôhkamâtotân Centre at room E121 on Main Campus from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. during the week and visit their website for more info.

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# NAIT Academic Staff Association voting on strike

An instructor strike is closer than ever — here's what students should know



Photo via NAIT

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

On Jan. 14 and 15, NAIT's Academic Staff Association (NASA) will hold a strike vote after collective bargaining stalled in December.

To pass, 50 per cent plus one person would need to vote in support of a strike. If that happens, NASA will have 120 days to call a strike. They'd need to provide NAIT 72 hours' notice before doing so.

If members vote in support of a strike, this does not automatically mean a strike will happen — NAIT and NASA could go back to the bargaining table and still reach an agreement. But if NASA does call a strike, classes could be disrupted and NAIT could issue a lockout.

According to a post on NAIT's staff portal, a lockout means academic staff would not have access to campus, NAIT-issued devices, emails or systems like Brightspace.

Time may be added to the end of the semester for significant disruptions, NASA's website explains. NAIT is "committed to minimizing any potential impact to students and their learning environments," they told *the Nugget* via email.

But the NAIT Students' Association (NAITSA) is worried about the impact a strike would have on students.

"NAITSA is deeply disappointed that after 18 months there is still no agreement," said Lilly Houcher, president of NAITSA, via email.

"Students are the ones that will get caught in

the middle of this, and we hope that both sides recommit themselves to making every effort to come to a fair agreement."

It is unclear if services and campus would remain open should a strike occur, but currently, campus remains open and there are no disruptions to classes.

## **NASA says they are bargaining for 'quality and sustainability of education at NAIT'**

"Faculty want to be in the classroom, focused on teaching and supporting learners," said Shauna MacDonald, NASA president, in a press release. "A strike vote is not something faculty take lightly. It's a signal that we need real movement to resume bargaining and protect the learning environment students expect and deserve."

On their website, NASA highlights concerns about employee benefits. A statement explains that NAIT is proposing a "formulary system" which NASA said would "significantly degrade" their benefits package 1.

They are also seeking things like job security and additional compensation. The post said that "the last time instructional staff saw a wage increase that kept up with inflation was in 2016."

"In 'real dollar' terms, the average instructor is making almost less than they were 10 years ago," the post says.

NAIT has offered a retroactive wage increase of 12 per cent over four years. They told *the Nugget* via email that they also proposed an increase to the professional development fund and health spending account.

## **NAIT 'disappointed' NASA choosing a strike vote**

Jodi Edmunds, the interim associate vice-president human resources and labour relations, said via email that NAIT is disappointed in NASA's decision to go ahead with a strike vote.

"Our hope was that we would be able to reach a collective agreement during mediation in December 2025."

NAIT says that during bargaining, they narrowed their outstanding proposals, but realized NASA was not willing to do the same. "What became clear to the NAIT bargaining committee was that the NASA bargaining committee was not willing to narrow the outstanding items in a way that would allow the parties to reach a collective agreement," says Edmunds.

"NAIT remains committed to returning to the bargaining table, with the continued assistance of a mediator, to reach a fair and sustainable collective agreement with NASA."

NASA members will vote online between Jan. 14 at 8 a.m. and Jan. 15 at 4 p.m.

# Auto Body student first woman to represent NAIT on world stage for car painting

By Sara Sheydwasser, *Masthead Contributor*

Anika Jones, a third-year Auto Body Technician student, is set to be the first woman to represent NAIT at the WorldSkills Competition for car painting.

"I always liked the look of cars, never really understood the technology and the mechanics behind it, so I went into painting them," said Jones.

WorldSkills is considered the biennial Olympics of skilled trades and includes 47 skills from baking to aircraft maintenance to graphic design.

Competitors go through multiple qualifying competitions before they're invited to join a national team. This will be Jones' first time at WorldSkills, but she's now competed twice at Skills Alberta. But the path wasn't straight forward. The first time she competed, she didn't make the national team.

"It was challenging because the work they were doing at the shop she was at was very kind of basic entry level type stuff," said Stephen Giordano, Jones' paint rep and a judge at Skills Alberta. "I think her first year she competed she had a little bit of a struggle."

But it wasn't for a lack of trying, said Giordano. Within six months of knowing Jones, it was her "dedication to always exceed everything she did each day" that stood out. "There was always no quality that could be less than the best she could produce and she was always trying to do better and better every day," he said.

After some convincing, Jones agreed to compete another year. She won first place at Skills Alberta for car painting and went onto nationals where she placed second. Jones was then asked to join team Canada to compete at worlds.

"I think skill level, there was obviously a little bit of an improvement, but I think the biggest thing was the confidence of knowing that she can do it," said Giordano.

Her coach and mentor, Cecile Bukmeier, also noticed Jones' improvement after the first competition.

"She has this hunger that she came back and wanted to do a lot better than she did before." Bukmeier was the first woman hired as an Auto Body Technician instructor at NAIT. Now, she's the chair of the program.

"When I first came through, I was one of the only females I'd seen at all in any male-dominated industry," said Bukmeier. "I think we still have a ways to go, but from when I started to now, there is a noticeable difference, and we are on the right path."

**"She has this hunger that she came back and wanted to do a lot better than she did before."**

Jones says she's also felt pushback as a woman in the trades.

