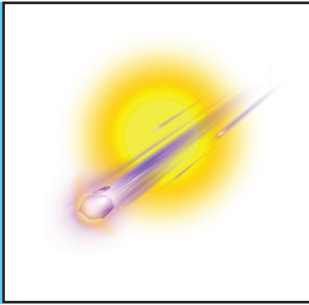


Comet passing

A comet is passing by the sun. Read more on page 8.



Remain Human

What does perfect mean to a world that's not supposed to be? Read more on page 5.



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Special Reports: Education

Cell ban making a difference

By **PIPER GALLAGHER**
Senior Reporter

For the first time in years, students are looking up.

This change comes as Oklahoma public schools implement a statewide ban on student cellphone use during instructional hours for the 2025–26 school year. The ban is outlined in Senate Bill 139, and according to Oklahoma Legislature, it requires public schools to implement policies that restrict student personal cellphone use on campus during school hours.

This bill signed by Oklahoma Gov Kevin Stitt was intended to reduce distractions in classrooms and encourage face-to-face interaction and participation during instructional time. Lawmakers also hoped the bill would help address declining academic performances and student mental health.

Schools were allowed to enforce the ban how they saw fit, whether that be making students put their phones into pouches that lock or allowing phones to be put in lockers.

Yondr Pouches have been a popular option for schools. These pouches offer students an option that allows them to keep their cellphone within their possession during the school day.

See **CELLPHONE**, Page 6



With a mandated cellphone ban in place, Medford High students talk to one another more as they walk to classes.

Photo by Piper Gallagher

Virtual school: How is it working?

By **CORKY HALL**
Senior Reporter

At the start of the school day, no bell signals first period. Just the glow of a laptop screen shows a student logging in from home.

For students enrolled in online schools like Epic Charter Schools and Oklahoma Virtual Charter Academy, the classroom looks different than it once did, but the expectations to learn, stay engaged and succeed remain the same.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many traditional school districts struggled to transition from in-person to online. However, this was a time when enrollment at Epic Charter Schools grew to an all-time high.

According to Erin Hatfield, Epic's director of public relations, enrollment climbed to nearly 60,000 students at its peak, a figure that has since dropped by nearly half to approximately 31,000 students today, making it the third-largest school district in Oklahoma.

See **VIRTUAL**, Page 7

Public schools lacking in life skills classes

By **KEN IRVING**
Senior Reporter

Each day, high school students stress over Algebra tests and English essays, but few know how to cook a basic meal or change a flat tire.

Life skills that were once taught in schools have slowly disappeared from the classroom. The American education system

has changed from focusing on vocational learning to college readiness.

“Back when I was in high school, we were taught skills that kids these days just aren't learning” D'Iberville, Mississippi, High School teacher Melissa Payne said.

Although test scores are rising, many college students are lacking basic life skills. According to a 2025 report cited by 105.7

WROR, about 80% of young adults feel unprepared for life. Additionally, fewer than 30% of college students say high school adequately prepared them for life after graduation, according to a 2025 article published by the New York Post. As a result, the number of college students who are feeling anxious or have mental health issues has skyrocketed.

At the same time, the financial cost of higher education continues

to rise. In 2026, approximately 43 million Americans carry federal student loan debt, according to the Education Data Initiative. The average borrower owes around \$40,000. In 20 years, the national student loan debt has increased by \$1.26 trillion. Millions of Americans are going into debt to pay for an education that does not prepare them for the real world.

The concept of “education” in the United States has evolved dra-

matically over the past century. In the early 1900s, education often reflected societal expectations. Women were frequently taught domestic skills to prepare them for managing households, while men were trained for industrial or agricultural work. Hands-on instruction was common, particularly in communities where factories and skilled trades drove the local economy.

See **LIFE SKILLS**, Page 12

NEWS

Pages 2, 3, 12

OPINION

Pages 4 & 5

SPECIAL REPORT

Pages 6 & 7

FEATURE

Page 8

SPORTS

Pages 10 & 11

NEWS

Celebrate passions on campus

By EMILY WRIGHT
Student Reporter

The English Department is inviting Northwestern students and faculty to explore their creative side this week.

The Creativity Fest will serve as an opportunity for Northwestern students to present their creative work, and will also double as Alabaster Echoes release party.

This event aims to celebrate what students from any major can do with their creativity and how that creativity is appreciated.

"I think the more that we highlight creativity in general, the more people see that creativity exists in many places," Dr. Christina Xan said, "I mean, I think that things like art and literature and theater and music actually highlight the creativity that's in sociology, science and math, and that they're all forms of expression..." Xan added.

The Creativity Fest will be held Thursday from 6pm to 8pm in E.C. 109.

The event will host an open mic where students can share their creative works with their peers.

In the past, Students & faculty have showcased a variety of skills, from Songwriting, to paint-

ings and even Crochet work.

During this time, students with works in the student journal, Alabaster Echoes, will be given time to read their work out loud or show and talk about their pieces featured in the journal.

The Creativity Fest will also host games of Kahoot in between open mic segments.

Free pizza will be available for those who attend.

The release of the 3rd edition of Alabaster Echoes will be celebrated at the event and free copies will be available.

The journal was started in 2024 and has featured poetry, short stories, photography, paintings and more since its first release.

The journal is curated by faculty, while students in the creative writing classes vote on which works will be featured in the journal.

Some students on campus have been submitting work to the journal since the journal's founding.

"I've been submitting my work to Alabaster Echoes since it began," Ashland Crites, an English major from Hennessey said. Crites added that having the place to share their creative works was awesome for Northwestern to have. "It's a time capsule for where we're at in our journeys," Crites said.

Visiting writer on the way to campus

By EMILY WRIGHT
Student Reporter

The English department is continuing their Visiting Author series by highlighting an Oklahoma author.

Dr. Constance Squires will be reading from her works April 6 from 6pm to 8pm in the Ranger Room in the Student Center.

The English department encourages students to attend, as Squires' latest novel relates to a traumatic moment in history for Oklahoma, the Oklahoma City bombing.

"Coming to this talk will demonstrate to students that they have a choice when it comes to making sense of the past as it relates to their lives,"

Dr. David Vaughan said, "I suppose you can either sit back, be passive and live your quiet life and not really care, or you



Constance Squires

can come to events like this and learn how to grapple with difficult, complex and traumatic events in the past," he continued.

Squires is an associate professor of English at the University of Central Oklahoma and is an award-winning author.

She has received the Oklahoma Book Award for Fiction

with her debut novel and even had her non-fiction writing appear in *The New York Times*.

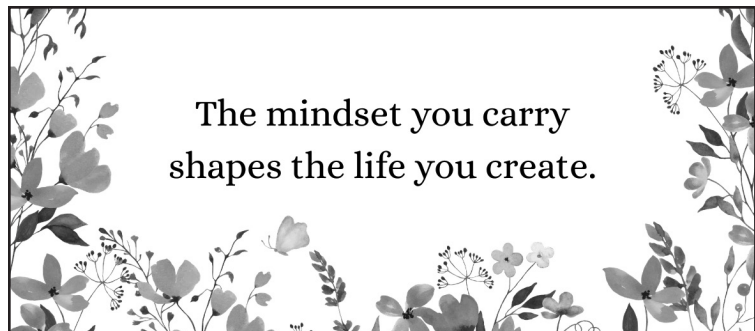
Squires is most known for her books "Along the Watchtower" and "Live from Medicine Park."

Most of Squires' works are set in Oklahoma, and display themes of redemption, discovering one's identity and are coming-of-age stories with elements of Rock-N-Roll.

Squires' latest novel is called "Low April Sun" and is a historical fiction novel that is centered around the events of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.

"Low April Sun" was published in 2025, the year of the 20th anniversary of the bombing, which correlates with the time line of the novel.

The novel follows two characters who begin to receive messages from someone thought to have been killed in the OKC bombing.



FUN HEADLINES FROM UPI

- Bottle of wine from 1945 sells for \$812,500
- Pennsylvania man wins \$50,000 during pit stop in Maryland
- Opossum stows away to Alaska on cargo ship, gets new home at zoo
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NEWS

What's Up




April 3

- NWOSU Art Society Winners' Show @ Runnymede 6- 8 pm
- Alva Bull Battle @ the Salt Fork Event Center 6-10 pm
- Heath Owens concert @ Alva Beer Co. 7-8:30 pm
- Kenny Fiedler @ the Nite Lite 10-11:30 pm




April 6

- Visiting Writer's Series presents Constance Squires
- Spring 2026 SGA Meeting 6:30-7:30 pm



April 7

- Psi Chi Induction Ceremony EC 109 6-7 pm



April 8

- National All is Ours Day



April 9

- NWOSU Carnival & Crafts 5:30-8 pm
- Chi Alpha Night @ Ranger Perk 7 -9 pm

SGA Candidates



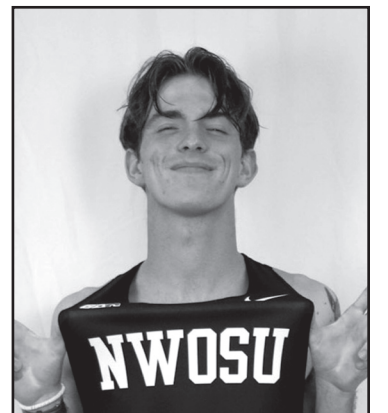
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OPINION

What is bulimia nervosa?

