Formulating a college transfer essay can be a highly strung and anxious procedure. The meaning of a college transfer essay is to reveal to the college a little more about the person behind the application. Your first impression of such a task might be heartwarming and wholesome. The college that I wish to attend wants to know more about me? Amazing! Sadly, that is not the reality. The truth is, writing a college transfer essay can be an immensely stressful and a demanding chore. No need to fear, however. Buried in the depths that is the hell of college transfer essays rose a hero; that hero’s name is John Findura.

John Findura, along with Kelly Keane, an associate professor who also serves as faculty in the college’s writing center, has created a college essay transfer program that has been running unofficially for years. However, due to the increase in exams, a lot of students began asking for help. The goal of the program, which launched officially in 2017, is to aid students that are working on the written component to the transfer process into four-year institutions for absolutely no charge.

“We are supporting students who would not have otherwise received assistance,” Keane said.

Our dynamic duo, Findura and Keane, along with other tutors have held over 12 workshops accumulating over 120 students helped by their program. Findura’s valiant quest to rescue transfer students and their essays didn’t go unnoticed. The program located at Bergen Community College has won the “Innovation of the Year Award” which was a pleasant surprise to Findura and his band of tutors.

Despite all the attention the college transfer essay program is receiving. When it comes to what students actually know about the program, it is surprisingly sub-par. When admission season begins there are workshops that students are able to attend. Students are even able to set up and schedule one-on-one appointments with tutors. “Students doubt that their story is unique to get into a four-year school,” Findura said. “We want to help them find those moments that set them apart,” Keane added.

The only issue the program suffers is the lack of students who attend similar programs outside of BCC. Specifically, students who don’t attend Bergen Community College and are in need of assistance, but even students who currently attend Bergen are clueless about this program. Findura wishes to share his program with the students attending Bergen and even expand it to students elsewhere.

The New York Police Athletic League has also given recognition to the program. In fact, in December 2018, Findura, Keane and three professional tutors visited the Bronx PAL site to hold a writing-intensive session for seniors in high school who are looking for more preparation when it comes to producing college essays.

Findura and Keane will also be presenting information on the transfer essay initiative at the Association for the Coaching and Tutoring Profession conference in Orlando, Florida in March.

If you or others are plagued with the inconvenience of a college transfer essay and looking to improve your writing, visit John Findura at Bergen Community College and get started on the college transfer essay program and see what you can accomplish in room L-125 across from the Bursar.
Dr. Redmond Tackles Tuition and College Curriculum with SGA

DANIEL CURRIER
STAFF WRITER

On January 30, College President Dr. Michael Redmond addressed SGA members during a senate meeting. In his briefing, Redmond discussed changes to the college regarding the undecided student curriculum and tuition.

At the start, Redmond announced that the college has hired two new staff members for the executive team. In order to aid the President, the college has hired Brian Agnew as the Executive Vice President and Ronald Miller as the Director of the Foundation Fund, whose combined salary is over $300,000 per year.

Redmond discovered that approximately 39 students burned through their financial aid by the start of their last semester, leaving them without funding. After helping these students regain their financial aid, Redmond spoke to the Foundation. He made two requests: “To start building up some reserves and to start using those monies more strategically with students.” With this direction, this issue will likely be resolved.

Redmond then moved on to discuss 60-credit degrees. He told the senate that a school is currently working on reforming the curriculum to meet these new requirements. He stated that the Faculty Senate has approved of the initial 40 percent of the A.A and A.S programs, and is looking forward to the approval of the remaining 60 percent. Some of these approved changes include six credits worth of free electives, and a permanent place for the Success 101 course.

During this time, the topic of A.S.P.S, GEN arose and he updated the senate on their efforts. A.S.P.S, GEN is the most popular program at the school, and is used primarily by undecided students. However, due to its lack of structure and other key factors, it has the lowest retention and graduation rates of any degree program in the college. At this time, roughly 4,000 students occupy this program.

Redmond asserted that Phi Theta Kappa had recently collaborated with the college administration on creating a new default curriculum to alleviate this issue. “It will not go into place this fall,” he said. “It’s going to be a two year project.” Redmond is currently working with the faculty senate to finalize this project.

There’s also been talk about whether or not the A.S.P.S, GEN program will be an A.A or an A.S.- an A.S having more flexibility in terms of coursework and an A.A being more concrete and definitive. The templates that have been approved to allow six credits for free electives, which Redmond calls “a win for students,” since this is twice the amount of previous free elective credits.

Redmond also discussed the consequences of the newly mandated 60-credit requirement. The four to six credits that have been taken from Bergen’s degree requirements haven’t just disappeared. According to Redmond, they’ve “shifted from the two-year sector to the four-year sector.” Bergen Community College will suffer a loss of $1,460,000 by next year as a result of the new legislation. Another casualty of this mandate was the previously promised banded tuition, which would provide students with a sizeable discount by taking four or more classes. According to the president, the institution of banded tuition will be delayed by another year.

There will be a 1.5 percent increase in tuition and fees, meaning that the cost per credit will jump from $144.25 to $146.50.

To offset this, Redmond plans to eliminate what he calls “misuse fees.” One of which is the $10 it costs to change registration at the beginning of each semester. Redmond stated that the charge served no educational purpose. For example, if a student dropped one class in the morning, added one in the afternoon and then dropped another one at night, the student would be charged $30. However, if the student were to make all of those changes at once in the same session with an advisor, the student would be charged $10. Redmond sees this as “fundamentally wrong,” and will be eliminating the fee.

The second fee getting eliminated will be the reinstatement fee—the one students pay when returning to BCC after being on probation or being dismissed.

Despite financial losses, an additional $5 million deficit has been closed, and more funding has been restored by the county.

Karl Lagerfeld Dead at 85(ish)

KATY TEMPLE
EDITOR IN CHIEF

On February 19 the creative director of Chanel, Fendi and his own label, Karl Lagerfeld, passed away at what is presumed to be age 85 (he often lied about his age and the year he was born).

Lagerfeld is credited for saving the House of Chanel and rebranding the line when he accepted the position of House of Chanel and rebranding the iconic snowy white hair, tailored suit and the iconic shoulder bags, he true to staple Chanel pieces like pant suits and the iconic shoulder bags, he was the previously promised banded tuition, which would provide students with a sizeable discount by taking four or more classes. According to the president, the institution of banded tuition will be delayed by another year.

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Karl Lagerfeld in 2008 // Wikimedia Commons

Fendi Store Opening // via Flickr
Animals are Dying to Warn us

DANIELA GOMEZ
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Animals such as the polar bear and the amur leopard are on the verge of extinction. February 20, 2019, marked the first recorded animal to vanish due to climate change. A tiny brown rat, known as the bramble cay melomy, was found on a small island located in Northern Australia.

The bramble cay melomys first settled on the island of Torres Strait, close to the coast of Papua New Guinea. They were first found in the 1970s. Scientists claim it has been 10 years (as of 2009) since the bramble cay melomys have been seen. Its population has decreased ever since it was discovered.

In 2016, both the Australian government and the Queensland State government came to an agreement and listed the animal as extinct. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) recognized Australia as a country with one of the world’s highest rates for extinction. A report was issued from the state government explaining how these rodents became extinct due to an overflowing of low cays. This eventually lead the bramble cay melomys to lose their habitat.

The loss of these animals has caused great sadness to Australia, even if they weren’t as known until today.

Scientists believe the effects of climate change started in the early 1830s and began to show serious signs in the 1960s. It has impacted our economy and the air we breathe throughout the years. More than 93 percent of heat from global warming is being transferred to our oceans.

Another animal that is close to extinction is the polar bear, that relies entirely off of sea-ice. The water temperature is continuing to rise rapidly and the arctic ice packs, which are located in open areas between sea ice, are melting and make it difficult for polar bears to hunt. They depend greatly on these ice patches because that is where seals, their main source of food, are mainly located.