"When I was trying to get my practicum in the pre-employment course, I called a bunch of shops, and just a lot of them told me to f\*\*\* off," said Jones.

"It's making me want to work like 100 per cent harder and just prove everyone wrong."

But Jones says she's noticed the industry changing in the few years she's been a part of it. "It's expanded, a lot more women are in the trade now."



Anika Jones, a NAIT Auto Body Technician student, will represent the polytechnic for car painting on the WorldSkills stage in 2026.

Photo via WorldSkills Canada

"There's a ton of skill coming out of the women that are in the industry today," said Giordano.

"It feels rewarding, honestly, I think it's important for women to be seen on this global stage," said Bukmeier. "I think it's pretty cool to be a women's team going as car painters to the international event."

Bukmeier said this will be her fourth international competition as the Canadian expert. "This is similar to a trainer but the expert is also responsible for coordinating with the other countries that participate," said Bukmeier. "We decide on things like the marking standards, criteria and we'll also be judging at the competition."

Though Bukmeier won't be judging Jones, she's excited to see her former student grow and compete. "I feel really lucky to join her on this journey."

And Jones feels lucky to have Bukmeier as a supporter.

"She's definitely the biggest person to play a part in this," said Jones. "She's just been kind of picking at me and just picking at all my mistakes, which is kind of annoying, but it's needed."

"[I'm] kind of scared, but I'm trying my best to learn everything I need to know and just do the best I can."

WorldSkills will take place in September 2026 in Shanghai, China. Students can watch Jones compete on the world stage via livestream on their website.

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Please visit [naitsa.ca/peer-support](http://naitsa.ca/peer-support) for more information.

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# 9 programs could see 'exceptional' tuition increases in 2026/27

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

NAIT's Board of Governors unanimously approved Exceptional Tuition Increases (ETIs) for nine programs, with an average increase of 89 per cent. The Government of Alberta will now review the proposals. If approved, the tuition would increase for students starting in 2026/27. Current students will "remain under their existing tuition rates," NAIT told *the Nugget* via email.

The nine proposals are all quality-based, meaning the increased revenue from tuition would "improve the quality in a way that justifies the increase," according to Alberta's Tuition Framework.

Patti Hergott, associate vice-president of academic quality and operational excellence, told the Board on Dec. 19 that the increases focus on four main areas: modernization of curriculum, simulation capacity, new student support in labs and educational technology.

Modernization of curriculum would include the movement to an annual quality assurance process, digital tools and use of AI. It also includes how the institution will structure some of their programs, said Hergott.

Much of the focus revolved around simulation and lab support. Simulation capacity would give students opportunities to develop skills before moving into the workplace.

"Sometimes students aren't exposed to things that they'll see right away, just by the number of opportunities they might have," said Hergott. "Simulation allows us to expound on all of those."

New student support in labs would introduce "non-capital, mostly positions" such as educational lab techs, support for Work Integrated Learning and program advising.

ETIs will also support capital educational technology, like new simulators and image review software. "There's some huge opportunities from an ethical perspective of what we can do and practice with students before we move into using live animals, live patient care," said Hergott. "It really does give the students a sense of what they're doing."

The Government of Alberta opened applications for exceptional tuition increases in 2025, which allows post-secondary institutions to propose

tuition increases beyond the two per cent increase they are limited to each year. Tuition increases also cannot exceed 10 per cent overall, but ETIs do not count towards that limit. If a program has an approved ETI, NAIT could not apply for another for five years.

Institutions can propose student-approved increases, which require approval from the students' association, or quality-based increases. Initially NAIT had proposed a longer list of programs, including some suggested student-approved increases, but after consultation, NAITSA declined to support any of their proposals. NAIT then pivoted to the final nine increases listed above. About 425 students would be impacted, said Hergott.

"The goal is to continue to ensure that we're serving future students as well," Hergott told NAIT's Board of Governors. She also mentioned the Advanced Education Minister would be looking for documentation regarding NAIT's consultation with students — which Hergott said she was "most proud of."

"We were incredibly thorough," she said. "We met with the NAITSA executives every week for nine weeks."

NAIT also invited 2,000 students to share feedback on proposed ETIs through focus groups, email and a survey. Hergott told the Board that 335 students responded to their survey — more than they anticipated, "especially given that [current] students won't be impacted and what other institutions were seeing," said Hergott.

"This is typically a low response rate of students being engaged throughout the process," she said. The Board had access to the survey results in their information package, but they were not discussed publicly at the meeting.

The Government of Alberta will decide on the ETIs by the end of February, said Hergott.

NAIT's website still reflects the current tuition costs; there is no mention of potential ETIs for the nine programs. All individual program webpages do say under the tuition and fee section that the listed numbers are "estimates ... based on the tuition rates from the past academic year."

Rates for 2026/27 will be posted in April.