By ECE OZDEMIR
Opinion Editor

Beauty is no longer merely an aesthet-
ic preference; it is presented as a state that
must be cultivated, maintained, and frequent-
ly proven. Slimness, fitness, and “not letting
oneself go” are treated as if they were core
personality traits. Consequently, bodies that
reflect these characteristics are implicitly
granted higher social value. A survey of con-
temporary discourse reveals a clear message:
Bodies that occupy less space are deemed su-
perior.

This perspective gradually transforms eat-
ing behaviors. Food is no longer just a ne-
cessity to satisfy hunger; it derives meaning
only to the extent that it can be controlled.
Phrases commonly used in daily life—such
as “resisting,” “holding back,” or “not break-
ing the streak”—demonstrate how deeply this
shift has been internalized. We now exist in a
framework where individuals feel more pow-
erful and successful not when they eat, but
when they abstain. It is at this precise intersec-
tion that the line between being healthy and
being in a state of constant self-surveillance
becomes blurred.

Discussions regarding eating disorders of-
ten conjure extreme clinical images. However,
many disordered eating patterns blend seam-
lessly into daily life, making them difficult to
detect from the outside. Bulimia nervosa is a
primary example of this phenomenon. Many
individuals living with this condition maintain
a normal weight, hold steady employment,
and sustain social relationships—appearing
“trouble-free” to the casual observer.

Consequently, their internal struggles are
frequently overlooked or undervalued.

Beneath this facade of normalcy lies a
physically and mentally exhausting cycle.
Individuals experience episodes of losing
control, leading to the consumption of large
quantities of food, typically in isolation and

secrecy. These episodes are invariably fol-
lowed by intense feelings of guilt and shame,
often accompanied by an acute fear of weight
gain. This triggers compensatory behaviors—
such as self-induced vomiting, excessive ex-
ercise, or prolonged fasting—in a desperate
attempt to “rebalance” the body.

A defining characteristic of these behaviors
is that they do not provide genuine pleasure
or relief, contrary to common misconcep-
tions. Instead, they often function as a form
of self-punishment. The relationship with the
body ceases to be a partnership and devolves
into a constant struggle. Even the act of eating
becomes inextricably linked to the corrective
measures that must follow.

In cases of bulimia nervosa, body weight
and shape become the central pillars of
self-evaluation. Even a minor fluctuation on
the scale can dictate an individual's mood.
Looking into a mirror transcends a daily habit,
becoming a moment of intense self-judgment.
Consequently, the quality of one's day often
hinges on these physical assessments.

This fragile body perception creates a sig-
nificant cognitive burden. Feelings of anxiety,
guilt, and shame intensify, making emotional
regulation increasingly difficult. As a result,
depression and anxiety disorders are frequent-
ly comorbid with bulimia nervosa. Some
individuals may also experience challenges
with impulse control or exhibit self-harming
behaviors. Rather than being isolated issues,
these are various manifestations of the same
underlying psychological pressure.

A common misconception persists: “They
could stop if they wanted to.” This perspective
is both incomplete and misleading. Individu-
als are often acutely aware of their actions and
feel distressed by them, frequently harboring
a strong desire to break the cycle.

However, neurological disruptions in
emotional regulation and control mechanisms
make ending this cycle far more complex than
it appears.

The core issue is not a lack of willpower,

but a profound physiological and psychologi-
cal imbalance.

At this juncture, it is essential to examine
how the concept of “health” has been nar-
rowed. Health is frequently conflated solely
with thinness; however, true health requires
an equilibrium of both mind and body.

Constant preoccupation with caloric in-
take, calculating every morsel, and attempting
to dominate the body instead of listening to it
does not constitute a healthy state.

Nevertheless, society often praises indi-
viduals who endure self-starvation, exercise
to the point of exhaustion, or push their phys-
ical limits.

As long as this language of admiration
persists, such a strained relationship with the
body will continue to be normalized. As the
definition of beauty narrows, the “breathing
room” for the body also diminishes, making
it increasingly difficult to live in peace with
a physique that is subjected to constant sur-
veillance.

The factors fueling this cycle often go un-
noticed because they have become embedded
in daily life: casual jokes, well-intentioned
comments, and unsolicited advice. Celebrat-
ing weight loss with enthusiasm while meet-
ing weight gain with silence—or viewing food
as a reward or punishment—treats the body as
a project in perpetual need of correction.

As these behaviors become mundane, the
relationship with the body reaches an impasse.

Perhaps the time has come to ask: What do
we truly find beautiful? Is it the body that con-
sumes less and occupies less space, or the in-
dividual who is at peace with themselves? So
long as beauty is defined only by what can be
measured and weighed, these questions may
remain unanswered.

Ultimately, the greatest necessity may be
to allow the body room to breathe. The core
issue is not merely how we look, but what we
sacrifice in pursuit of that appearance. Every
single one of us is unique. There is no other
you, know your worth.

Small talk has big impact

By ECE OZDEMIR
Opinion Editor

Have you ever considered
the instinctive reactions that oc-
cur when entering an elevator
with a stranger? Some individ-
uals immediately reach for their
smartphones, others fixate on
the ceiling, while some attempt
to mitigate the silence with re-
marks such as “this elevator is
remarkably slow” or “the weather
has certainly turned cold.” These
brief, seemingly insignificant
sentences illustrate a subtle but
pervasive social behavior: small
talk.

For most, silence is inherently
uncomfortable, providing a space
where one can easily become
lost in internal thoughts. Conse-
quently, engaging in small talk is
a simple yet effective method of
disrupting this tension. A brief re-
mark or a sincere smile not only
puts the other person at ease but
also establishes a sense of mutu-
al security. In essence, small
talk represents the simplest way

to demonstrate one's benign in-
tent. It is the invisible salutation
of human relations—a means of
signaling to another person, “I
am here, and I acknowledge your
presence.”

Although the form of small
talk varies across cultures, its
objective remains constant: es-
tablishing a connection. In the
United Kingdom, for instance,
discussing the weather is consid-
ered a tradition; conversations be-
ginning with “It's raining again,
isn't it?” serve not only as a cour-
tesy but as a primary vehicle for
rapport.

Conversely, in Japan, where
silence is often a manifestation of
respect, small talk is not always
an instinctive reflex.

Small talk serves as the foun-
dational brick of human inter-
action. Research suggests that
transforming a stranger into an
acquaintance requires an aver-
age of 50 hours of interaction;
notably, the vast majority of this
time consists not of profound dis-
course, but of minor exchanges. A
brief exchange initiated in a café

can evolve into mutual encour-
agement before an examination
just one week later.

The success of these interac-
tions often depends more on de-
emeanor than subject matter. Indi-
viduals typically gravitate toward
those who listen; therefore, being
an active listener is frequently
more valuable than being an elo-
quent speaker.

The essence of effective com-
munication lies in making the
other person feel acknowledged.
Authentic small talk is not mere-
ly about speaking; it is about
hearing. Demonstrating genuine
attention to a stranger's remarks
fosters a baseline of trust. For in-
stance, following up on a previous
comment about a pet's behavior a
few days later transforms a minor
interaction into lasting rapport.

It is a subtle way of saying,
“I remembered you,” which of-
ten carries more weight than pro-
longed conversation.

While some may find initiat-
ing small talk anxiety-inducing,
its efficacy lies in its perceived
spontaneity. Noticing a detail in

the environment and offering a
simple, positive comment is of-
ten sufficient. Furthermore, small
talk relies on appropriate tonality
rather than linguistic complexity;
a sincere smile or a brief greeting
can fulfill the same social func-
tion.

Beyond social circles, small
talk plays a pivotal role in the
professional sphere. A brief
pre-meeting exchange can de-es-
calate tension, and a simple in-
quiry at a networking event can
transition into a significant career
opportunity. As communication
expert Dan Bullock noted, “Small
talk, when mastered, opens big
doors.”

Ultimately, small talk is far
more profound than its name sug-
gests. A smile, a question, or a
few words exchanged in a queue
can define the highlight of a day.
The next time someone inquires
about the weather, do not dismiss
them. That brief sentence may be
the catalyst for a new friendship
or an unforeseen opportunity.
While the talk may be small, its
impact is substantial.

OPINION

Social power of advertising

By **ECE OZDEMIR**
Opinion Editor

Advertisements are the most frequent images we encounter while watching television. Whether during breaks in television series or news broadcasts, numerous commercials appear across various channels. The primary objective of these advertisements is to market products directly to a specified target audience. For instance, baby products are presented to parents, while toys target children.

Corporations attempt to attract interest and acquire new customers by demonstrating how high-quality, innovative, beneficial, affordable, or convenient their products are.

The most basic example of this is toothpaste advertisements. In these commercials, we often see an expert figure recommending the product to the viewer. However, today we are aware that these individuals, presented as “experts,” are merely actors wearing white lab coats to appear more knowledgeable and reliable.