Due to climate change, the patches melt and cause the polar bears to become helpless and starve. Studies predict polar bears could become extinct in the next 50 years or sooner if necessary actions aren’t taken for them to live.

Polar bears are just one example of the 16,306 animal species that are endangered. To name a few, there are also snow leopards, giant pandas, monarch butterflies, green sea turtles, African and Asian elephants, cheetahs and mountain gorillas. About 41,415 species, including both animals and plants, are on the IUCN red list and only 65 animals are found in confinement. 500 years later, about 800 species will become extinct because of climate change and other human activities, being the burning of fossil fuels and more. Countless elephants are dying due to the urge of humans wanting their tusks for ivory. Tigers are being killed and skinned to be used as rugs for furniture accessories.

Animals don’t have voices. It is predicted that if no human cares enough about these animals to take action against endangerment and animal cruelties, they will soon die off.

Homeless Youth Task Force

KARISSA ROSEN
STAFF WRITER

Whether it’s unemployment, addiction, alcoholism, natural disasters, no support, mental health issues or affordable housing, there are too many young adults facing homelessness.

“Young people are often considered the ‘invisible homeless’ and there are fewer statistics for this group as they don’t normally engage with services,” said The Medium.

Bergen County leaders created the Homeless Youth Task Force, targeting homeless individuals between the ages of 18 and 24. After conquering U.S. veteran homelessness to functional zero, Bergen County is paying more attention to the younger people living on the streets.

The county aims to provide support to young adults in mental and physical health, job training and affordable housing. The task force is made up of representatives from the Department of Health, Human Services, Christ Church, New Bridge Medical Center, Bergen Community College, The Center for Food and Action and others.

Bergen Community College itself has improved its efforts to support the homeless in recent years. The college now offers more counseling while also helping students pay bills (including rent) and partnering with the Center for Food Action pantry.

The most recent search for homeless youth was Tuesday, January 23, 2019.

“Volunteers holding flashlights and carrying bags with toiletries and clothing started the count at 9 p.m. at Garden State Plaza and finished at 1:30 a.m. at Bergen Community College. They walked through classrooms, drove around parking lots and looked under the college’s stairwells, where Cynthia Rivera, a public safety officer at the school, found a homeless veteran,” said northjersey.com.

To get involved in helping Bergen County and their homeless youth initiative, one can get in touch with Bergen Volunteer Center, a non-profit organization, at 201-489-9454. They are located in Hackensack, New Jersey. One can also contact the non-profit organization, Family Promise of Bergen County, at 201-833-8009, located in Ridgewood, New Jersey.

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LGBT History to be Taught in Public Schools

KARISSA ROSEN
STAFF WRITER

New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy (D) signed a bill in late January that will require schools to teach about the societal, economic and political contributions of the LGBT community. New Jersey will now be the second state (after California, in which the FAIR act was instituted in 2011) to implement LGBT history into its classrooms.

The law will be implemented in the 2020-2021 school year. It does not apply to private schools. The new bill will also require teaching students about disabled persons and their contributions to society. The new learning material will be included in social studies and history class curriculums.

“The Governor believes that ensuring students learn about diverse histories will help build more tolerant communities and strengthen educational outcomes,” Murphy’s office said in a statement.

New Jersey Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle (D) said on her Twitter account, “It is my hope that with this legislation signed into law we can foster new generations of students that understand the importance of tolerance and equality.”

The bill has also garnered opposition. Opponents have said that teaching gay and transgender history may lead children to question their sexuality.

Len Deo, president of the New Jersey Family Policy Council, told NorthJersey.com, “We believe it further erodes the right of parents to discuss this sensitive issue with their children, if in fact schools are going to be promoting and making the claim that this particular person was an LGBTQ member.”

He went on further and said, “Individuals should be included in lessons based on achievements without discussion of sexual orientation.”

The new law was modeled after the FAIR act in California that was passed in 2011. It was one of several things that the Murphy administration has supported in favor of LGBT rights, such as giving transgender people the legal right to alter the sex on their birth certificates in July of 2018.

“The ACLU believes that Trump is using this state of emergency in order to get the funding he needs to build a border wall between the US and Mexico in an unconstitutional way. He is not getting the votes to pass his bill. In a state of emergency, he can use one of the 136 new powers he’s been granted to try and force the construction of his wall.”

President Trump will be looking to use the support of the Title 10 U.S. Code, which means if the president puts out a state of emergency, “that requires use of the armed forces,” the defense secretary “may undertake military construction projects ... not otherwise authorized by law that are necessary to support such use of the armed forces.”

This is the path that President Trump looks to be taking in order to build his wall after failing to get it done through Congress. The ACLU is not happy about this.

President Trump is trying to build a wall that America has voted against, and the ACLU sees this as an abuse of power. Cecillia Wang, the ACLU deputy legal director, said, “The president is using a bogus declaration of a nonexistent emergency to undermine our constitutional system of checks and balances.”

With Trump pushing so hard for this wall and all the backlash and legal response that has come from the state of emergency, this case will almost certainly go all the way to the Supreme Court. Last time President Trump was in the Supreme Court, it was for his administration ban on travel to several Muslim populated countries. His ban was upheld and he won the case.

Either way, no matter how this all plays out, this will be another blip on Trump’s presidency, as there has been a continuous trend of disagreements between him and Congress.
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The Power of CBD

KARISSA ROSEN
STAFF WRITER

The power of CBD oil is a game changer in the world of medicine. Cannabidiol, commonly known as CBD, is a natural remedy with numerous benefits according to medical studies. Unlike tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), CBD is not psychoactive. It is a chemical compound extracted from the marijuana plant that serves as a relief to many illnesses and diseases without the mind-altering effects of THC.

Studies on CBD have been linked to treating chronic pain, anxiety, epilepsy and other illnesses. It has helped reduce symptoms related to cancer and the terrible side effects related to cancer treatments. CBD holds anti-inflammatory properties and the best part is that it does not get you high. Tests have shown strong results in treating neurological disorders due to its neuroprotective properties. It has shown that treatment improves the lives of those with Parkinson’s disease.

CBD also helps reduce psychotic symptoms and help people with schizophrenia and other mental disorders. On top of all that, studies have shown that CBD has helped users overcome substance abuse and withdrawal.

There are several ways one can consume CBD. There is CBD oil, which is the purest and strongest form. There are also capsules, topicals, tinctures and even gum. According to medicalnewsoneday.com, “Cannabis is legal for either medical or recreational use in some American states.” Other states have approved the use of CBD as a hemp product but not the general use of medical marijuana.

With all the benefits of CBD, there has been the rise of minor side effects such as changes in appetite, fatigue, drowsiness, and/or diarrhea. The power of CBD has and will continue to change the medical world as we knew it.

Press ‘Unwind’ with Games in this Club

CHRISTOPHER GAGLIARDI
STAFF WRITER

Growing up, Julian Campillo enjoyed playing Super Smash Bros. and every Thursday, at 3:15 PM. He and a dozen other students come into one of the classrooms to attend a ritual on one thing: the power of video games.

That’s because it is a special kind of club called the video game club, and Campillo decided that he wanted to join the club because he not only was a big fan of video games, but he also wanted to associate with people. Since taking up the video game club, he has said it changed his life. “It has made me a different person and I use to never really associate myself with people and doing something I like and enjoy and has helped me just be more social,” he said.

Many people come from all walks of life to be a part of this unique club. Students come in to play video games as a form of relaxation and entertainment to unwind from the stresses brought by their studies. There are many people who have joined this club. Some did so because it has helped them to get away from having challenges - be it a physical or mental challenge, or to simply find friends. In 2013, Ted Locolo was one of those who had the same passion and just as much fun playing the video games of his youth. He mentions, “I could say that it has changed my life. I definitely have more friends now in college.”

The Benefits of Bergen’s Health Center

DANIELA GOMEZ
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

From a headache to a bad stomach ache, if you are a student at Bergen Community College you don’t have to break the bank and stop by your local clinic.