Program Name	Current Cost/Credit	Proposed Cost/Credit	Current Tuition	Proposed Tuition	Tuition Increase
Electrical Engineering Technology Diploma	\$200	\$290	\$13,200	\$19,140	45%
Instrumentation Engineering Technology Diploma (includes co-op)	\$187	\$260	\$13,464	\$18,720	39%
Dental Technology Diploma (includes co-op)	\$151	\$350	\$10,872	\$25,200	132%
Denturist Technology Diploma	\$204	\$650	\$15,912	\$50,700	218%
Veterinary Technology Diploma (includes co-op)	\$159	\$290	\$11,448	\$20,880	82%
Diagnostic Medical Sonography Cardiac Diploma	\$222	\$420	\$17,316	\$32,760	89%
Diagnostic Medical Sonography General Diploma	\$222	\$420	\$13,986	\$26,460	89%
Medical Laboratory Technology Diploma	\$239	\$380	\$18,642	\$29,640	59%
Medical Radiologic Technology Diploma	\$252	\$380	\$15,120	\$22,800	51%

NAIT's proposed Exceptional Tuition Increases. All numbers taken from presentation shared at the Dec. 19 Board of Governors meeting. Percentages calculated independently.

# NAIT's website maze: What you need to know (and what you don't)

By Bradley Houston, *Masthead Contributor*

So we have Brightspace, Ooks Life, Self Service, shop AT NAIT, Moodle, MyNait Portal, NAITSA, NAIT Library Services, NAIT Ooks and the official NAIT website.

MyNait is what sometimes pops up when I search up other things, and Ooks Life is an app? What is Moodle again? Where are my textbooks?

If you're feeling any of this friction as a new student this semester, you're not alone — I was there too. The sheer number of websites to navigate is staggering.

It doesn't arise from malice or ignorance; NAIT is a large organisation that has to offer multiple services to its students. Each website is structured to do a different thing separately. The result, though, is that you end up feeling stuck with a website glut.

So let me give you a guide based on my own opinion and experience.

You've probably already figured out the **MyNAIT Portal** by now. If you need to find a website, this is your hub. While a very cluttered, text heavy website, it contains all the links and directories you need to reach the actual website you want to be at.

**Self Service** is your most critical hub. If you're enrolled at NAIT, you've already accessed it. Self Service is your method of picking classes, paying tuition, checking your admission and applying for scholarships and bursaries. And just in case you forgot how to get there: go to [my.nait.ca](http://my.nait.ca), sign in, click My Programs & Courses in the top right, then click Self Service.

Once you're in, I highly recommend bookmarking Self Service in your browser. You're going to use it a lot.

**Brightspace** is your next most important hub. It contains the real, relevant information about your classes such as syllabi, links to e-textbooks, assignments and so on. In the same vein, you can get into Brightspace by going through the MyNAIT Portal. I would also recommend bookmarking Brightspace — and saving any provided class calendars for easy offline access.

MyNAIT Portal, Self Service and Brightspace are your three need-to-knows. They're the most closely related to your time and money, your class info and a map for everything else.

Now that the basics are out of the way, here's a few more pointers:

**Moodle** is a dead website that used to do what Brightspace does. Ignore it.

**NAITSA** is the students' association at NAIT. On their website ([naitsa.ca](http://naitsa.ca)), you can access information about your student health and dental benefits, perks and deals, student governance and other services paid for through your NAITSA fee. There's also a handy digital student handbook you can check out.

**Ooks Life** ([ookslife.ca](http://ookslife.ca)) is a website and an app run by NAITSA. It contains information about clubs, when they meet and what they're up to. It's also your main resource for events on campus. I would recommend getting the Ooks Life app, as the app lets you access your Event Pass, a QR code lots of departments use for registration at events.

**NAIT Ooks** ([naitooks.com](http://naitooks.com)) is where you get athletics information. You can find some of the games on Ooks Life, but for information on the players and teams, you'll need to head to the Ooks website. You can also find more information about athletic facilities here. Ooks Life = NAITSA, but the Ooks = NAIT Athletics and Recreation. So, two separate organisations.

**Shop AT NAIT** ([shop.nait.ca](http://shop.nait.ca)) is where you buy things, like your textbooks or equipment. If you're ever unsure, your instructor has probably linked you to the exact thing you need on Brightspace. NAIT students can also use the physical shop in the X-wing and get help from shop AT NAIT staff.



Photo via NAIT

**NAIT Library Services** ([library.nait.ca](http://library.nait.ca)) is where you can search for online peer-reviewed articles, find out which physical books you can access at the library in U310, book study rooms, learn about citations and style guides and more. This resource is a must if you have to write essays or do research for assignments.

Not to be confused with **Learning Services** ([learningservices.nait.ca](http://learningservices.nait.ca)), where you can talk to someone about accommodations, assistive technology and other academic-related supports.

And **the Nugget** ([thenuggetonline.com](http://thenuggetonline.com)) is where you read wonderful articles like this one — we're in print and online.

Got it? If you're already lost, let me say it again: MyNAIT Portal, Self Service and Brightspace.

In the grand scheme, especially laid out like this, it seems simple enough. But there's a confusion and frustration hump that can overwhelm new students before they overcome it. It could be a small wave of annoyance whenever you access your coursework or added stress as you face tuition deadlines. Hopefully this article helps make NAIT's website maze a little easier to navigate.

# Neurodivergence as superpower: How one NAIT student wants to change our perspective

By Rafael Luis Flores, *Opinion Editor*

Jola Illemori, a Bachelor of Business Administration Entrepreneurship student and self-taught comic book artist, is in the process of creating something no one at NAIT (or maybe even in Canada) has seen before. This creation, named *Project Delta*, is a comic book series that tells stories of superheroes battling supervillains, but with one crucial detail: the superheroes are all neurodivergent people.