These are the conventional advertising models we most frequently encounter in daily life, and we often bypass them without a second thought. Indeed, we are all familiar with the general commercial func-

tion of advertisements; however, have you ever considered the power of advertising in terms of creating social awareness?

While the majority of advertisements are sales-oriented, some serve a distinct purpose: promoting social awareness, informing public opinion, and transforming established attitudes or behaviors. These initiatives are defined as social advertisements. While traditional commercials emphasize product advantages, social advertisements aim to evoke empathy and a sense of conscience in the viewer.

Although this advertising model may appear to be another method of generating profit, it is considered one of the most effective and accessible ways to initiate change. Indeed, these messages are omnipresent; they span from digital advertisements on social media platforms and websites to physical posters found on streets and buildings. Consequently, social advertisements possess a unique potential to trigger social transformation and foster a collective consciousness by reaching broad audiences.

The first step in creating awareness through advertisements is to provide the audience with clear information on the subject. To persuade viewers to change their opinions or take action for a specific cause, the advertisement must present

factual and concrete information related to that objective. In other words, while the social advertisement represents the primary mission, the informative advertisement functions as the fundamental method for achieving that mission.

Through this approach, organizations prove that they are not merely addressing a social issue superficially, but are instead giving the matter the value it deserves and are committed to creating awareness through high-quality work. Because this approach resonates with individuals experiencing these issues and makes their experiences visible, such campaigns are rendered far more convincing than traditional advertisements.

The advertisement prepared by Ford for International Women’s Day on March 8, 2023, was remarkably impactful and memorable. The creative approach exhibited in the commercial allowed the brand to stand out among its competitors and once again emphasized the vital importance of women within the social structure. In this advertisement, Ford introduces a “redesigned” vehicle ironically titled the “Ford Explorer (Men’s Only Edition).”

However, this model is presented as lacking essential equipment invented by women, such as windshield wipers, heating systems, turn signals, rearview mirrors

and the GPS. By highlighting the absence of these features that make an automobile functional, the campaign conveys the message that society would lose its integrity without the contributions of women.

Ford’s celebration of women in this manner possesses a significance far deeper than a standard message of congratulations. The campaign does not merely praise the achievements of women; by removing vital components they invented from the vehicle, it tangibly demonstrates how “dysfunctional” life would become without their contributions.

In conclusion, Ford’s approach to gender equality demonstrates that advertising is a resonant power used not only to sell products but to build values. While traditional advertisements appeal to the consumer’s wallet, social advertisements speak to the individual’s conscience and collective future.

Today, audiences no longer wish to know only what they are purchasing; they also seek to understand the values embraced by brands and institutions. These campaigns, constructed with an informative and creative understanding of social advertising, do more than clarify complex global issues; they transform the viewer from a passive observer into a participant in conscious change.

Remaining human in a seamless world

By **ECE OZDEMIR**
Opinion Editor

The illusion of perfection has imprisoned us within an invisible yet rigid wall. From the phones we pick up upon waking to the advertisements we encounter on the street, everything is seamless, symmetrical and flawless. These filtered faces and algorithms strip away the most fundamental human right: the margin for error. Yet, what defines us is our capacity to make mistakes and the unique traces we leave behind them. While the modern world compels us to pursue the ideal, it simultaneously prunes our authenticity.

If you were to ask anyone about the concept of error, they would define it as failure, a source of shame, or something to be avoided. However, when we examine nature and history, we see that development is not seamless; on the contrary, it is full of disruptions. The history of science is essentially a history of magnificent errors. The light bulbs found in every room today underwent the same journey. If Edison had aimed for perfection and felt ashamed of failing, the world might be a much darker place today. Enlightenment has arrived through the accumulation of mistakes.

No musician stops to apologize upon hitting a wrong note. On the contrary, they embrace the mistake, navigate around it and transform it into a moment of improvisation. Perhaps that specific instance becomes the most memorable part of the performance. For this reason, I prefer “imperfect” live concert recordings over studio tracks where every note is pre-planned. A mistake in that moment serves as an invitation for the next stroke of genius. This

is the essence of human beauty.

An individual capable of accepting their own errors becomes more forgiving toward the flaws of others. The decline of compassion in the present day stems from this lack of self-acceptance. A devotion to perfection brings with it narcissism and intolerance. This situation worsens when the frustration of being unable to achieve the ideal is added.

We live in an age of intolerance because no one has the margin to make a mistake. A single wrong word, a momentary lapse in concentration or one instance that fails to fit our perfect image causes us to fall victim to digital lynch culture. Because we are already ruthless toward ourselves, showing compassion to others becomes nearly impossible.

Consider the artificial intelligence technologies that have entered our lives at the blink of an eye. They can produce text with perfect grammar and spelling within seconds. Yet something is missing from those texts. This deficiency is the indecision, error and realism brought by lived experience. More accurately, these texts lack the scent of humanity.

What makes a human being real are the unexpected deviations that an algorithm cannot predict. Long story short, we must grant ourselves and one another the right to make mistakes. We need to perceive failure not as an end but as the beginning of an undiscovered path. We must realize that oversalty a meal, failing an exam, falling in love with the wrong person or stuttering out of nervousness during a job interview are simply the rhythms of life. A seamless life is merely a simulation. Real life, however, is noisy, dusty and full of mistakes.

Digital age has dark sides

By **ECE OZDEMIR**
Opinion Editor

Technology is widely regarded as a pivotal tool for bridging divides among diverse populations globally. While individuals in the past relied on handwritten correspondence or endured months of travel to remain in contact with loved ones, modern technological advancements have transformed these interactions. It is now possible to reach distant destinations in a matter of hours and establish communication within seconds. Through mobile devices and instant messaging applications, geographical distances have effectively been neutralized; even video conferencing with family on different continents has become a routine activity. This unprecedented speed and accessibility represent a hallmark of the luxury and convenience defining modern life.

However, while technology appears to have brought people closer by providing such conveniences, this abundance of superficial connectivity may simultaneously serve as a primary source of profound loneliness for many. The rapid emergence and evolution of technology have rendered individuals increasingly introverted and individualistic. While the role of individualism in fostering self-expression and the acquisition of personal identity is undeniable, its integration into the fabric of daily life presents significant risks.

By creating environments detached from the social sphere, technology instills a form of individualism in younger generations that may weaken socialization skills and deepen feelings of loneliness and alienation. The ubiquity of smartphones and the ability to connect to social media platforms at any moment have diminished the perceived necessity for face-to-face in-

teraction.

This shift is particularly evident in younger generations. Historically, children sought every opportunity to play outdoors, engaging in games such as hide-and-seek or tag until sunset. However, with the increased accessibility of tablets and computers, children now frequently prefer to stay indoors, engaging with technological devices in isolation. This trend has given rise to terms such as “iPad kids,” supporting the thesis that technology negatively impacts social development from an early age. The preference for spending leisure time online has significantly contributed to social withdrawal and an intensified sense of isolation.

Due to the conveniences offered by technology, individuals have integrated digital tools into every facet of their lives, rendering technology an indispensable component of modern existence.

From education to professional environments, its ubiquitous application has fostered a profound dependency. Frequent activities—such as deferring all inquiries to artificial intelligence or engaging in hours of “doomscrolling” on social media—are eroding the capacity for independent thought.

Crucially, the “showcase of perfection” presented on social media creates a pressure for social comparison that severs ties with reality, trapping individuals in a cycle of perceived inadequacy and self-loathing. A significant consequence of this shift is the normalization of new social cues like “ghosting,” which condemn interpersonal connections to a state of superficiality where trust and sincerity are diminished. When technology ceases to be a tool and becomes the epicenter of existence, the resulting speed and convenience are acquired at the expense of psychological well-being, communal bonds, and profound humanity.

CELLPHONE

Ban curbs many school problems

Continued from Page 1

The pouch is locked upon school arrival and can only be unlocked with magnets that are typically kept in school offices or with teachers.

This is the choice of Watonga Public Schools, a small school in western Oklahoma. They actually received a grant for the pouches, which helped with the cost of implementing this bill.

Although there were some learning curves when the ban was first announced, teachers are widely pleased with how the policy has impacted their school systems.

Kara Locke began teaching nine years ago, when apps like Snapchat and other social media were just beginning to kick start in popularity. As the yearbook teacher at Medford Public Schools, she has personally seen changes in her classroom and in the hallways.

"It's louder," Locke said. "Everything is louder but in such a good way."

Previously, the hallways and lunchrooms saw students with their noses in their phones and headphones in their ears. Now, Locke said students are talking to each other and spending quality time together.

"I see kids actually eating, too," Locke said.

Previously, some kids would spend all of their lunch period on their phones, getting so distracted and invested in their devices that they wouldn't eat.

"Which is weird to think about," Locke said. "It's way louder in the halls, it's way louder at lunch, but in all the good ways."

The absence of cellphones has allowed kids to act their age again, and go through the day without drama and stress, Locke said. Especially at a middle school age, social media can be harmful and distracting.

Administrators have also noticed a change in student behaviors.

"Students have definitely increased their verbal communication with each other, and it has really helped with some student self-confidence, in my opinion," said Garrett Smith, the principal of Weatherford Public Schools.

Smith has been in favor of a no cell phone policy for a long time. He said he has seen a lot of positives to it, like reduced cheating and better school culture.