There is actually help here on campus! Here at BCC, there are many health resources a student can benefit from. One of them being the RN staff, who is trained to provide aid if a student has a sprain, burn or even allergic reactions.

Dania Huie-Pasigan, who is an RN BSN and the head college nurse at BCC, said, “The Center for Health, Wellness, and Personal Counseling offers first aid, emergency medical responses and health care maintenance to all members of the campus. Not only does the RN staff offer that, but they also provide on-campus workshops and sports and health profession clearances throughout the academic year. Personal counseling can also be set up for any student that has a personal issue and wants to speak with someone confidentially.”

The Health Department provides these services to the student body and there are no qualifications that one must complete. Anyone can simply walk in.

The office is required by the state of New Jersey to keep track of state-mandated immunizations on all full-time students and for those majoring in nursing and other health majors.

Financial Aid Made Easy

MIKE MULLIGAN
STAFF WRITER

Borgen’s Financial Aid department deals with a lot of students on a daily basis. Students have a number of questions that they may not necessarily get answered. The Assistant Director of the Financial Aid department here at Bergen Community College is Patricia Pappas-Juliano. She let The Torch know about resources available to students who may be struggling to figure out everything that is needed when applying for financial aid.

I first asked what advice she would give to any students having trouble figuring everything out. The biggest piece of advice she gave me is that Bergen offers a workshop that gives one-on-one help for FAFSA. The staff is trained and experienced to help with whatever questions you may have and anyone can find out when these workshops are just by going on Bergen’s website.

The second thing that we discussed was the biggest issue she sees with miscommunication between the financial aid department and the students. She told me that the thing that students can do is check their Bergen emails daily so they can see if they have anything from the financial aid department.

Also, the financial department does call students when needing more information so they should always be looking out for those calls.

We also talked about how to make the process go smoothly. Students can get nervous or anxious over these matters, as it may be essential for them to attend school. I was told just to communicate with the financial aid department. They want to get everything done as well and are trying to get it done as fast as they can for students.

The last thing we discussed that day was the government shut down that affected the financial aid department. She told me that it did, as Bergen students weren’t able to get their tax transcripts, which forced them to use their tax returns instead.

Hopefully, this information is useful to students and they can use these resources to get any help they need. Financial aid can be a tricky thing to figure out so it’s always great to use all the help you have available to you.
**Alive In Fiction**

**Spotlight on a Local Band**

### Bergen PRIDE Makes Bergen Proud

**CAITLYN CONVILLE**

**CONTRIBUTING WRITER**

Thanks to the efforts of Bergen PRIDE’s co-advisors, Linda Seidman and Jim Bumgardner, Bergen Community College is continuously working towards, according to Seidman, “creating a safer and more welcoming environment for all of our diverse community.”

Seidman and Bumgardner conduct “Safe Space” trainings and LGBTQ+ 101 workshops on campus to ensure that LGBTQ+ individuals have a place to go where they feel “welcome and respected.”

There are Safe Space Stickers on doors and work areas across campus to indicate certified safe spaces with one of the over 300 staff and faculty trained by Seidman and Bumgardner.

There are approximately 40 students who attend the Bergen PRIDE meetings, BCC’s official LGBTQ+ Alliance, but there are even more who are a part of the Bergen PRIDE mailing list and who attend events.

Bergen PRIDE events and fundraisers vary from guest speakers to film screenings, but they always support topics of importance to the LGBTQ+ community, including equality, HIV/AIDS awareness and suicide prevention. The Alliance also hosts at least two social gatherings per year, once in the summer and once around the holidays.

Even for those students not on campus, the Virtual LGBTQ+ Center on the BCC website is the one-stop source for locations of certified safe spaces and gender neutral restrooms on campus, LGBTQ+ physical and mental health resources and information about provisional name changes, as well as contact details for allied faculty and staff.

Interested students can attend a Bergen PRIDE meeting in room S-253, every Tuesday from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., or visit Bergen PRIDE’s own social media pages on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Links can be found on the Virtual LGBT+Q Center.

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For Love of Ping Pong

**MIKE MULLIGAN**

**STAFF WRITER**

This Valentine’s Day at Bergen Community College, the athletic department hosted the For The Love Of Ping Pong Tournament in the Student Center from 12 to 3 p.m. It cost five dollars to play and winners were able to stay at the table until defeat.

If a player could string together five wins in a row, the winner would receive two tickets to a Brooklyn Nets vs Boston Celtics game. That was not all though. If the person could win ten games in a row they would get four tickets to that game.

The winner’s game should be highly rated as both the Nets and Celtics make their push towards the playoffs, the Nets first time since 2015. The Barclays Center will certainly be loud on that day.

The games of ping pong were simple, as players got time to warm up before the match and then each player would get five serves each before switching. The game was played to the score of eleven.

The money from this event was used to purchase food for the Bergen Community College food pantry, which helps students, faculty and staff fight off hunger. The event also brought out a good amount of people with no lack of people to play.

Joseph Esteves, who is in his last semester at Bergen, went on a ten-game win streak to win the four tickets.

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**Available at AliveInFiction.com, @aliveinfiction (Twitter) and @aliveinfictionnj (Instagram).**
Horoscopes

Aries - (March 21 - April 19) - This month is going to be a doozy for our fiery friends. With the New Moon on March 6, this is the time to let go of anything that has been holding you back. Whatever/whoever it is has run its course and you have gained everything you possibly could as of now. By releasing yourself from these burdens, you’ll make room for something new and thrilling! This exciting new venture will also be accompanied by some well-deserved recognition.

Taurus - (April 20 - May 20) - At the moment, it would be best to take a step back and focus on your work, home, and financial situation. This may make you feel defensive but precious bulls, trust that this reflection will only bring you some much-needed clarity. By redirecting your energy, you will encourage improvements in all your personal relationships and in your bank account as well.

Gemini - (May 21 - June 20) - Twins, you should expect this month to bring on many fresh ideas. As a sign of intellect, this sounds exciting BUT fair warning, with all these unfamiliar plans you may feel a bit overwhelmed. Don't panic, you will be able to use this new information to not only improve yourself but also invite new opportunities to come your way. So, take a deep breath, trust the process and trust yourself.

Cancer - (June 21 - July 22) - Directed towards all our caring, crabby readers, THIS IS YOUR TIME TO SHINE! March will be a month full of inner reflection and contemplation that will pay off immensely. With the Super Moon on March 21, your self-confidence will be at an all-time high. This may seem intimidating but remember, the moon is always on your side.

Leo - (July 23 - August 22) - To all our lions and lionesses out there, this is a period of love and passion. You will be at your peak when it comes to creativity and enthusiasm, so be prepared for new flings to gravitate towards you. This is an exciting time that will allow you to freely express yourself and embrace your affectionate side.

Virgo - ( 23 - September 22) - You will experience an immense amount of energy at this time. You need to focus this new power on finishing old tasks, getting organized and committing to your priorities. The time for procrastination is behind you. Allow this period to help you meet your full potential earth child.

Libra - (September 23 - October 22) - It’s time to throw caution to the wind and use that extroverted charm to your benefit. March will place you in many situations that will encourage you to communicate with those around you. This will restore meaningful bonds and make room for much healthier relationships in your life. There will also be an increased amount of creativity coming your way so get ready to be inspired.

Scorpio - (October 23 - November 21) - The New Moon will allow time for much needed healing water child. Dive deep into your psyche and eliminate any bad habits you come across. Making these efforts will equip you with the strength you’ll need towards the end of the month Though you may be hesitant, it’s time to give your protective barriers a break. Make way for deeper emotional connections to enter your life.

Sagittarius - (November 22 - December 21) - This is going to be a long month, my friends. Though the beginning of the month may seem quite dull and leave you wanting more excitement in your life, this time will pass. Staying true to your positive nature will allow emotional connections to prosper. It will even entice new flirtations. Keep your head up, archers.