To be clear, there are mainstream comic book superheroes who are portrayed as having a disability of some kind — for example, Daredevil is blind, and Professor X is a paraplegic. But these are physical disabilities. In addition, the disabilities are not the source of their powers, but something that needs to be overcome.

For Illemori's neurodivergent characters, their disabilities are their superpowers.

"Initially, I wanted to create clothes that make ADHD, autism, bipolar, all those mental disabilities, feel like superpowers," said Illemori on the evolution of *Project Delta*. "But then I just thought to myself that there has to be a better way to motivate neurodivergent people besides just clothes."

**"Embrace who you are. Having a different mind from everybody else is not a defect. It's a gift. You just have to know how to use it."**

Illemori took inspiration from his late friend, Jeremy Julien Rondo, whom he believes had Bipolar I disorder and Tourette's syndrome.

"I lost him to suicide in 2021. He was only 17 when he ended his life."

Illemori recalls how his friend was picked on in elementary school because of his condition. He wanted to do a tribute to him, so he made him a superhero in *Project Delta*.

"But then I remembered there are other neurodivergent people I've met who fought different battles. I should honour them too. And I'm even going to use the challenges they fought, the battles they've had to motivate other neurodivergent people who are like them," he added.

Illemori is diagnosed with ADHD, dyslexia and Asperger's syndrome — now generally recognized as level 1 Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

"So growing up, school academics was just terribly difficult," Illemori said. He explains interacting with neurotypical people was also challenging since they do not always understand.

"It's easy to sit outside the edge and judge someone for not performing half as much as you are when you're not the one living their life, fighting their battles, carrying the weight of being neurodivergent."

But there are neurotypical characters in his comics, too. "Even neurotypicals sometimes face challenges in this system," he explained. Despite *Project Delta*'s potential to foster empathy between neurotypicals and the neurodivergent community, Illemori said his primary audience is still the latter.

"My main focus is mental health, motivating neurodivergent people and making them not feel ashamed to express themselves anymore," he said.

"Embrace who you are. Having a different mind from everybody else is not a defect. It's a gift. You just have to know how to use it."

This view of neurodivergence not being a defect



**Jola Illemori, an Entrepreneurship student, is writing a comic that features neurodivergence as a superpower.**

*Photo supplied*

but a different way of functioning is supported by some modern scientific theories. Annie Swanepoel, a child and adolescent psychiatrist from the UK, published a study in 2024 that argues ADHD and ASD are "natural variations in neurodevelopment" and traits associated with these conditions served an evolutionary purpose in humanity's distant past.

Looking to the future, Illemori intends to develop *Project Delta* into something more than a passionate hobby. Currently, the comic book is being created as a completely online series. But the entrepreneurship student hopes to eventually publish it in print and make it profitable if there is enough demand.

For updates on *Project Delta*, follow its Instagram page at @project\_delta\_comic.



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# Campus club teaches students to uncork and chill

By Rafael Luis Flores, *Opinion Editor*

At the start of every term, organizers of new interest clubs apply for accreditation with NAITSA. If all goes well, they can promote their new club at the next Clubs Showcase — an event hosted by NAITSA to highlight the different student clubs on campus.

Last semester's showcase saw the launch of new general interest clubs like the Music Club and the Film Club at NAIT, as well as clubs that cater to more niche interests, such as the distinctly named Revolutionary Communists at NAIT.

One club that turned a lot of heads during the last Clubs Showcase was Uncork & Chill. No doubt, having a seven foot tall "Winosaur" mascot roaming around got students' attention, but the very idea of a wine club certainly helped.

Of course, wine appreciation is not a novel idea around a campus with an in-house fine-dining restaurant. But to date, there has never been a student club in NAIT solely dedicated to wine appreciation.

## Humble, and unintentional, beginnings

According to Hiu Ying Lam, a Business Administration Marketing student and the club's VP Finance (and Winosaur mascot), the founding officers did not set out to specifically start a wine club.

The idea underwent a gradual process beginning with social gatherings. Lam, along with Serene Gong, a Bakery and Pastry Arts student and Billy To, a Business Administration Management student, would hang out and occasionally. Gong would bring wine recommendations for the other two to try. All three are international students — Lam and To are from Hong Kong and Gong is from China.

Gong, as it turns out, is a literal wine expert, having completed the International Sommelier Guild diploma program and earning a Level 3 Wine and Spirit Education Trust certificate.

She was also recruited by Ernest's to help elevate diner experiences through her wine knowledge.

And Gong was apparently skilled enough to convert Lam to be a wine enthusiast.

"I'm not a big fan for it before I tried her wine. Like usually, when I was in Hong Kong, just sake, beer ... but after [her] recommendation, I was like, oh, the grape wine is not bad. It's also very tasty. It's good to fit with steak or food."

From there, it was just a matter of asking themselves, "Why don't we have a wine tasting club?"

## Additional challenges for alcohol-based clubs

NAITSA Campus Clubs grants, which are a considerable source of funding for most clubs, can't cover alcohol purchases. For a club that promotes wine appreciation, this is a considerable hurdle.

During their recent wine tasting event, attendees had to purchase a \$12 ticket to reserve a slot. The proceeds from the tickets sold were used to buy



**TOP:** Rafael and friends clinking their samples at the club's first event in December. **BOTTOM:** Rafael posing with Lam (in the Winosaur costume) at the Fall Clubs Showcase. *Photos supplied*

the wine, while NAITSA subsidized some of the other, non-alcohol related, expenses.