Smith said he hasn't noticed any negatives from the ban in Weatherford schools. Some parents across the state were concerned about not having access to their kids during the school day. And although it has been an ad-



Students in the yearbook class at Medford High spend more time focusing on their tasks instead of monitoring their phones. Photo by Piper Gallagher

"Students have definitely increased their verbal communication with each other, and it has really helped with some student self confidence."
— Garrett Smith

the office has to get involved, and it's a bigger deal, which has led kids to be more accountable to avoid that.

School districts are able to punish violations of the cellphone policy as they see fit. Schools can use warnings, in-school and out-of-school suspension, and other disciplinary measures at their discretion.

A minor problem that schools have run into is that information is not as easy to get out as it was previously. For example, if an activity bus needs to leave at a different time for a basketball game, the school has to ensure that the information is spread as wide and as quickly as possible, when previously kids could just text their parents to let them know.

"We as a school have to go back to old school and start sending things home [in] communicating better with parents," Locke said. "We just kind of stopped doing that because of the ease of cellphones."

The ban was originally introduced as a one-year trial policy, with schools then having the option to choose whether or not to continue the ban. However, state Superintendent Lindell Fields is supporting a bill that would make this ban permanent, according to KOCO5. This new bill would remove the option of school districts to choose.

Safety is a main concern of some parents who expressed their opinions of being opposed to the ban. But another bill that is also currently being backed by Fields aims to increase school safety and security.

If both of these bills pass, Oklahoma schools will see a permanent concrete ban on cellphones, and funding for security upgrades for increased school safety. According to KOCO5, Senate Bill 1189 would fund things like school officers, security systems and cameras, and shelters in Oklahoma's public schools.

It's important to note that private schools in Oklahoma do not have to adhere to the cellphone ban. This only affects public school systems.

While Oklahoma did not start the trend, other surrounding states have been considering similar policies and legislation. In January of 2026 Kansas began to discuss potential statewide cellphone bans. Much like in Oklahoma, opinions on the ban are divided.

Supporters say it will decrease distractions and encourage participation, while those who oppose it say it is an overstep of school power.

"Some kids were a little upset because they feel like their rights are being denied, but I reminded some of them that until they're 18 and not a student on our campus, they really still have to abide by whatever our rules are," Hilterbran said.

Hilterbran said she actually expected more pushback than they received, and that the Watonga administration handled it early in the summer in order to let students and parents prepare.

justment, the benefits have been clear.

Michelle Hilterbran, a history and AP teacher at Watonga Public Schools, said the changes were even noticeable off campus, like on field trips. When the Watonga FCCLA went on a trip to a district convention, they didn't allow students to have their phones there either.

"I'm proud that Watonga has stuck by it, and we're following through with it," Hilterbran said.

In her classes, Hilterbran said she finds students are more attentive and involved with the material she's teaching, and they are also utilizing resources like their Chromebooks

more often in class time.

Another positive outcome from the cellphone ban has been that schools are able to stop misinformation or gossip spreading about incidents that happen at school.

"It allows us to have some normalcy and control of information before it gets crazy," Hilterbran said.

She said in the past, situations that were not major have blown up or gotten out of control because of phones and social media.

It has also made students, and parents, more responsible. Locke said when kids used to forget things like school or sporting supplies, they could just text their parents. Now,

VIRTUAL

Online school offers many positives

Continued from Page 1

At 8 a.m., while most Oklahoma students are sitting in a classroom waiting for the next bell to ring, one high schooler logs into class from home with his day already mapped out and centered around athletic training.

"I chose Epic over traditional school because of the flexibility with my daily schedule and athletic opportunities," Epic student Baron Prock said.

For him, school is not confined to a building or a rigid seven-hour day. Assignments can be completed around practice, travel and competition. But the flexibility comes with tradeoffs.

That desire for flexibility has become one of virtual education's defining features. When students enroll at Epic, Hatfield said, families work with educators to create an individualized learning plan tailored to the student's goals and schedule.

About 45% of families cite flexible scheduling as their primary reason for choosing the school. For some students, that means pursuing athletics or artistic talents. For others, it means catching up academically, managing health concerns or escaping bullying.

"What started as a very small school has grown incredibly," Hatfield said. "It's quite a testament to the desire for parents to have flexibility and choice in where their kids go to school."

Many families across Oklahoma have begun to utilize the online school option, as virtual charter schools continue to reshape what public education looks like. The question is no longer whether online learning works, but whom it works for and at what cost.

"There may be some idea that it's just a kid in front of a computer," Hatfield said. "That's not the case."

Epic offers field trips, student organizations, e-sports teams and even hybrid options like Common Academy, which allows students to attend in-person classes two days a week while finishing their coursework online.

"We have a path for that," Hatfield said. "However you want to get your education, Epic is there, and we can help make sure that happens."

But, not all virtual schools operate the same way. At Oklahoma Virtual Charter Academy, the structure closely mirrors a traditional school day.

After 35 years of teaching in brick-and-mortar classrooms, Karla Webb transitioned to virtual education this year. Now a reading lab teacher for sixth, seventh and eighth graders, she begins her day promptly at 8:10 a.m. with a live online class.

"If a student logs in at 8:15, they're tardy," Webb said.

Unlike Epic's flexible pacing model, Oklahoma Virtual Charter Academy follows a bell schedule. Students attend live classes, teach-

ers take attendance and coursework aligns with state standards. Webb teaches small remediation groups of nine students per class, allowing for more individualized attention.

"We are under a lot of microscopes," Webb said. "We follow Oklahoma standards, virtual laws and charter laws."

Virtual schools in Oklahoma operate under oversight from the Oklahoma State Department of Education, as well as charter and virtual education regulations. Accountability measures include state testing and academic benchmarks designed to track student growth.

In addition, the Statewide Charter School Board was established in 2013 as the state's primary agency for online learning oversight. Its role is to authorize and review virtual charter school operations across Oklahoma. The board evaluates applications, renewals and contracts and certifies online courses to ensure quality and accountability in digital learning environments.

While flexibility and structure appeal to many families, virtual education's academic impact is a more complicated picture, research shows.

A study from March 2023, published in the Oklahoma Education Journal, examined more than 800,000 state test scores and found that students attending virtual charter schools showed significantly lower academic performance compared to their peers in traditional public schools.

"However, the promise of virtual school has been tempered by research showing consistently poor academic outcomes for virtual school students across the United States," researchers Hill, Bloom, Black and Lipsey wrote in their study. "We find similar patterns here in Oklahoma."

The study also found that students show much lower scores in English language arts and math

Pros and Cons of Online Education

Pros	Cons
Flexible schedule	Less peer interaction
Access to resources	Self-motivation needed
Self-paced learning	Technical issues
Geographic flexibility	Limited hands-on practice
Lower costs	Digital Platform Dependency

Source: Boise State University Online

when they are attending a virtual charter school compared to when these same students are enrolled in a district-run public school.

The findings highlight one of the central debates surrounding virtual education: whether flexibility and individualized plans can outweigh measurable deficiencies in standardized test performance.

Educators within virtual systems argue that test scores rarely tell the full story when it comes to student growth, especially for students who enroll after previously struggling in traditional environments.

Webb said her work focuses heavily on remediation and rebuild-

ing foundational reading skills. She analyzes student behavior and schoolwork and reaches out to families when students fall behind.

"It is our job to make a lot of contacts with parents and students just to make sure everything is OK," she said.

The school operates under a trauma-informed model, meaning teachers are trained to consider students' emotional and environmental challenges alongside academics.

That emphasis on communication challenges a common misconception about online learning, which is that it lacks connection. Educators at both schools say the concern about socialization is valid but manageable. Epic offers clubs, field trips and hybrid learning options. Oklahoma Virtual Charter Academy hosts live classes where students can interact daily.

Educators at Epic and Oklahoma Virtual Charter Academy say the concern is valid, but argue that connection in a virtual setting looks different. Epic addresses this through clubs, e-sports teams, field trips and the hybrid Common Academy model, which gives students face-to-face time with peers twice a week. Oklahoma Virtual Charter Academy builds community through live daily classes where students see and hear from each other in real time, not just submit work into a digital void.