Capricorn - (December 22 - January 19) - March is going to be the perfect time for some change. It will bring on improvements in both your work and home life. This month will also present fun, new social activities. But heed my warning, earth child, these positive changes will only arise if you separate yourself from old habits that no longer suit you. Confidently take back the wasted time and energy you’ve been blessing these things/people with.

Aquarius - (January 20 - February 18) - This month is the perfect time for some spring cleaning. Out with the old and in with the new! I know change may seem a bit scary but you’ll make room for something new and thrilling! This exciting new venture will also be accompanied by some well-deserved recognition from the people in your life.

Pisces - (February 19 - March 20) - Generous Pisces, it’s time for some self-care. With your self-sacrificing nature, I know this concept may seem unfathomable but trust me, some “Me Time” will help you prepare for what’s coming next. Don’t worry, all the people who NEED you will understand if you take some time to focus on your own needs. If they don’t, just remind them of all the times you were there for them.
Puzzle Corner

BAGPIPES
BLARNEY
CELEBRATE
CELTIC
CLOVERS
COINS
DUBLIN
EMERALD
FOUR LEAVES
GREEN
HOLIDAY
IRELAND
LEGEND
LEPRECHAUN
LUCKY
MARCH
PARADE
PATRICK
POT OF GOLD
RAINBOW
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SHAMROCK
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10 Women to Celebrate This Women's History Month

Amani Al-Khatahtbeh 1992–
**KATY TEMPLE | EDITOR IN CHIEF**

Amani Al-Khatahtbeh is the founder of MuslimGirl.com, an online magazine for Muslim women and the very first Muslim Woman's Day. As a member of the Forbes 30 Under 30 list, Amani uses her platform to create content for an often ignored audience.

Her journey began as a young woman living in New Jersey during the 9/11 attacks of 2001. She often felt her religion and doesn’t fear of being attacked or treated differently than other students. Her family’s fear of the rise of Islamophobia in the United States is what led them to move back to her father’s home country, Jordan.

Amani’s time in Jordan led her to begin falling back in love with her religion and re-defining herself as a muslim woman. Upon her mother falling ill, Amani and her family moved back to the United States, where Amani chose to wear a hijab to show loyalty to her culture and defiance of Islamophobia. She noticed that there was no space in mainstream media sphere for Muslim women, so she decided to carve some out herself and thus MuslimGirl.com was born.

With 17 million hits last year, MuslimGirl.com covers a huge array of topics relating to life as a muslim woman. Violence, sexual assault and lack of access to politics and social institutions are covered all throughout the site as well as lighter fashion tips, lifestyles and reviews. Amani found an audience that needed a voice and then gave them a platform all turning around.

Alice Paul 1885–1977

**KATY TEMPLE | EDITOR IN CHIEF**

Alice Paul was an American Suffragist who played a huge part in the passing of the 19th Amendment in the twentieth century. Paul had a quieter background but her parents were supportive of gender equality and her mother often brought her to women’s suffrage meetings.

Paul graduated from Swarthmore college with a degree in biology and later went on to what is now Columbia University for a degree in sociology. She went to England to study social work and earned her PhD from the University of Pennsylvania. Paul’s first and largest organized protest occurred on the day before Woodrow Wilson was sworn into office. About 8,000 women showed up to march while half a million showed up to watch, some in support of the movement and some to heckle and harass participants.

Rather than being protected by the first amendment, Paul was thrown in jail for “obstructing traffic.” In jail, Paul staged a hunger strike and loss enforcement (threatened to send her to an asylum) to be force fed. When newspapers picked up and published stories on her treatment in jail. Paul and the suffrage movement gained more supporters and public sympathy.

Upon her release, Paul played a role in the creation of the Equal Rights Amendment - a guarantee to protect women with constitutional rights from discrimination. The Amendment was short of ratification 27 years later and has yet to be added to the Constitution.

Elizabeth Hamilton 1757–1854

**KATY TEMPLE | EDITOR IN CHIEF**

Elizabeth Schuyler, more commonly known as Eliza Hamilton, has recently been brought to the forefront of American consciousness by her role in the hit show Hamilton. However, her role in shaping the beginnings of the United States extended beyond what was covered in the musical.

The Schuyler family was considered to be social royalty in the early days of America. Elizabeth’s family was no exception, being the union of two of New York’s wealthiest families. She grew up in a household whose wealth was maintained by slave labor. They also owned slaves in the South.

Hamilton treated Eliza as one of his closest officials. They discussed matters of grave political importance such as the betrayal of Benedict Arnold. She also revised drafts of the Federalist Papers as well as Washington’s Farewell Address.

After the death of her husband and parents, Eliza put herself to work and founded the first private orphanage in New York, the New York Orphan Asylum, which still operates under a different name to this day.

Eliza threw herself into other charity work and fought to preserve her husband’s legacy in history. She collected all of his letters, hired writers to write biographies on her husband and defended him against critics for the remainder of her life. She also worked alongside revolutionary wives Dolley Madison and Louisa Adams to raise money for the construction of the Washington Monument.

She outlived her husband by 50 years, and during those years, continued her work as a philanthropist, patriot, and historian.

Sophia Bush 1982–

**KATY TEMPLE | EDITOR IN CHIEF**

Mostly known for her role as Brooke on the early 2000’s hit “One Tree Hill,” Sophia Bush is using her platform to push for social and political change.

She’s a known member of Connie Britton’s girl gang and co-founder of a scent company, T’Smell Gutsy.

Bush also had a starring role on “Chicago PD,” which she recently left due to unfit working conditions and abuse. Bush has used her experiences in television, both good and bad, to stand up for the American movement.

She’s also an advocate for animal rights, animal adoption and basic human rights. Bush makes a conscious effort to be aware and fully informed of what’s going on in our country, and she encourages others to do the same.

Bush’s Instagram stories are often filled with positive messages, resources for those affected by sexual assault, news articles that may get swept under the rug and the perfect amount of dog pictures in between. Bush also emphasizes the importance of fact checking and reliable sources by always linking to where she finds her information and makes corrections promptly when needed.

Bush sets a positive example for young women around this country and always reminds us that our voices are valid.

Lydia Conley 1869 – 1946

**JENNIFER PARK | LAYOUT EDITOR**

Lydia Conley was not only the first woman to be admitted to the Kansas Bar, but also the first Native American woman to be admitted to any bar. In 1894, Conley became the first woman in the state of Kansas to be admitted to practice before the Supreme Court.

Conley was also an active suffragette. In addition to being the first woman lawyer in Kansas, she was the first woman to be admitted to practice before the Supreme Court. Ultimately, they ruled against her request.

However, in the time and publicity bought with her legal battles, Conley was able to gain support from other women in the state who were fighting for equal rights. She was able to use her legal work to help other women gain access to the bar, and her efforts were instrumental in paving the way for future generations of women lawyers.

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Lyda filed an injunction against the sale. The courts, consistently ruled against her, but she appealed the case all the way to the Supreme Court. Ultimately, they ruled against her too.

In time and public brought with her legal cases, Conley and the rest of the movement for the establishment of the first women’s law school in the U.S. The school was based in Kansas City and offered a three-year program for women who were interested in pursuing a career in law.

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Lydia Conley was a woman who broke barriers and fought for what she believed in. She was a inspiration to women who came after her and continues to be a symbol of strength and resilience.
Don’t Tell Me What to Wear

KATY TEMPLE
EDITOR IN CHIEF

In the little amount of downtime I have, I usually find myself scrolling through social media like any 22-year-old. Much of it consists of pageant friends, school friends and the occasional political post, but every once in a while, I see an absurd headline that is equally confusing and infuriating.

Just last week I stumbled across an article entitled “Women Need to Stop Wearing Workout Leggings to All the Places That Aren’t the Gym.” This article was written by Melissa Hames and published in PackerMob: a website that is trying to be Buzzfeed but lacks social and political awareness.