Lam also admits to experiencing some growing pains in organizing events. "Because it's our first time to organize events like this, so there's some delay for our events," she explained.

The club was supposed to have its first wine tasting last Nov. 17. But some delays and difficulties meant their first event wasn't until Dec. 8.

"Hopefully, we can do it better for the [winter] semester," she said.

Lam shares that aside from wine tasting, Gong is exploring the possibility of doing a group visit to a winery.

However, nothing is certain yet because it would involve more risk management and budgeting, and will therefore need more careful planning.

Before the Clubs Showcase last fall, Uncork & Chill had under 20 members on Ooks Life.

That number has since ballooned to over 60 members. Interested students can follow their Instagram account (@uncork\_and\_chill) or view their Ooks Life page for updates on future club events.



# Is AI teaching us or are we teaching it?

Editorial by Samantha Lajeunesse, *Masthead Contributor*

Over the past few semesters, I've noticed that some instructors are less available to discuss feedback and instructions on assignments.

And with AI ready at the push of the button, I've turned to it to explain instructions, give examples and even assist with grammar and formatting.

I'm sure I'm not the only one, but every time we use AI to teach us instead of speaking to an instructor, we're losing our humanity.

Generative AI learns from us, and in turn, can help us with all sorts of things — things that other people can't, won't or maybe just don't have time to. So, what makes AI so bad then? Don't get me wrong, I saw *Terminator*, and I believe that will be our demise in the distant future.

But for now, it seems like we jumped too early into using AI for everyday things. We should still be teaching AI, not the other way around.

When we use AI to correct our grammar, our spelling or to explain something we did wrong in a paper, we lose the opportunity to connect with

an instructor who may give us a more human insight into our mistakes. Receiving feedback is a crucial part of any workplace, and when we use AI to skip that process, we're losing the connection that makes us human.

If an instructor graded you poorly but isn't free to elaborate as to why, AI can show you how you might have made a mistake and can do it quickly. But that doesn't mean that it should take the place of a teacher.

You can't learn from AI's experiences in an industry and create professional connections that help you get a job later. You can't have a conversation with AI about why you chose to write a sentence in a particular way and convince it to give you extra credit. You certainly can't get your grade reversed by talking to AI.

Artificial Intelligence is still artificial. So, how

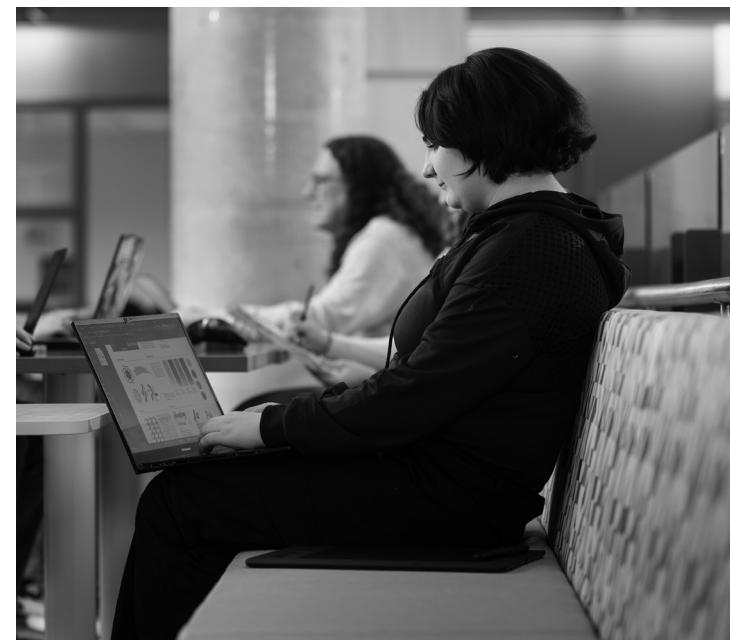


Photo via NAIT

about we learn patience, wait for the teacher to respond and put some humanity back in the world before Arnold Schwarzenegger shows up?

## NAIT's very own 'local Clodsire enthusiast'

By Mitchell Janisse, *Freelance Contributor*

For anyone browsing the Ooks Life app's community page, among the posts from students and clubs here at NAIT, you may have come across postings from NAIT's local Clodsire enthusiast.

The Clodsire enthusiast is really Tyler Kendall, a Mechanical Engineering Technology student. When he is not sitting in lectures or working hard studying, he can be found sharing photos of the Pokémon Clodsire.

Clodsire is an amphibious, brown Pokémon from the franchise's ninth generation and one of the evolutions of Whooper.

At the start of the semester, Kendall "scoured the internet" to collect as many Clodsire photos as he could. The reason for this?

"Because Clodsire is awesome," said Kendall. On Sept. 3, he started posting on Ooks Life daily using photos of the Pokémon from the large "collection."

"If ever you are sad, look upon the mighty clod and rejoice!" he wrote in his first post.

Later in the semester, he switched to weekly Clodsire posts.

"I did lose track of which ones I had already posted," he explained, adding that he also ran out of photos of the tadpole-like Pokémon. "So, I slowed down a bit because of that."

Many of the captions include friendly messages to NAIT students encouraging them to enjoy their weekend or take time to rest.

Kendall said he's never played the official *Pokémon* games, but enjoys connecting with other students on Ooks Life this way.