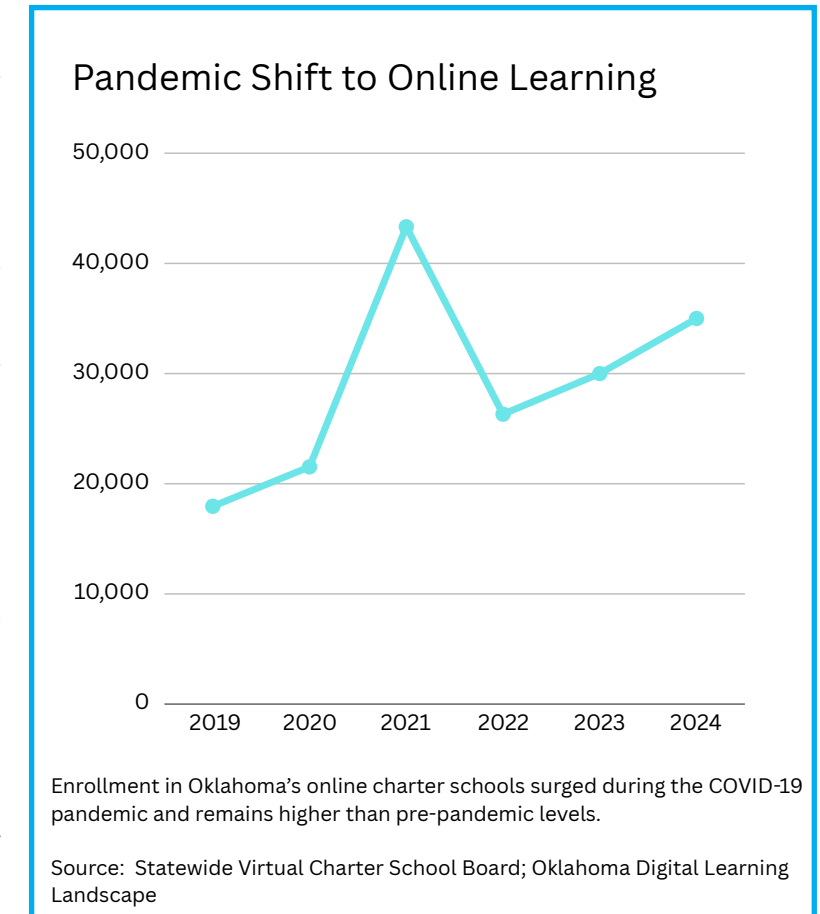
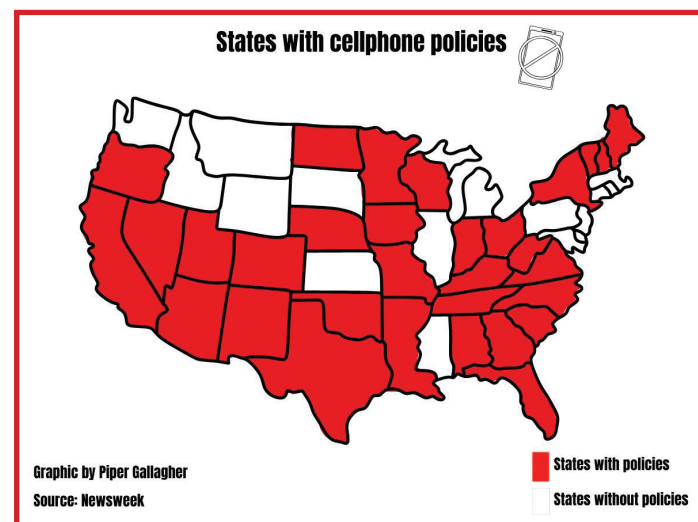
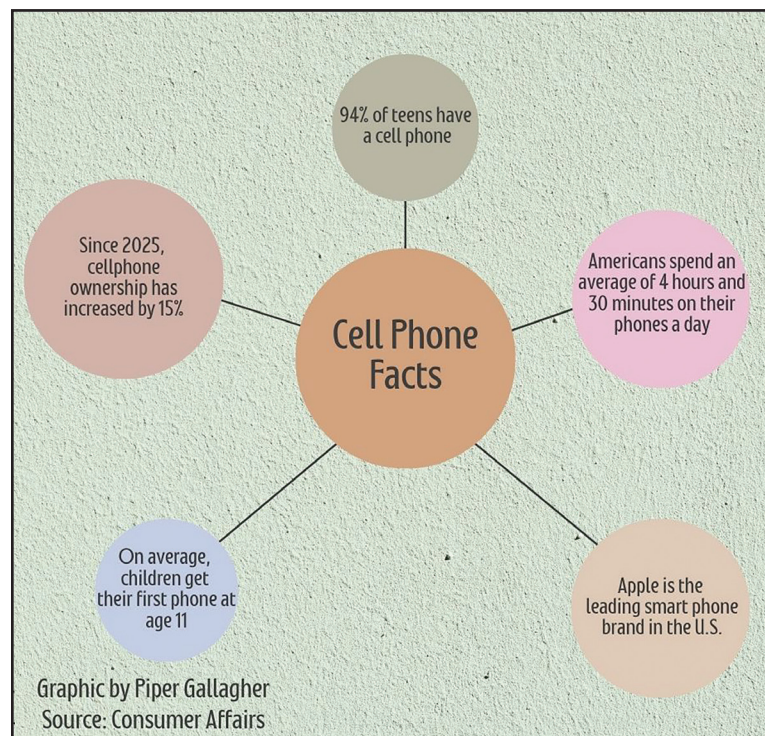
Webb said the live format matters more than people might expect. When students show up to her reading lab each morning, a rhythm to the class exists, the social pressure of a teacher who notices when you are absent or not engaged still exists.

It boils down to this: The degree to which students feel socially fulfilled often depends on the individual. A student who joins clubs, attends hybrid days and participates in live classes will have a different experience than one who completes assignments in isolation. Like most things in virtual education and public schools, the students' success with social experiences is reflected in what students and families are willing to participate in and invest in.

Ultimately, administrators make it clear that the students and their families will get out of their education what they put in, just the same as a brick-and-mortar school. Virtual education is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Some students thrive in structured classrooms surrounded by peers. Others excel when given flexibility and independence. The growth of virtual charter schools reflects a broader shift in how families view public education—not as a single pathway, but as a system with multiple entry points.

For students balancing athletic training, medical appointments or personal challenges, online options can provide opportunities that traditional schools cannot. At the same time, the responsibility to stay motivated and connected often falls more heavily on the student.

Back at his computer, Baron Prock moves through his final assignment before heading to practice. No crowded hallway, no locker to visit between classes. Just the glow of a screen, a schedule shaped around his goals and the particular quiet of a student learning entirely on his own terms, and finally, no bell required to tell him when he's done.



FEATURE

Sidenote:

Being yourself is not a flaw

By JESSICA SCHIEBER
Editor-in-Chief

We so often let the world tell us how we should look, act and what things we should like.

I have never really paid much attention to these sorts of things before believing that being myself will bring the right kind of people into my life.

I like a lot of things that people find odd and different, but I never let that stop me from liking them.

What's the harm in being yourself? Why do so many people think they have the right to tell you how to live your life?

You only have one life, live it to the fullest, if you want to travel to Japan to visit the Tokyo Pokémon Center than don't let anyone tell you that it's too weird to do that.

If you want to travel to Seoul South Korea to experience a different culture, why not go?

If you want to travel to Switzerland to try authentic Swiss chocolate, hey be my guest.



Photo by Jessica Schieber

A picture of Jessica's desk showcasing a collection of trinkets and the books she has for fun reading. Two of the trinkets are Littlest Pet Shops that she collects because they remind her of her childhood.

If you want to travel to all the football stadiums in the NFL, go ahead. If you want to watch the

Olympics in person, do it.

Some things have been more accepted than others, but your life

is your own and you should be allowed to be yourself.

I like collecting Jelly cats, a stuffed animal brand, I like to collect Littlest Pet Shops, a little toy that looks like different animals, I enjoy collecting hockey pucks from the games I go to and I love collecting little trinkets that don't really have names.

Although to many people this stuff may seem childish, it's something that brings me joy and I'm going to continue to do it as long as I still find joy in it.

Another thing that isn't something people would find odd that I do is collect notebooks. I like to buy notebooks and most of the time they'll remain empty or half used until I find some purpose for them.

This year my most recent notebook purchase was from Barnes & Noble; I bought a notebook that is greenish blue and has roses on the cover. There is the quote "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet" on it and I haven't used the book yet.

I also bought a cheap one from

Walmart that I have been using to write one of my works in.

On top of notebooks, I also have a collection of books, many that I haven't read yet.

In my dorm room alone, I have four books I brought for enjoyment reading that I have yet to finish.

The titles of those books are "The English Experience," "First Love, Second Draft," "Dungeons and Drama" and "if he had been with me." I also have the books I'm reading for class.

Being an English major, I find it harder to get time to sit down and read for pleasure because I'm doing it so much as work. But I wouldn't change any of it for the world. I love my major and everyone I have met in the department.

I find it a lot easy to communicate with these people than I have communicated with others for a long time because I know that they have at least some of the same interests as I do.

Find your community and be yourself without feeling ashamed for being who you are.

Comet set to pass by the sun

By JOHN STOWERS
Student Reporter

The next comet to pass by the sun might just be the brightest comet we've seen since 2011.

On Saturday, April 4, 2026, C/2026 A1 (MAPS) will be reaching its perihelion, the closest point to the sun in its orbit.

The comet will be passing by the sun at roughly 0.0057 astronomical units (AU), or less than 530,000 miles, above the surface of the sun.

The last comet to pass this close to the sun was C/2011 W3, also known as the Lovejoy comet, which reached its perihelion at only 0.001 AU, or 87,000 miles, above the sun's surface. Because the C/2026 A1 (MAPS) comet is passing this close to the sun, it has been given a special designation: a Kreutz sungrazer.

Out of this family of comets has come some of the most famous comets ever documented, such as C/1965 S1, also known as Ikeya-Seki and the aforementioned Lovejoy.

The reason for this classification's fame has to do with the close proximity of its members to the sun.