I made the mistake of clicking on the article, only to be baffled by how many contradictions could be made in a mere 350 words.

Benes starts out with a rather logical thought. She writes, “it takes a lot more for a woman to reach success than it does a man” and without diving into an entire history of gender relations and the feminist movement, she’s right. It’s difficult being a woman in a patriarchal society that has institutions in place that thrives off of gender suppression. The pink tax for example - paying extra money for a pink razor instead of a black one or having feminine hygiene products deemed “non-essential goods.” That’s something women deal with just for being born. We shouldn’t also be dealing with people telling us how to dress.

There’s a common misconception that feminism and the feminist movement is about rejecting gender norms and traditional gender roles. For one faction of the movement, that’s true. But we need to remember that “feminism” doesn’t have a concrete definition. It’s intersectional, different women have different goals and that’s ok.

Benes misses this point completely. She writes “some of the things women want to do away with due to ‘feminism’ like skirts, dresses, and heels, actually makes you look professional and confident.” The first issue with this statement is that skirts and dresses aren’t actually the problem, nor is the feminist movement trying to eradicate them.

The actual problem is the judgements and assumptions people make of a woman who is or isn’t wearing a skirt. If you’re wearing one, you’re stuck up or vain and if you aren’t you’re sloppy and don’t care about yourself. If it’s too long you’re a prude and if it’s too short and you’re a slut. That’s the problem.

Benes equates athletic wear to “sluggish and sloppy” and business casual to “successful and thriving” but whose right is it to dictate what type of apparel makes women feel confident. Or maybe (stay with me here) someone isn’t “feminazi” because she’s the exact opposite of that. I’m not saying the feminist movement is perfect either. There’s a lack of inclusivity and diversity a lot of the time, but writing and publishing articles that contribute to the narrative of what women should be isn’t going to help any cause.

I’m not anti-feminist because I wear makeup and do my hair and enjoy typical “female” things. Someone isn’t a “feminazi” because she’s the exact opposite of that. I’m not saying the feminist movement is perfect either. There’s a lack of inclusivity and diversity a lot of the time, but writing and publishing articles that contribute to the narrative of what women should be isn’t going to help any cause. What we should be doing is building each other up, not tearing each other down.

Remember Your Parents

CAITLYN CONVILLE
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

As responsibilities pile up and you gain more independence as you transition into adulthood, it’s easy to forget about your parents. Unless you don’t have a great relationship with them, for personal reasons, there’s no excuse to ignore the two people who love and care about you more than anyone else.

Plus, child-you made them suffer through “Yo Gabba Gabba!” You owed them a little bit.

You can hang out with them one-on-one or as a trio. If you have siblings, bring them along for some wholesome fun. Places and try new activities and laugh as Dad’s face twists in disgust after eating oysters for the first time. If you’re of legal age, then you can party with them too! Come on, aren’t you the least bit curious to see what Mom is like on the dance floor? In the evening, when all of you are full from the room service you ordered, your parents can tell you all the family gossip that you were too young to hear before.

If a vacation is too much for you to handle, you can still pamper Mom in the spa or treat Dad to lunch. Now that you make your own money, you can spoil them for a change. That said, you don’t have to blow your entire paycheck on them. The amount of free activities you can enjoy with your parents are myriad. Have a movie night on the couch or go for a walk, dust off that old board game or puzzle box shoved in your closet for some wholesome fun.

At the very least, ask them how their day went. If you live far away from home, shoot them a text or drop them a call if they still haven’t figured out how to use smartphones.

You don’t need to travel the world with your parents to make them happy, because you are already their world.

Corrections

The Torch strives for the highest journalistic standards and accuracy. Readers are encouraged to contact us if they find any mistakes in any edition of the Torch.

Editorial and Opinion Pieces

As an open public forum, The Torch welcomes guest opinion pieces and letters to the editor from any member of the Bergen Community College community. Materials should be submitted to eictorch@gmail.com or delivered to The Torch office, SC-111. Such submissions must include the writer’s name, contact information and affiliation with the college. Students should include their major; faculty and staff should include campus title or position. Opinion pieces are limited to 600 words and letters to the editor to 200 words. The Torch reserves the right to edit and to refuse publication of any submission.

The Torch offices are located in Room SC-111, 400 Paramus Road, Paramus, NJ 07652-1595 201-493-5006/5007 eictorch@gmail.com
To Vape or...  

ANARGYROS COLE 

Staff Writer

Bergen Community College has been committed to maintaining smoke-free environments for years. Many students fully support banning a significantly unhealthy process of taking in nicotine as well creating additional stressful environments. Students also need to understand that their need to vape isn’t more important than the comfort of other students.

Students can be respectful of one another, avoid blowing clouds in the faces of their teachers and peers, and not step on or go to a designated area set up by the school for people who need to vape in the time between classes and extracurriculars.

As a school that cares for its students’ comfort, rules should be made for the benefit of students, not at the cost of their stress levels. While vaping on campus has some flaws, the benefits of allowing vaping over cigarettes are beneficial for the students and campus.

Cigarette smoking has proven to be a problematic issue on campus, like when a small fire was started when a lit cigarette was put out in some dry leaves. Events like this create dangerous situations for other students and the campus.

Additionally, the butts are littered on campus when students are not near trash cans and the smell often lingers on school grounds. People who do not have a standing around smokers. Cigarettes are far more of a detriment and distraction to the environment at BCC campus and can’t be ignored by other students. I see the need for their restriction on campus, but whether or not adults want to use nicotine shouldn’t be decided by their educational institution because it is their choice and their health.

BCC campus appreciate the fact they come here from different walks of life, from various backgrounds and for multitudes of reasons. They enjoy many abilities to make their own decisions and vaping is a decision to be made for their own personal comfort. I don’t think it is the governing body of the school they attend.

BCC is comprised of a large amount of well-educated adults who are capable of making their own decisions and are attending to learn more or become better qualified. I feel BCC should respect their students’ choices as long as those choices don’t endanger or distract other students. As far as I can tell - from a student’s perspective - vaping isn’t a plague to BCC’s campus.

Seeing students around campus vaping isn’t odd at BCC, but I’ve never seen it be problematic to others. Students hit their vapes outside, share their vapes with friends, let their friends and then return to what they need to do at school.

I haven’t witnessed an epidemic of students hiding vapes in various pieces of clothing just to hit it in class, and not get caught. I have no idea how many a certain number would make another student uncomfortable.

I’ve witnessed an epidemic of students hiding vapes in various pieces of clothing just to hit it in class, and not get caught. I have no idea how many a certain number would make another student uncomfortable.

I’ve seen a vaping as more of a benefit to student social life here at BCC than a burden on the well-beings of students. I have these assumptions based on my personal experience with vaping on campus, but I don’t think I’m alone in my opinion on this topic. vaping is a choice we’re entitled to as adults and I’m not encouraging or discouraging anybody. I simply believe it should be a decision we make elsewhere.

Not only are there so many vapes and e-cigarettes brands out there, but college students, high schoolers, and even middle schoolers own some type of e-cigarette.

A study done by the Center of Disease Control found that 50 percent more high schoolers and middle schoolers vape than smoke actual cigarettes. When putting smoking and vaping together, the nicotine found in both substances are doubled. Nicotine can increase blood pressure, heat rate levels and is linked to cancer. Because they are starting at an early age, it is more likely for teens to have catastrophic health issues in the future, such as respiratory and heart disease.

Most vapers or e-cigarette users do not want to admit they have addictions, but it begins to show through their bank statement or how many times they’ve stopped by a gas station to refill their vape or Juul. A pack of Juul pods retails for about $15 and a vape cartridge, depending on the milliliter, starts around $6 and ends at $20.

For someone who is not as addicted or has just started to smoke, these cartridges or packs will last longer than a couple of days and spend more money than someone who is less addicted. Regardless, if you’re a consumer of these products, you’re basically purchasing an early death pass.