"Clodsire brings me a lot of joy," said Kendall. "Some people may not like school, so I just try and brighten people's day by sharing what I love."

He has gotten "mostly positive" responses to these posts, including some from other *Pokémon* fans. Some students have even asked if he's the "Clodsire guy," Kendall told *the Nugget*. But not everyone appreciates Clodsire as much as he does.

Kendall received a direct message from another NAIT student who wanted to inform him that "Quagsire is better."

Quagsire is an alternate evolution of the *Pokémon* Whooper in the game.



Kendall's first Clodsire post on the Ooks Life app.

Photo via Ooks Life

This didn't discourage the Clodsire enthusiast, though. "It's fun to talk to people like that," he said.

Kendall encouraged students to "post what you want to share."

"If you've got something you love, share that. If you just want people to see something funny or [if] it made you smile, maybe it'll make someone else smile too. And that makes it all worth it."

# Cuts, cash cows and consequences

Okay NAIT. Show your work.



Photo via NAIT

**Editorial by Katherine Hawn, Freelance Contributor**

It's time to look around.

I was grateful to see coverage of the NASA collective agreement bargaining by *the Nugget*, as well as the article about the Photographic Technology program closing. I'm a PhotoTech grad, so it's dismaying to see its history in the context of the 18 recent program closures that were done with misleading facts about program performance, enrolment and post-graduation employment rates. The articles side-by-side are quite telling about NAIT's current consultation, bargaining and decision-making approaches these days.

We can look back a few months for the cherry on top: a \$25,000 spend in 2023 for NAIT's Executive Office that bypassed its own procurement rules.

The narrative of NAIT's recent choices is hard to convey —partly because the issues are widespread, partly because the devil is in a lot of the details about what isn't being done. As a current BBA student with over 20 years of experience in administration, I can confirm that you'll rarely see a document that says, "Here's what we didn't do."

A recent government decision means post-secondaries across the country have or will have a smaller pool of international students that will even be in the country, and a lot of eggs have gone in that international student basket due to the sheer number of people that want to study in Canada. (The tuition differential is another discussion.) The point is, NAIT is feeling some financial pressure.

## Follow the money

So, in a monetary crunch, what is NAIT to do? If we take a look at the list of 18 program closures, there's a theme: high overhead needs regardless of enrolment potential, post-graduation employment outcomes and industry demand in the sector.

I've personally been in rooms at NAIT where it's been openly discussed that programs like Business, with low-overhead and nearly limitless enrolment potential, were the cash cows of NAIT.

So, it looks like NAIT went through a list of their programs and determined which ones need to draw from the communal budget. That might seem like a smart move, except that NAIT needs to operate as an institution rather

than multiple self-sustaining programs, or Alberta will be without important graduates.

I encourage anyone who's interested to dig into the data about enrolment, graduation and post-grad employment rates and see if, in context, it matches your idea of productive programming.

## Program closures

There are a lot of justified thoughts and feelings about the program closures, including from staff and students. If you browse Reddit for a hot minute you can see lives being thrown into the abyss of uncertainty with very real effects and costs.

The process went quickly, and according to the NAIT Academic Staff Association (NASA), NAIT didn't follow process. At the time of the announcement, NASA indicated that the "decision hadn't been reviewed by council." I'm interested in the actual timeline of events, especially considering a leak of the programs being closed prior to the press release. Were students notified in appropriate timeframes? When was staff notified? What was staff told to indicate (or not indicate) to students?

## The NASA agreement

NAIT's bargaining with NASA may seem like it doesn't have much to do with students, but it includes things like the determination of how many instructors we get. For example, we were promised hands-on, real-world experience under industry-expert instructors, and we can already see a shift with the number of instructional assistants in the organization (who may be helpful but are not industry experts.)

As a two-time graduate of NAIT with a third in progress, I have always known NAIT to be an institution that does better than the bare minimum of what their agreements set out. I have trusted them to act in good faith for and with students, staff and the public.

In response to the potential NASA strike, NAIT said, "Students are at the core of everything we do, and we are dedicated to minimizing any potential disruption to their learning environment."

Okay. Prove it.

# State of the Ooks: Push for playoffs

By Geono Aloisio, *Sports Editor*

School is back in session for the winter semester, and the Ooks are back in action. There is a lot to cover from the fall term, so here is how each team's season is shaping up with the playoffs around the corner.

## Badminton

Coming in as the number one-ranked program in the country by the Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association (CCAA), NAIT is in a great position to contend on the national stage this semester.

The Ooks have shown their dominance through the first two tournaments, taking home a handful of top-three finishes on both the men's and women's sides. Expect the program to contend for multiple gold medals at nationals and potentially end its two-year gold-medal drought.

## Curling

The Ooks are off to a great start on both the men's and mixed team's sides. The men started at the Fall Regional and the mixed team went 3-1. The women's team started on the wrong foot at 0-6 and will need to climb into the top four to qualify for the Alberta Colleges Athletic Conference (ACAC) championships. There won't be much room left to turn things around, though.

The Winter Regional hosted by NAIT on Jan. 16 will be the team's last chance

to qualify before the championships begin on Jan. 30.

## Men's basketball

*8 wins, 3 losses // 3rd in North Division*

It was a tough final two weeks for the men's team. They started the season with a seven-game win streak, outscoring opponents by 10 points in nearly every game. Unfortunately, the men dropped three of their last four games before the holiday break, knocking them out of the top 15.