A comet is made up of 4 essential parts: the nucleus, the coma, the ion trail and the dust trail.

When a comet passes that close to the sun, the nucleus — which is primarily made up of ice and dust — undergoes a process called sublimation, which

means that the solid ice changes forms directly into gas without becoming liquid.

The gas from this process creates the coma, which can extend thousands of miles into space.

The gas, along with dust from the nucleus, then get ionized and pushed back by solar winds, which create the dust and ion tails that we see here on Earth.

When a comet gets closer to the sun, it has the potential to get even brighter.

Because of its orbit, C/2026 A1 is rather faint in March, but could brighten rapidly leading up to its solar encounter in early April, Star Walk, a news site and star tracking app that covers astronomical events claims.

If it survives, observers in the Southern Hemisphere will get the best views in mid to late April, especially during evening twilight.

These comets also have a high chance of fragmenting or outright disintegrating.

Only around 1% of all known Kreutz sungrazers survived perihelion with even fewer of them remaining intact through their journey around the sun.

The Ikeya-Seki comet was one of the comets that fragmented after perihelion, but it was still visible during daylight for almost a month, and visible by the aided eye for almost 4 months afterward, so even if C/2026 A1 (MAPS) fragments, it still might put on quite the spectacle in the night sky.

If C/2026 A1 survives its

close encounter with the Sun, it could join the small and informal group of comets often referred to as "great comets" — objects that become exceptionally bright, develop enormous tails, and leave a lasting mark in astronomical history, Star Walk reports.

The other aspect of this comet that makes it so special is the fact that it was discovered quite early. C/2026 A1 (MAPS) was discovered at 2.056 AU, or almost 200 million miles, away from the sun, making it the furthest inbound Kreutz sungrazer ever discovered.

It also has a particularly long orbital period of about 1900 years, which is uncharacteristic of Kreutz sungrazers, which usually have a short orbital period and a short lifespan.

The comet was discovered on January 13, 2026, by 4 amateur astronomers, Alain Maury, Georges Attard, Daniel Parrott and Florian Signoret — hence the name MAPS — from the AMACSI observatory in the Atacama Desert in Chile.

For the best viewing in the northern hemisphere before the April 4 perihelion, go to a clear area where you can see the horizon, and away from any lights.

The comet will be hard to see and will be low in the sky in the direction of the sun, toward the east at dawn and toward the west at dusk.

Viewing after perihelion remains uncertain so be sure to keep watch of the sky after April 4.

Billboard Top 10

1. "Swim" by BTS
2. "Choosin' Texas" by Ella Langley
3. "Man I need" by Oliva Dean
4. "I Just Might" by Bruno Mars
5. "Ordinary" by Alex Warren
6. "Golden" by HUNTR/X: EJAE, Audrey Nuna and REI AMI
7. "So Easy (To Fall In Love)" by Oliva Dean
8. "Stateside" by PinkPantheress and Zara Larson
9. "The Fate of Ophelia" by Taylor Swift
10. "Folded" by Kehlani

Expect Fentanyl & Test First

What is fentanyl?

- Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is up to 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine.
- It is a major contributor to fatal and nonfatal overdoses in the U.S.

What is a fentanyl test strip?

Fentanyl test strips are small strips of paper that can detect the presence of fentanyl in all different kinds of drugs (cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, etc.) and drug forms (pills, powder and injectables).



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ENTERTAINMENT

Is the opera slowly dying out?

By KEVIN KAUMANS
Entertainment Editor

Recently, I have been seeing these debates online recently about whether or not opera is dying. Like I said last week: These days, the youth prefer movies over more older forms of media.

Even if someone reading this is one of the select few of the younger generation that prefers the more “classical” stuff like, say, orchestras, for example, the fact remains that if you were to walk up to the average American teenager or college student, chances are they cannot tell you the last time they’ve been to a theater to hear opera.

Typically, though I tend to write about it

in the newspapers on occasions, celebrity news bores me. I know a lot of students my age finds them intriguing based solely on the absurd happenings with the rich elites, but I always found it to be quite the vapid form of distraction.

That being said, though the occasions may be rare, there are exceptions to this. Once in a blue moon, a celebrity will do or say something that actually ends up sparking debates on our society.

Recently, famous actor Timothee Chalamet has been coming under fire recently after an interview in which he says that he is glad not to work for the ballet or opera because “no one cares about them anymore”.

While I can understand why some might be offended by this statement, I get where he is coming from. Note: For the sake of

this article, I will not be focusing on any controversy Mr. Chalamet has been involved in or who he is as a person. I am merely talking about what he said about ballet and opera.

It is true that, despite not being the center of the entertainment industry like they once were, ballet and opera still have many die-hard fans ready to spend their money on them.

However, the sad fact is that most kids today do not have much interest in them. Think about it: When was the last time you have seen a group of kids talking about their favorite conductor or who the best ballet dancer of today is?

I am not bringing that up to make fun of anyone who performs in or attends operas, I am just pointing out that a thing can only

survive if new generations continue to do it.

If none of the future adults show any interest in the opera, how will it survive? Who will make sure these classic traditions stay alive?

Now, I am not saying that there is a definite chance that theaters showing operas and the like will go out of business anytime soon.

Who knows, maybe in ten years from now we will see a regression to the classics. Perhaps operas will become the new “TikTok” or “Instagram” (though I would not hold my breath).

What do you think, fellow reader? Will operas still exist fifty years from now? Will the younger generation come to appreciate it over time?

A Short Story

‘Night Life at the Bar’: new entry in ‘Buddy’ saga

By KEVIN KAUMANS
Entertainment Editor

Rachel told herself last week that she would stop drinking. When she was a kid, she would joke with her friends that two things ran in her family: Nicotine and alcoholism. Her dad was a drunk, her mom’s dad was a drunk, Hell, most of her cousins were or are drunks.

She first started drinking when she was fifteen. It wasn’t anything serious in the beginning; She and Samuel would wait for Mom and Dad to go to bed before breaking into the liquor cabinet. They would take the cheap bottle of whiskey and fill them into small glasses before filling the bottle with water. They would then turn off the light in their bedrooms and sneak out into the backyard. Buddy would sometimes join them, bringing a can of soda as a chaser.

Rachel never believed she had a problem, not compared to the rest of the family at least. She knew her limit, which can’t be said for most men she’s encountered in her life. She had a special rule in place for when she is out drinking: Once she starts feeling sick, she’ll stop.

Rachel looked up at the plain white clock on the bar well, just above the shelf. The time was eleven-twenty; *Paul’s* will close in forty minutes. She sighs, ordering a glass of Seagram’s Seven. “On the rocks, please.”

With a small smile, Paul began fixing her drink. Paul was a lanky, bald man in his eighties who had known Rachel ever since she was a baby. “How long have you been home for?” he asks.

Rachel had to bite her tongue to stop herself from snapping at him. She knew Paul meant well. She knew that he would have no way of knowing how trapped she felt returning to the town she was raised in. A town in the middle of nowhere, where most things outside the limits may as well not exist. “About a month now. I have been helping my mom get things ready for the funeral.”

Paul’s wrinkly face dropped to a frown. “Ah...I’ve heard about what happened. When is it?”

“Friday, at ten,”

“I’ll be there.”

“Thank you.”

She sipped away at her drink. They were the only people left in the bar that night, everyone else having turned in. The entire building was dead quiet except

for the sound of Paul washing dirty glasses and the clock ticking.

“It’s all lies, you know.” Rachel said suddenly.

“Huh?” Paul asked, stopping halfway through cleaning a glass.

“Whatever Sam’s been going around saying about me.” She mutters. The brown-haired woman looked down at her now empty drink. “It’s all crap.” She stood up from her stool, walking behind the counter to refill her drink before sitting back down. “Sorry, I...I just really need another drink.”

“No, you’re fine.” Paul said reassuringly, despite the twitch in his smile saying otherwise.

She downed half her glass. “I’m not saying I was a good sister. Hell, I guess you could even say I’m the worst now. I’m not gonna sit here and say I don’t have some responsibility in what happened. But Sam isn’t the saint he’s been making himself out to be either. If you knew half the shit he done to him...” Rachel turned her head to look out the bar window.

“Ma’am?”

“I’m fine, I’m fine, just the drink talking.” She laughed, flashing the old man that bright,

childish smile he used to see from her all the time. She stood up, taking out her wallet. “How much do I owe ya?”

Paul put his hand up. “Don’t worry about it.”

“I’m not about to rob a man I’ve known for twenty years. C’mon, how much?”

Paul put away the glass he was washing. “I’m retiring this year. Me and Gertrude are moving to Enid at the end of this Summer. Consider this a late birthday gift.”

“I...alright then. I guess this is good-bye Paul.” Rachel said, her words starting to slur.

The old man laughed. “Why

Rachel, you make sound like we’ll never see each other again. Enid is only a hour away.”

Rachel stopped right in front of the exit. Without turning around, Paul heard her say in a soft, melancholia-filled voice. “The world is changing. Nothing about this god-forsaken place is how I remember it. Everyone I know is either dead or pulling away from me. I’m practically a damn ghost at this point.”

“Rachel?”