E-cigarette users are less likely to feel the nicotine because of the flavors that are in the product. Flavors such as cotton candy, mango, mint and watermelon mask the actual taste of the nicotine and invite the buyer in. Aside from flavors, the product is accessible and easy to hide.

Most teens usually begin to vape or smoke due to peer pressure. They see everyone around them do it including their friends, so they begin to buy it off of a local shop that does not check ID or from someone who is older.

Vaping and e-cigarettes also hurt non-smokers through second hand smoking. Teens hide their vape or Juul in their pocket or backpack and smoke it during class, lunch, in the bathroom and anywhere in school. Teachers and professors normally don’t notice it because it’s odor is not as strong as a regular cigarette. Once a puff comes out, it vanishes in an instant.

The more you buy a vape cartridge or a Juul pod, the more you feel yourself in. It then becomes a tendency of needing it rather than wanting it.

E-cigarette smokers use this as a way to start smoking and don’t challenge the idea of quitting or finding other ways to relieve stress. Spending time with positive and supporting people and drinking less caffeine are healthier alternatives. Even by exercising, finding a hobby to do, giving yourself time to relax and getting the right amount of sleep are all ways for you to stop the addiction and turn your life towards the right direction. There is always a way to end smoking, but it starts with you.

...Not to Vape

DANIELA GOMEZ 

Contributing Writer

Did you know while the amount of teenage cigarette smoking is going down, the amount of teen vaping is going up? Most teens have dropped the old-fashioned way of smoking for a new and improved version of e-cigarettes, such as Juuls or Vapes.

No one can fully understand the health risks when it comes to vaping. Vapers simply believe it’s just water vapor. In reality, one cartridge carries 200 to 400 puffs of nicotine. This is equivalent to smoking two to three packs of regular cigarettes every day. One Juul pod also carries 200 puffs of nicotine, which is equivalent to smoking 20 cigarettes.

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The Importance of Fashion

ESMERELDA LOREN 

Contributing Writer

There’s more to fashion than what is assumed. In the words of George P. Fox, “Fashion is and has been and will be, through all ages, the outward form through which the mind speaks to the universe.” Fashion has a way of influencing our world through interior designs, foods we eat, cars we drive and music we listen too.

Fashion has allowed people to make a change in history, innovate new fabrics to better improve the environment and allow us to express ourselves regardless of if you are following a trend or not.

Just like politics, there is a cycle of history repeating itself. Designers create new styles by researching what has been done before and being up-to-date with keeping in mind new trend alerts that are present in our culture. Keep in mind that fashion is ever-changing and it is important as we progress to improve our modern culture.

As much as we are allowing people to see us for who we are internally. For example, the way we feel about ourselves, we are allowing people to see us for who we are internally. For example, the way we feel about ourselves, clothing is also work hard in.

Clothes can be a religious honor to people who use fashion in modest ways. The fashion becomes something that is not to be taken lightly. For someone who is already hooked.

Someone who has been consuming it longer will tend to smoke it all in a couple of days and spend more money than someone who is less addicted. Regardless, if you’re a consumer of these products, you’re basically purchasing an early death pass.

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The movement against vaccinations has always been prevalent, stemming as far back as the early 1800s, when widespread smallpox vaccinations became a common practice. Those who were against inoculation described it as being “unchristian” and “unsanitary”. However, many of these intellections were the products of mistrust in medical practices and a notion of violation of personal liberties as England and the United States ordered mandatory vaccinations for infants and children.

Today, there is an uproar among medical professionals and people against inoculation - commonly known as anti-vaxxers. In 1998, Andrew Wakefield, a former medical practitioner in England, and 12 of his colleagues published a case series in the Lancet that suggested that the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine had a connection to behavioral disorder in children.

The study was flawed according to an article from the Indian Journal of Psychiatry in 2011 that stated “Despite the small sample size (n=12), the uncontrolled design, and the speculative nature of the conclusions, the paper received wide publicity, and MMR vaccination rates began to drop because parents were concerned about the risk of autism after vaccination.”

Wakefield received backlash from multitudes of medical groups as they discredited him and published studies of their own, refuting Wakefield’s research. The Lancet retracted Wakefield’s study in 2010 and excised him and his colleagues under the pretexts of ethical violations and scientific misconduct, when he was found to have been “funded by lawyers who had been engaged by parents in lawsuits against vaccine-producing companies,” according to the article.

Additionally, through investigative journalism, Wakefield was found to be guilty of deliberate fraud (hand-picking and choosing data and falsifying facts) for financial gain described by a series of articles published by the British Medical Journal.

However, the damage that Wakefield caused was irreparable, and history is currently repeating itself as concerned and doubtful parents are once again mistrusting vaccinations while putting their children in danger of ailments that should not be concerns today.

According to the CDC, measles outbreaks are still present due to “an increase in the number of travelers who get measles abroad and bring it into the U.S., and/or further spread of measles in U.S. communities with pockets of unvaccinated people.”

The CDC also reported that, “The U.S. experienced 17 outbreaks in 2018, including three outbreaks in New York State, New York City, and New Jersey, respectively. Cases in those states occurred primarily among unvaccinated people in Orthodox Jewish communities.”

According to a bar graph from the CDC, 2018 had the largest spike in measles cases of 372 since 2014’s 667 cases. Funnily enough, multitudes of news articles and medical papers were published throughout 2018 about the rise of an anti-vaccination movement.

Not quite a quarter of the way through 2019, and the year has more cases of measles outbreaks than in 2010, 2012, 2016 and 2017. The CDC also stated that from January 1 to February 14, 127 individual cases of measles have been confirmed in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, New York, Oregon, Texas and Washington.

That said, a growing number of parents are opting for nonmedical exemptions and putting their children at risk due to suspicions and flawed notions of the effects of vaccinations. While their intentions may be in the right places, it should be a tacit agreement that avoiding vaccinating should be considered child neglect.

In November 2018, 17 cases of children with measles ranging from seven months to four years were confirmed in New York City. Three of these infections were acquired by children who visited Israel during a large measles outbreak resulting in communities in Williamsburg and Borough Park being affected - two places known for having large Orthodox Jewish populations that hold ideologies against vaccination.

Considering that these came from the New York State, it should be noted that according to NYC’s Administration for Children’s Services website, the Family Court Act of the State of New York defines child neglect or abuse as “the act, or failure to act, by any parent or caretaker that results in the death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation of a child under the age of 18.”

While these people are practicing their faiths, should this not be considered child neglect? Is the endangerment of a child’s life worth less than a religion being practiced? With a plethora of research papers refuting Wakefield’s studies with plausible evidence and tireless experimentation and studying only a Google search away, is there really a shred of doubt in parents’ minds that believe vaccines are unsafe to use?

In many communities, parents continue to opt to have their children go unvaccinated. When a pocket of anti-vax people begins to form, outbreaks are bound to happen as a result. Children are affected by their parents’ choices and often bear the burden of enduring an illness that could have easily been prevented.

Choosing not to vaccinate children should be seen as child neglect and actions should be promptly taken. It does not matter what reason a parent has for opting not to get their children vaccinated. If those ideologies or intellecctions matter more than the lives and well-being of their children, what loss would be incurred if those children were taken away from those who choose to sacrifice those very children and endanger other children because of harmful ideas?
What if I were to tell you that there is a way you could reduce stress without the need for pills or prescriptions? What if there were a way to feel energized, creative and have the necessary drive to get through the day? I’m here to tell you that there is.

I became interested in learning about Transcendental Meditation (TM) after reading David Lynch’s book, “Catching the Big Fish” (a must-read for anybody who considers themselves creative). In it, he describes how meditation has not only helped him with catching new ideas, but has also aided with managing the stresses of being a film director.