The good news is that they have built themselves a healthy cushion and are outperforming the Concordia Thunder (3-7), who occupy the final playoff spot. Outside of some struggles, this team could be a contender for the conference title.

## Women's basketball

*9 wins, 2 losses // Conference title contender*

The women's team has been on a tear in the first semester. They are third in the conference in points scored per game and have two players — Mikah Reed and Payton Neilson — in the top 10 for individual scoring.

The women peaked at sixth in the CCAA's national rankings in November before finishing the month at the 12th spot. The North Division has a challenging



The women's basketball team celebrates.

Photo via NAIT Ooks



Byron Tung plays in the first badminton games of 2025.

Photo via NAIT Ooks

field with all four teams in playoff positions holding nine or more wins.

But the Ooks have proven this season that they can compete with elite teams and should be viewed as contenders for the conference title.

### Men's hockey

5 wins, 9 losses // *In the mix for playoffs*

The first half of the men's season was filled with adversity. They dropped the first five games of the season, won one, then went on another four-game losing streak. Holding a 1-9 record does not exude confidence about a team's capabilities, but the tides may have begun to turn in the blue and gold's favour. NAIT won the final two games before the holiday break and opened the new year with another pair of wins. Outside of the top two seeds — Red Deer and SAIT — all five remaining teams in the conference are tied with a 5-9 record. That leaves a tight window for which team will finish in the seventh seed and miss the playoffs. Now every game until the playoffs will feel even more important. If things go their way, they could end up as a second or third seed, but if they suffer another losing streak, it could very well end their playoff hopes.

### Women's hockey

8 wins, 8 losses // *Dark horse*

The women's team rebounded and ended the fall semester on a high note after finding themselves in a five-game losing streak at the end of October. Heading into January with a .500 record might not scream elite, but this team trails only Lakeland and Red Deer, who hold records of 14-1 and 11-4.

The Ooks have scored the second most goals in the conference, in part thanks to Maria Ayre and Greir Slabaida, who are both in the top seven in points. Their chances of staying in the top four and qualifying for the playoffs

seem reasonable. Olds sits as the first team out, with a 4-11 record.

NAIT also handed Lakeland their only loss of the season so far. If the Ooks can avoid another long losing streak, this team could cause an upset come playoff time.

### Men's volleyball

6 wins, 3 losses // *National title contender*

The men's team has plenty to be excited about before playoffs. NAIT will host the 2026 Men's Volleyball National Championships in March and receive an automatic bid to the tournament, meaning they will play at nationals regardless of their conference playoff results.

It is an excellent opportunity to capture the program's second national title in three years after winning its first in 2024.

The blue and gold are also first in the conference in kills and assists, and have eight players remaining from their first title run. If they can find a way to recapture the same magic they had in 2024, this team could win the national title on home court.

### Women's volleyball

8 wins, 1 loss // *National title contender*

The women's program is leading the conference in kills and assists and is second for digs. They have a player in the top two in each of those categories and are undefeated in home games so far this season.

It shouldn't be a surprise that this team is tied for leading the conference and ranked sixth in the country in the CCAA's latest poll. The Ooks are positioning themselves as a clear contender for the conference and national championship, with a mix of veterans and younger players. This might just be the year they win their first conference title since 2013.

# Sustainability spotlight

## Rocky Mountain Soap



Photo via Rocky Mountain Soap

*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 Cam Baty, co-owner of Rocky Mountain Soap, a Canadian company focusing on natural beauty products.

Answers have been edited for clarity and space.



### NAITSA Sustainability Committee: How are your products different from traditional ones in terms of environmental impact?

**Cam Baty:** Natural is the start, organic is number two and then sustainability and packaging is number three. And then sustainability and energy use, et cetera, would be number four.

So the natural is easy for us, because that's what we've always been. The organic costs a lot, but we're happy to do it wherever we can and we do it to a large extent. The packaging is the most critical area and the hardest.

So we're on a journey there and there's no easy solutions to that. We do try and go naked first, so no packaging if possible. You can have it with a wrapper, which is a paper wrapper, or you can have it unpackaged. So we give people options.

And it's refillable. All of our liquid soap products and bubble bath and things like that, you can buy refills. So that in itself reduces plastic by 60 to 70 per cent.

### NSC: What long-term impact do you hope to achieve?

**CB:** Well, there's many things we want to do, but from a sustainability and people standpoint, we want to provide a great place to work for people and ideally have them have the ability to have long-term financial security, which is very tough. And we haven't done a lot on that front, but that is one of our goals.

And I guess to be a model for other businesses to try and do things sustainably.

### NSC: Tell us about your community bar program.

**CB:** It's a monthly feature bar and we just come up with a new scent that's inspired with different things. And then a dollar from each of those sales goes to a charity, and various different charities get supported.

We also do a lot of product sponsorships, just most locally. We sponsor some athletes and we have bigger philanthropic goals.

We have a sales profit and profit number we want to get to, and the other two aspects of it, is over this period, we want to share \$5 million in profit sharing with our team. We did \$1 million previously during COVID-19. We had a really good year and we were able to distribute a million dollars. It's a big goal, and we're nowhere near it, but we hope to get there.