She stepped out into the starless night, saying nothing more.

Fun Facts

- Nevada is the only state in America where prostitution is legal.
- You can legally buy a pet otter in Oklahoma.
- It is rumored that over ten-million men alive today are related to Mongolian warlord Genghis Khan in some way.
- Entertainment Editor Kevin Kaumans’ favorite candybar is a Reese’s fast break.
- Photo Editor Ingrid Maldonado used to be a massive “Harry Potter” fan when she was younger.
- Rats are ticklish and are actually able to “giggle”.
- Drinking green tea everyday can offer health benefits.

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SPORTS

Track keeps breaking records

By **SHEALYNN PRATT**
Student Reporter

Northwestern's Track and Field team continues to break records as they begin their outdoor season, and the team credits the coaches, whereas the coaches credit the athletes.

The team had their second meet of the outdoor season on Saturday at Oklahoma Baptist University.

Jamaira Ross, a senior from Richardson, Texas, has set and broke the school record six times in the 800m this year. During the first outdoor meet, Ross broke her 800m record with a time of 2:26.18 and secured 2nd in the 5000m at the UTSA Invitational Meet. During Saturday's meet, Ross broke the school record in the 3k steeplechase with a time of 11:26.11.

"When I race, I have learned to stay out of my head and stop telling myself that I couldn't do it," Ross said. "Stop worrying about everyone else's time and just run because I just want to get better and push to my max."

With over ten years under her belt, she says that the team dynamic and coaching staff is what makes her experience running at Northwestern different. She gives credit to Sterlin Broomfield, Head Women's & Men's Cross Country Coach.

"There is way more support than all of my other schools," Ross said. "Broomy has always been there and if I have a bad race he always tells me to keep my eyes on the future and to not dwell on the past."

As her final track season is underway, she says that she is happy for how her emotions have changed towards the sport.

"In the past, it felt like a job and I just felt like a number but here I feel like the coaches and my teammates see me as a person and don't just see me for how I



NWOSU Athletics Photo

Northwestern competitor Zach Thomas, throws a javelin in Shawnee in the competition at Oklahoma Baptist.

run," Ross said.

The Head Women's Track and Field Coach Jill Lancaster says that is the exact goal of the coaching staff.

"Being patient in this environment, respecting the athletes that we have and treating them like individuals is so much easier than in a 'survival of the fittest' environment."

Coach Lancaster says their job is to educate and to be patient with their athletes. As the coaching staff remains respective of the team's academics, receiving Academic All-American every year in Women's Cross Country since the program has started.

"We have a vision for the students and it's not about what they have done, it is about what they can do," Lancaster said.

Cadence Long-Torres, GAC Athlete of the Week, has been running track for eight years and from Moore, Oklahoma. She says that the coaching staff has altered the training plan as they begin

their outdoor season.

"This season we have been implementing double threshold training days where we do two workouts in one day," Long said. "The goal is to build our lactic acid threshold to maximize our aerobic capacity and since implementing this into our weekly training plan, I have seen improvements in mine and my teammates' performances."

Being named Athlete of the Week has not come easy for Long.

"Any accolades I've earned come from discipline and dedication rather than pure talent, all the hard work I've put in over the years has paid off and I'm so grateful," Long said.

Coach Lancaster says as the program grows, so does the progress.

"Now we are getting enough depth, so our younger athletes have someone to follow and that is monopolizing the numbers of them getting better because it is easier with a unit," Lancaster

said.

The freshmen on the team also say that the outdoor season comes with its own pressure.

Jeremiah Anderson, from Columbia, Missouri, has set and broken his own school record twice in the long jump, was named GAC Field Athlete of the Week in December and is currently first in Conference. On Saturday's meet, Anderson got first place with 2.13m.

"I just go out there and jump," Anderson said.

Anderson says the group of jumpers have also implemented double threshold days whenever it comes to preparation during the outdoor season.

"I just had practice two times in one day, the workouts have changed and my schedule has been moved back farther."

Anderson ran track throughout high school but credits Assistant Head Coach Tamaj Gordon and teammates, like Malakhi Straker, for help regarding his personal

development, saying it's all family oriented.

Aaliyah Cobb, a freshman sprinter from Dallas, Texas, ran in the indoor season, breaking the school record for the 200m dash with a time of 25.55. She and teammates Madyson Organ, Jada White and Kerr'Yelle Carter also broke the school record in the 4x4 with a time of 3:59.51.

"Everybody here is driven to be the best and being in an environment where I'm not the only one who wants to get better and take this to the next level is really refreshing," Cobb said.

The team is not just breaking records because of skill, Cobb credits bonding outside of the sport.

"Having fun and really trying to bond with each other outside of track really helps with us hyping each other up and reminding each other that we are fast," Cobb said.

Lancaster says that the coaching staff understands and appreciates dynamics like that.

"They depend on each other for rides or entertainment because it's not like we are in a large city where they can get distracted, so I think that the environment is just right for them to be successful."

Cobb credits the care of the coaching staff and Head Sprints Coach Zaccheus Beasley for her improvements as an athlete.

"The coaching staff is probably one of the best that I've ever had," Cobb said. "They're just really driven and Coach Zach has been doing research, like he has pages and pages and he even goes to other coaches to get more insight on how to coach us better."

Coach Lancaster says the care that runs through the program highlights how important athletics have been on the Ranger campus, especially for new recruits.

"We are an environment where we allow our athletes to develop and we are fortunate enough to have coaches that understand that we have to lay the groundwork," Lancaster said.

Softball

Game	Runs	Hits
Game 1		
NWOSU	0	1
SNU	4	9
Game 2		
NWOSU	0	3
SNU	7	15
Game 3		
NWOSU	0	2
SNU	8	11
Game 4		
NWOSU	0	4
FHSU	8	5
Game 5		
NWOSU	2	5
FHSU	10	11

Rodeo continues to impress as 2025-26 season continues on

By **OAKLEE FIELDER**
Sports Editor

The rodeo team was in Garden City, Kansas as they competed in the Garden City Community College Rodeo, with some amazing finished in multiple events.

As the Central Plains Region Rodeo season is drawing to a close, the Rangers and Lady Rangers are finding ways to keep pushing as they continue to score points adding to their current standings.

There are two event leaders in the standings from Northwestern. Nathan Duvall leads the steer wrestling event, with four more Rangers in the top five. Emmett

Edler in 3rd, Tydon Tsoie in 4th and Sam Daly in 5th. The Rangers continue to do well in the steer wrestling event, as they have led in the event in the latest rodeos.

The other event standings leader from Northwestern is Payton Dingman in the goat tying event. Dingman sits in first with five points separating her and one of the Southwestern Oklahoma State competitors. Although Dingman has not done as well as the second-place competitor, there is still time before the end of the season, where she can grab some points.

Kendyll Miller sits 3rd in the breakaway event, as she sits comfortably in that position, despite not scoring points since the sec-

ond rodeo of the school year in Southeastern Oklahoma State.

Overall, the teams sit 4th for the women and 5th for the men.

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SPORTS

Rangers sweep Crimson Storm

By **OAKLEE FIELDER**
Sports Editor

The Rangers swept the Southern Nazarene University Crimson Storm last weekend in a three-game series with two games ending with a lead of over 10 runs.

The Rangers came back home after defeating Panhandle State on March 24 for a weekend against Southern Nazarene. The Crimson Storm entered as the expected losers as they sat at the bottom of the Great American Conference standings with only one conference win. The Rangers were able to hold their ground against SNU and swept them in the three-game series.

After the three wins, the Rangers still sit in the lower parts of the standings 9th. They are above East Central and are just one win behind Henderson State, Oklahoma Baptist and Ouachita Baptist.

After the win over Panhandle and the three wins over SNU, Jailon Goodfellow was announced as the GAC Player of the Week. Goodfellow had reached base 14 out of 16 at bats. He had six runs scored, eight hits, 10 RBIs and two homeruns over the four games. These are some amazing stats that hopefully will carry over to next week.

SNU 2-5 NWOSU

The first game against the Crimson Storm had the Rangers down by one to start. SNU scored in the first inning, and held the lead until the fifth.

In the fifth, Goodfellow hit a homerun to left field, taking Joel Lindahl home with him. The Rangers kept their momentum rolling into the next inning as

Chase Gordon hit a sacrifice out to send Alex Dabrowski home. In the seventh, the Rangers' momentum didn't stop, and they scored two more runs to extend their lead to four.

Lindahl hit a double to left center to send Jason McCarty home. Then, after Matthew Bailey got onto base, Jailon Goodfellow hit a single to left field, sending Lindahl home to make it a 5-1 game.

The Crimson Storm were not able to score anymore runs, besides one in the top of the ninth, giving the win to the home team to start the long weekend for SNU.

Lindahl and Goodfellow had two hits to each of their names. Goodfellow had three RBIs. Will Kates started on the mound and had three strikeouts. Elias Herrera relieved Kates and had three strikeouts as well. Ryan McClaskey came onto the mound to close the final inning and struck out the two batters he faced.

SNU 1-19 NWOSU

The Rangers continued their momentum off of the first game, and put a beatdown on the Crimson Storm in the next games. The Crimson Storm opened the game with a run scored in the first inning. The Rangers then scored in the next six straight innings, with two innings having more than five runs scored by Northwestern.