Given that my goal in life is to direct movies, I wanted to give TM a try. I wanted something that could help my intuition become sharper and clearer. I did some research, and it turns out that this was something much bigger than I’d imagined. Everybody from the Beatles to Oprah has talked about how TM has changed their lives, improved their abilities to work and created and helped them to discover “the Self”.

Founded in 1955 by Indian guru, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, TM went international in 1958. Since then, nearly 5 million people worldwide practice it on a daily basis.

The meditation consists of reciting a mantra, given to the individual by a certified TM teacher, for twenty minutes twice a day, normally once after waking up and again before dinner. Once relaxed, the mind begins to dive deeper until it reaches what science calls the “Unified Field,” the area of unbounded consciousness. For those interested in learning the technique, reach out to a local TM center and meet with an instructor. At my center, I was able to learn through a four-day program. The first day consisted of acquiring the mantra and getting used to the practice. From there, days two to four consisted of detailed explanations of what goes on during transcendence. After completion, I was ready to begin meditating on my own. It is recommended that those new to TM meet once a month with their teacher to help fine-tune their mantra and practice.

Given that Transcendental Meditation is a non-profit organization, costs for the program are tailored based on annual house income. Thus, this allows easy access for anybody wishing to participate in learning. Evidence-based research that has gone into the program makes this different from other meditations. From the American Heart Association to the Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, TM has been shown to reduce blood pressure, treat individuals with mental disorders such as PTSD and improve creativity and intelligence.

Most importantly, TM is a non-religious practice. The organization itself emphasizes that it does not adhere to any specific religion or philosophy nor enforces it upon its students.

After having meditated for nearly two weeks, I can most certainly say that I’m starting to feel a bigger pep in my step. Things that I would normally get stressed out about now seem clearer and organized. I’d recommend anybody with an open mind and a willingness to try something new to give Transcendental Meditation a go. In this day and age with how fast things are moving, sometimes we need to stop and give ourselves a moment to relax and destress. This also allows us to unwind and get in touch with ourselves.
Behind the Sleeves
The History Behind Shen Yun

JENNIFER PARK
LAYOUT EDITOR

Anyone who has paid attention to the billboards on the highway or has gone to a vaguely Asian restaurant or hair salon is surely familiar with the image of a beautiful Chinese woman gracefully floating across promotional material. Advertisements for Shen Yun have become so inescapable that they have been elevated to meme status.

Shen Yun markets itself as a performance celebrating 5000 years of traditional Chinese Arts through a night of dance in the form of a series of vignettes across China’s history. According to Nicholas Hune-Brown of Hazlitt Magazine, the pattern of a scene of ancient life in various regions of China interpreted through dance is interrupted by “a scene from Contemporary China” titled “The Power of Compassion.”

Unlike the previous spectacles of highly coordinated traditional dance, this performance depicts the persecution of incredibly kind and peaceful meditators by brutish communist thugs. Without context, this break could confuse audience members. An understanding of the origin of Shen Yun, however, makes this moment of political messaging totally expected.

According to the Shen Yun website, Shen Yun was founded in 2006 by “a group of Chinese artists... in New York with a vision: to revive the best of China’s cultural heritage and share it with the world.” However, it doesn’t actually reach as far back as you think. No, not to ancient China whose legacy they claim to preserve, or even to modern China before the cultural revolution. It all originates in the era of frosted tips, girl groups and rising Chinese nationalism: the 1990s.

Within the context of a secular society, a plurality of meditation based wellness practices rooted in Tai Chi and Buddhism emerged in what is called the qigong boom. Of these, Falun Gong (or Falun Dafa) gained particular popularity and notoriety. It stood apart from its contemporaries in its lack of membership fees and how its founder, Li Hongzi, crafted a spiritual worldview that came uncomfortably close to being a religion.

Falun Gong enjoyed institutional support for a short time. However, by 1999, it was being smeared in state media. Over 10,000 Falun Gong practitioners demonstrated in Beijing for legal recognition, fair coverage and freedom from interference. A state campaign to eradicate Falun Gong followed.

Falun Gong was outlawed and labeled a dangerous cult. Tens of thousands were arrested. Practitioners were tortured to death and sent to reeducation camps. In 2006, a report was published claiming that practitioners of Falun Gong were systematically killed for organ harvesting.

After half a decade of incredibly sympathetic western media coverage, the West’s compassion seemingly ran out. In the years since China’s rise as an economic power, criticism of their human rights record has dwindled, especially for practitioners of Falun Gong.

While the persecution they face is extreme, they are not the easiest group to sympathize with. Frankly, Falun Gong is strange. Founder Li Hongzi has claimed that he has delayed the apocalypse and is capable of levitating. He also warns of alien invasion and grand cosmic battles, in addition to claiming the Holocaust was caused by Falun Gong. Of course, Falun Gong is strange. Founder Li Hongzi has claimed that he has delayed the apocalypse and is capable of levitating. He also warns of alien invasion and grand cosmic battles, in addition to claiming the Holocaust was caused by Falun Gong.

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Thus, they consider Shen Yun a fundraising propaganda arm of a dangerous dissident cult. Of course, the Chinese government also claims that Shen Yun’s accusations of persecution are baseless when they are very well substantiated.

Patronizing Shen Yun isn’t simply a matter of consuming art from history. It’s also supporting a group of artists who are making a strong political statement criticizing the regime of the Communist Party. It positions itself as the true keeper of Chinese culture and history. The struggle of Shen Yun is a struggle to define the very nature of China.
The English language is a confusing and mystical thing. Knowing many people who speak English as a second language, it has been expressed countless times how confusing it is to learn. “Let’s eat grandma.” Sorry grandma, I was trying to tell you that we’re eating food, not you.

Along with mistakes that can make a conversation about Thanksgiving take a dark turn, there are also little mistakes that happen much more often than one would expect. The Superb Owl. Yes, you read that correctly. This typo for the (so I’m told) most popular sporting event of the year, The Super Bowl, has gained its own following, and has resulted in a series of memes and far fewer innocent grandmothers being eaten than my previous example.

Rushed and panicked football fans run to Google the current score of the game, or maybe go to refresh their memory of what number Super Bowl it is. Instead, they are greeted with an owl wearing a very elegant top hat and monocle. In my personal opinion, I think this is much more pleasant to see than some “athletes” throwing a ball around. However, as it often does, the internet became slightly obsessed with this odd phenomenon over the past three years.

Although it only recently gained traction in a substantial way, Reddit, a popular website that curates information from all around the internet, has subsites of the main website created for specific communities to join together. These are called subreddits. “Seven years ago, a subreddit called r/superbowl (Superb Owl) was created to troll the NFL’s strictness while simultaneously celebrating the grand majesty of the fine, feathered creatures.” (Kostarelis, Techly)

And celebrate they did. There are almost 250,000 readers on this subreddit all gathered to bask in the beauty of the elegant creature while simultaneously messing with people expecting sports updates.

You, the reader, may be asking yourself, “What is the point of all this?” The answer to that is absolutely nothing. In my eyes, the internet often does amazing things. These things include solving mysteries that have been given up on by mainstream media, finding episodes of television shows over the course of several years just to satisfy one person’s memories, or banding together to start movements against parts of society that are unjust. Often times, however, the internet decides collectively to mess with people. This is just a part of the beauty of the internet. The vastness of users result in huge communities of like minded people being able to find company in one another.

We get caught up in life way too much. It becomes hard to find joy in things anymore because there’s always people going against what you believe. There’s so much to be stressed about, so the internet should be able to offer an escape for people from the seriousness of everyday life. When people take themselves too seriously, it’s the duty of the people around them to keep their ego grounded.

Yes, Superb Owl is a silly meme that is irrelevant almost the entire year, but it also may represent something else unintentionally that I think the internet does amazingly well: putting people in their place. When you’re getting caught up in all the nonsense in the world, sometimes you need a Superb Owl to put everything in perspective.
Meet Brett Fiore and Anira Calamia, your February Student Athletes Of The Month. Fiore is a 19-year-old sophomore from Oakland, NJ and captain of the basketball team and Calamia is a 20-year-old Sophomore from Garfield, NJ. They sat down with me to tell me about themselves, what inspires them and how BCC has helped them become the players they are.