### NSC: What's next for your business in terms of growth and sustainability goals?

**CB:** We want to continue being manufactured in Canada. We want to continue to find local ingredients, organic. More refillable stuff, like we're trying to get our deodorants to a state where they can be refilled.

And then more paper. Our bath salts are currently in plastic, so we want those to go in paper, our body butters, our lip butters can go in paper. Those are all phase two of our packaging project.

We just completed phase one, which was those all plastic pumps and 100 per cent recycled bottles. So really, the major focus is the packaging. And then from a business standpoint, we just want to continue growing with a focus within Canada right now. We're at \$30 million in sales right now, we want to get to \$50 million over the next few years.

### NSC: Is there anything that you wish you had known at the beginning of this journey?

**CB:** All lessons are good lessons. One that stunted the growth a little bit is expanding too wide geographically. Like at one point, we did three new stores, one in Manitoba, one in Victoria and one in Vancouver.

In hindsight, we should have went to one market and done three stores. And then you can concentrate your resources into building your brand in that area. So that was a mistake that held us back on our growth.

And then two is — my wife would have a different answer — is not doing things because of seeking perfection.

So as an example, I wanted to change our basalt packaging over like 10 years ago to paper. And we couldn't make it look good enough. So it was always delayed to say "no, the brand, it's not perfect," so that it never happens.

So perfection is the enemy of progress in some aspects. On the flip side, you know, we just went through a rebrand. It took us a long time. It looks amazing. It's going in the right direction. The customers are really liking it.

So, it's that balance between perfection and action. And you got to find that. I'm more towards the action side of things than the perfection side of things, from my point of view.



To learn more about Rocky Mountain Soap, visit the website at [rockymountainsoap.com](http://rockymountainsoap.com).

Catch up on other Sustainability Spotlight interviews at [ookslife.ca/organization/naitsasustainabilitycommittee](http://ookslife.ca/organization/naitsasustainabilitycommittee)

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HARD

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(if what you need is answers to sudooku)



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### ONE BILL, BIG QUESTION: CAN AGE VERIFICATION EVER BE SAFE?

By Ibrahim Basim

Age verification laws sound simple on paper — until you look closely at how they work. Canada is now debating this through Bill S-209. But age verification is messy, and it becomes even messier when you realize how easily this sensitive personal data can be leaked — so Canada needs to do it right, and protect young people without creating a surveillance-style internet.

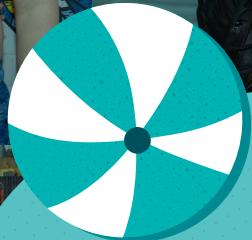
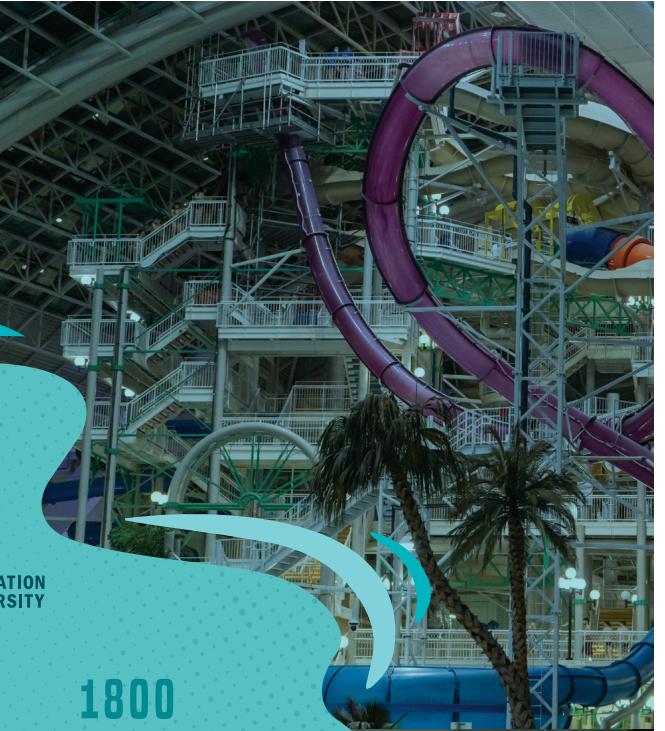
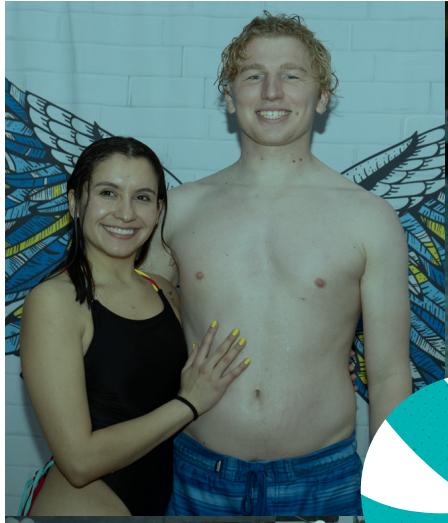


### NAIT MY PLATE, EPISODE 2: GOOD VIBES GRILL

By Pia Vistro and Roiel Carlos

Pia and Roiel are back at it. This time, they are in W building reviewing the Southwest Crunch Wrap from Good Vibes Grill. Spoiler, it's too spicy for Roiel, but this wrap was much better received than the grilled cheese from episode 1. The fries though... questionable.





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