In the second inning, Goodfellow hit a homerun to score, taking Bailey with him, giving Northwestern the lead. In the third, the Rangers scored two more times with a double from Gordon sending Blake Mattern home, and a sacrifice fly from Cole Barton sending Gordon home.



Photo by Victor Kinzie

Northwestern pitcher Will Kates throws a pitch against the Southern Nazarene University Crimson Storm.

The Rangers were not done there, they scored six runs in the fourth, extending their lead to nine. After Brandon Jennings, Dabrowski and Barton had RBIs, Lindahl hit a homerun with McCarty and Barton on base, giving Northwestern three more runs.

The fifth inning wasn't as wild as the one before, as there was only one run scored by the Rangers. Barton hit a single to send Mattern home, giving the Rangers a 10-run lead. In the sixth, the Rangers locked in the win, if there was any doubt, with eight runs in the inning.

The Rangers walked away from the first game of the day with a huge 18-run win over the Crimson Storm.

Gordon had the most hits with four, he also had three RBIs. Barton and Lindahl had four RBIs. Mattern and Goodfellow had

three runs scored. Logan Sandoval pitched all seven innings of the game. He ended with six strikeouts and only four hits against him.

SNU 2-14 NWOSU

The Rangers stomped Southern Nazarene in the final game of the series, forcing this game to end in seven innings as well.

The Rangers opened scoring in the third inning with their second eight-run inning of the weekend. Jennings, Mattern, Barton, McCarty and Lindahl all had singles, sending various runners home. Then, there was a wild pitch which allowed McCarty to run home. Later, Goodfellow hit a double to send Bailey and Lindahl home.

SNU responded with a homerun in the following inning, but that was immediately cut down by a run scored by Northwestern

in the same inning.

In the fifth, Mattern hit a double, sending Dabrowski, Jennings and Bailey home, giving the Rangers a 11-run lead. Southern Nazarene had a run scored in the sixth, but then, Northwestern scored two runs after a hit from Goodfellow.

Goodfellow, Lindahl and Mattern had three hits. Goodfellow and Mattern had four RBIs. Bailey ran home the most with three runs scored. Kyle Holzer had five strikeouts in the five innings he pitched.

The next games for NWOSU will be against Oklahoma Baptist this weekend in Shawnee. Then, they go to Topeka to face Washburn University. Oklahoma Baptist is one of the close rivals in the standings, which might prove as an important weekend with only four weeks left in the season.

Lady Rangers win, Rangers finish high in seperate golf tournaments

By **OAKLEE FIELDER**
Sports Editor

Both men and women's golf had amazing results over the week as they both finished in the top half of the tournaments they

were in.

The Rangers finished sixth out of 18 in the Tommy Riggs Collegiate Invitational in Pittsburg, Kansas. The women placed first in the ABC Supply Invitational, winning over four other GAC teams in Enid.

The men had a total score of +55, finishing just one stroke better than Missouri Western. The women also had a score of +55, three strokes better than Southeastern Oklahoma.

Chris Xiao was the best Ranger of the day as he finished 11th with a score of +11. Mathieu Zerwin was not far behind as he finished 15th with a score of +12.

Pierce Geminden finished 28th with a score of +15. Further down the order were Zac Farmer if 67th with a score of +25 and An-chieh Tsai in 79th with a score of +28.

The Rangers have no more competitions before the GAC Championship. The Rangers have bested all teams in various competitions besides Harding. Northwestern has topped the Rangers thrice and the two teams tied in the Perkins Cup, the head-to-head competition in the fall semester. The Rangers look to have a good finish in the GAC Championship.

Over in Enid, Northwestern had two of the top three golfers.

Gracie Duke finished 2nd with a score of +7. Just behind Duke was Tess Linden in 3rd with a score of +10.

Heather Hunkele finished 8th with a score of +19. Amanda Lane and Kelsey Hoy-Pollard tied for 14th with identical scores of +23. Ava Borne finished 25th with a score of +39.

The Lady Rangers have one



NWOSU Athletics Photo

An-chieh Tsai swings in Pittsburg.

more competition before the GAC Championship. They will be at Monkey Island at the Shangri-La Country Club to compete in the Spring Regional Preview hosted by Rogers State.

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LIFE SKILLS

Many HS grads feel unprepared

Continued from Page 1

Major global conflicts in the 20th century accelerated changes in both the workforce and the classroom. Before World War II, many American men worked in factories, gaining mechanical and technical skills through direct experience. During the war, as men deployed overseas, women entered industrial jobs in large numbers. They learned welding, machinery operation and engineering-related skills that had previously been dominated by men.

According to historical accounts from the National WWII Museum, women's expanded participation in the workforce during World War II marked a turning point in American labor history. Although some women returned to domestic roles after the war, many remained employed outside the home. For the first time, vocational skills were broadly developed across genders, reinforcing the value of hands-on training.

Another major education shift was during The Cold War, a war between the United States and Soviet Union between 1947 and 1991. The United States felt threatened by the Soviets, and President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the National Defense Education Act, which raised federal funding for mathematics, science, engineering and foreign language classes.

The goal was to strengthen the nation's scientific and technological capabilities in response to Soviet advancements. While the legislation expanded opportunities in academic fields, it also signaled a growing emphasis on classroom-based, theory-driven education over trade-oriented instruction.

Over the following decades, additional federal policies continued reshaping the public education system. Under President George W. Bush, the No Child Left Behind Act placed strong emphasis on standardized testing as a measure of student achievement and school accountability. Standardized tests, typically a yearly test, assess student proficiency in core subjects such as math and reading. School funding and evaluations often depend on those scores.

While standardized testing has some benefits, critics argue that it is one of the main culprits for the demise of vocational learning.

Payne said standardized testing can restrict instructional flexibility. Payne has taught for 20 years at the high school level, including dual-credit courses, and holds certification in technology education.

"Standardized testing does kind of put a limit on what you can teach," Payne said. "Don't get me wrong; it [standardized testing] does have its benefits. However, it doesn't necessarily mean that it's the correct way to measure if a kid is ready for the real world."



Northwest Technology photo

Life skills classes, such as welding, used to be taught as part of the high school curriculum. Now, they are usually found at technology centers.

Payne said teachers often feel pressure to prioritize material that appears on state exams. As a result, lessons focused on practical life applications may receive less attention.

Jeremy Eaton, assistant superintendent of the Northwest Technology Center, expressed similar concerns. Eaton said standardized testing is good for the government but doesn't think it is the most accurate way to measure if a student is ready for college.

"Just because a student has a high-test score, does it mean that they are ready for college?" Eaton said. "I think we need to re-evaluate what we deem as successful for students."

Eaton said when funding and performance evaluations are tied to test results, educators naturally focus on tested subjects. He said that approach can unintentionally sideline career and technical education programs.

Dr. Jen Oswald, education department chair at Northwestern Oklahoma State University, said standardized testing is aligned with state and federal curriculum standards. However, she noted that local districts still retain some flexibility in designing courses that meet community needs. This means that each district can have a curriculum that is tailored to them.

The curriculum as a whole has changed from 30 years ago. Today, the curriculum is all about college and career readiness. Payne said high schools are now more focused on getting kids prepared for college.

"The curriculum today is all focused on passing a test to prepare you for college," Payne said.

In addition to college readiness, high school students also have more pathways to take than traditional classes.

"There are so many choices for high school students today to go down their own career path," Oswald said. "High schools now offer many dual credit classes and even specific classes to what they want to major in. They also offer career pathway classes for students."

Despite expanded academic options, vocational programs are not always integrated into the traditional school day. Many districts rely on separate vocational-technical centers to provide trade-based instruction.

At the Northwest Technology Center, students can pursue certifications in automotive technology, biomedical sciences and other career-focused fields. Eaton said these programs emphasize applied learning, allowing students to use math, science and critical-thinking skills in practical settings.

"For example, even if a student is not taking an advanced statistics course, they are using math every day in our programs," Eaton said. "They see how those concepts apply directly to real work."

The vo-tech center in Gulfport, Mississippi, also uses applied science. Welding is a major part of the vo-tech center. One major employer in the region is Ingalls Shipbuilding, which hires skilled welders

and technicians. Many students don't want to go to college or think that college is for them, so they take welding classes in high school.

Vocational education demonstrates how academics translate into real-world applications. In welding or automotive classes, students use geometry to measure angles and physics to understand force and motion. In culinary programs, students apply math to calculate ingredient proportions and manage costs.

At the same time, traditional academic courses develop critical thinking, communication and analytical skills that are essential in any career field. English classes teach students how to interpret complex texts and construct persuasive arguments. Science courses foster inquiry and experimentation.

All the teachers that were interviewed suggested that there should be a life skills class that teaches students the blend between vocational and traditional learning. Thirty years ago, this class would be called home economics.

Today, home economics classes are rare. Oswald said schools in the rural Oklahoma area are cutting home economics because of budget cuts.

Payne said schools are cutting home economics to add more college and career readiness classes. Eaton said Oklahoma schools do teach budget and marketing classes in high school, but many college students don't know how to apply what they learned to real life.