Growing up in Oakland, NJ, Fiore was actually a baseball player before he took up basketball. He started basketball in 4th grade after he was told by his mother to try something new. Initially, he was a little hesitant to continue, as playing time was not there for him and it was an adjusting period for him, being that he was somewhat of a baseball star already. His mother and father continued to spur him on and convinced him not to give up. His father continued to spur him on and convinced him not to give up, as he believes he is the best coach he's ever had.

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A Look At Fiore and Calamia Off the Court

Student Athletes Of The Month

FRANCISCO CAMACHO
SPORTS EDITOR

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Student Athletes Of The Month Anira Calamir and Brett Fiore with their teams/ Bergencobulldogs.com

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Bergen Softball Team
Back and Better Than Ever

NOAH SANCHEZ  STAFF WRITER

“I think this is the start of a really good program,” first-year softball coach Jorge Hernandez said, believing that this year can be special for the Bergen Bulldogs softball team.

After disappointing seasons in recent years and a frustrating season riddled by injuries which led to the team only being able to play one game in 2018, the Bulldogs are set out on silencing any non-believers and bringing excitement back to Bulldogs Softball.

Injuries are part of the game. When you play, you hope for a healthy season but ultimately expect to deal with the unfortunate reality of losing players due to injuries. When you only have a nine player roster, you can’t afford any injuries.

This reality came to a head when one of the women on the team sustained an ankle injury at first base, when one of the women on the team afforded any injuries. When you only have a nine player roster, you can’t afford any injuries.

With a replenished roster throughout the infield and outfield, the Bulldogs look to change the narrative surrounding Bergen Softball from an afterthought to the thought in Bergen sports.

Returning sophomore Anira Calamia is at first base as freshman pitcher Madison Heck comes onto the field, who also received honors for her playing coming out of Bogota High School in 2018.

Other notable additions include catchers Tatiana Fernand and Hannah Christensen, who transferred to BCC from Rutgers University, giving the team a “strong” battery, in Hernandez’s opinion.

“Nobody is inexperienced. I think we’re going to have a very good year.” Hernandez has a lot of praise for his team just ahead of its spring break trip to Myrtle Beach. The trip before the game will not only be good for the members on the team but for the team’s leading scorer, Liana Martinez, hit the floor hard after she tried going up for a rebound and was not able to return to the game. During overtime, Nicole Gaito and Amy Culhane both fouled out. Heading into overtime the team only had two players on the court- Liz Vargas and Anira Calamia.

According to Head Coach Tracy Green on BergenCCBulldogs.com, she stated that “They finished out tough, it was unfortunate that we ended with only two players on the floor, if we had five I truly believe we would have won that game.” She went to say she very proud of the girls and they did a great job.

This is coming off the heels of a great 16-7 season by the lady Bulldogs with a depleted roster all season long. The team lost players due to injury and academic reasons. The team saw themselves playing 4 on 5 at certain points throughout the season.

The team did a good defensive job throughout the entire game as they only gave up 51 points and had 11 steals along with 5 blocks. It’s truly a heart wrenching loss for this team as it seems they’ve been fighting an uphill battle the entire season dealing with a diminished roster.

Another big cause for this loss could be summed up into two words: offensive inefficiency. The lady Bulldogs shot a underwhelming 20 percent from the field and going 6 of 24 from behind the arc.

That’s a staggering 14 percent lower than their season average field goal percentage. Those are numbers that are not going to get it done on the biggest game of the season.

There is still a lot to look for going forward for this team with a lot of players coming back next season like Liana Martinez, who was the team’s leading scorer this season with 17 points per game. She’s proven herself to be a reliable scorer at the point guard position.

Hopefully the team can ride the success of this great season onto next year. Also, team will most likely look to have a deeper roster to relieve some pressure from the starters as everyone this year played over 30 minutes a game.

As the season comes to an end, there are many things to be excited about for the future of this program.
Meetings every Tues., 12:30 p.m., SC-1 1 1C-D

One of the most successful seasons in Bulldogs history ended in shock and disappointment when the Men’s Baseball Team lost in extra innings to North Hampton in the first round of the Regional XIX tournament in 2018. Now, The Bulldogs are back and looking to build on arguably the best season in the team’s existence.

Going 30-15 and posting school-records for wins in a single season, runs scored and several other categories made 2018 one of the most “successful” seasons the team has had according to Head Coach Steven Mimms.

Going into his 7th year as head coach and his 10th year overall with the program, Mimms has developed a positive attitude and a winning culture in the Bulldogs locker room, which propelled the team to its first 30 win season while also being ranked in the top 10 in the country for over five weeks and ranking as high as the number 3 team in the country.

Clearly, the accolades and numbers are not the main objectives for Mimms, who looks to improve on the record-breaking season and viewed 2018 and ultimately the loss in the playoffs as a learning experience.

“We lost in extra innings, it was a close game. It’s one of those situations where sometimes young guys are looking to redeem themselves.”

One of those young guys is Sophomore Outfielder, Adrian Alarcon, who broke out in 2018 averaging over 400. at the plate while driving in 34 RBI’s. Alarcon received All-Region 2nd Team honors for his play and looks to carry his offensive surge into the new season.

While a high octane offense is a key component to any winning team, it is often agreed that pitching wins championships. A player who intends on contributing to that is Sophomore Pitcher Trey Fracassini. Fracassini, who pitched for the Bulldogs last year, is a stretch reliever who made spot starts. He made a name for himself coming out of the bullpen, and could be considered one of Bergen’s most versatile arms on the team.

Viewing himself as a starter since coming out of high school, Fracassini wants to pitch as much he can, but understands ultimately it’s about the team.

“Obviously I wanted to be a starter but it didn’t work out because we have other really good starters. I’m not the type of person to complain about or demand a job. I step in and do my role.”

Confidence is not a trait that this Bulldogs roster lacks. This is evident with Freshmen Pitcher, Adriel Correa, who realizes that confidence in yourself is important, but confidence in your team is essential.

“Honestly I like to have a lot of self-confidence because I do think I’m a good player but I also learn a lot from the Sophomores who were here last year. They tell me how games go and so I try to feed off of that and work towards my game so that when the next time I remember what they told me and I stick to that plan. College Baseball is a lot different from high school so it’s important to learn from people that have been there before and take that with you when you go onto the field.”

With every year, every team is different. Different players, different personalities, but the message stays the same: “Hungry.”

“This is a mantra that is flooded throughout the Bulldogs social media platforms and has embodied the team’s spirit through Coach Mimms tenure at BCC.

“We want to run this like a Division 1 Program. We’re not saying we’re here to yell down their throats but we want to make sure expectations are high” said Coach Mimms.

The team is far from perfect but Coach Mimms sees talent in the team.

He said, “The talent is there it’s just the IQ and training the brain, especially for the younger guys who are not used to a playbook and that’s our job as coaches to develop the talent in these kids.”

With the rejuvenated roster and improved coaching staff, which includes pitching coach Jonathan Dominguez, who comes over from Rutgers University. The Bulldogs set out for a revenge tour in 2019. The Bulldogs start off their season in Maryland before making a quick pit stop home and then going down to Myrtle Beach for their annual Spring Break trip, where they will have a 10 game stretch.

The Spring Break trip for the team is “huge” for several reasons in the eyes of Mimms.

“You know we’re a commuter school so we don’t get a chance to spend much time together so that overnight trip is huge chemistry builder for our team... Every year we’ve gone down there we’ve done very well and we came back with a winning record and it set the tone for the season...It’s a great experience and our guys’ love it.”

The Bergen Bulldogs return home to meet Bucks County Community College Saturday, March 23, after completing their Myrtle Beach trip.