

The Mount Observer

“Voices of the students of Mount Wachusett Community College”

PREVIEWS



A Hand Up, Not a Hand Out

GINNY'S HELPING HAND is at its busiest during the Christmas season. According to their website, “Each year around this time, we create and distribute food baskets to hundreds of families that contain everything they need for a great holiday feast!”

For the full article, see page 4

Gas Prices Soaring Once Again

Americans are once again experiencing agony at the pump; this is due to the traditional economic battle of growing demand and limiting supply.

For the full article, see page 5

Art on Campus

Photographs from the Ceramics class's outdoor firing on the Gardner Campus.

For the full spread, see pages 10-11



Winterfest at MWCC

Proceeds to Benefit Student Emergency Fund

By Kelly Johnson
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The Student Life Office is once again hosting Winterfest on the Gardner campus December 7, 8, and 9. Several baskets with prizes potentially worth hundreds of dollars will be available for raffle. As little as \$2 will give you five tickets to enter, to win a basket of your choice. All funds raised during the event benefit the Emergency Student Fund, where students may apply for small amounts of financial assistance during times of need.

Last year, according to Kathy Matson, Director of Student Life, \$4,620 was raised for the Emergency Student Fund. Winterfest has been held by the

Student Life Office for more than 10 years. Support from a variety of departments on campus provide the opportunity to fundraise thousands of dollars each year for students who find themselves with an unexpected financial need. The Emergency Student Fund provides small amounts of financial assistance for things like purchasing a book or supplies for a class or providing gas money during tough times.

Raffle baskets will be on display in the Gardner campus commons area on Tuesday, Dec. 7th from 10 am-4 pm, Wednesday, Dec. 8 from 8 am-6 pm, and Thursday, Dec. 9 from 8 am-12 pm. Tickets to enter the basket raffles are available for



Image from pixabay, by PublicDomainPictures

purchase with just \$2 for five entries and \$5 for 26 chances at winning. Various departments at MWCC donate themed baskets filled with items such as local restaurant gift cards, movie night themed prizes, scratch

tickets, as well as snacks, candy, and other goodies. “Every year, people rise to the occasion as the MWCC

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“Winterfest 2021” >>>

The Effects of Technology on Children

Education Expert Shares Screentime is No Replacement for Human Interaction



Image from pixabay, by twinquinn84

By Jailene Lopez
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Maureen Provost is an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education and a liaison at the Garrison Center for Early Childhood Education and speaks on the disadvantages

that technology has on the mind of developing children; along with some recommendations and tips on how to improve and influence a child's wellbeing. Tech devices, like cell phones, computers, tablets, video game systems, and televisions are

consistently used as a tool for education, employment, and entertainment. These machines provide a way of communication, learning, and leisure. One must be sure that allowing these technologies to be used by children is done in a way that creates good habits.

Provost's education and experience has poised her with the knowledge to offer valuable suggestions and notable guidance on the subject. Professor Provost states, “Human interaction and relationships are always better than technology. There is actually science that backs the negative impacts of too much technology for young children.”

Provost said that during the

pandemic, “technology became a necessity for children and their educators to communicate. In this case, using media as a tool was necessary. Again, positive human interaction is best. Children need relationships with trusting adults in their lives and media cannot replace a human reading a child a book, playing with them, creating with them, or simply being with them”.

In addition, Professor Provost suggested, “children are not spending enough time outside and participating in physical activities. If a family member decides that they want to watch television, then quality programming such as Sesame Street and other educational

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“Kids and Tech” >>>

Winterfest 2021 Winter Season Assistance

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community knows there is always a need," said Matson. While 2020's Winterfest was held virtually, she is excited for this year's in-person event as there are "many new employees looking forward to this experience." Matson said she was excited to see the involvement this year as people come back to campus. She is hoping the event will encourage

those not on campus to stop by for a "fun event as we are starting to do things in person again." Basket winners will be pulled at noon at the close of Winterfest, Thursday, Dec. 9. Cody Nathanson, Student Trustee through the SGA (Student Government Association), will be the presenter announcing the winners. When people purchase their tickets, their name will be recorded so they can be contacted about their winnings.

Kids and Tech

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television is best, however only as much as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. The other time a small number of media is okay is for a FaceTime with someone who may be far away. An iPhone, computer, or television should never replace a person!"

The American Academy of Pediatrics recently reported that "Today's children are spending an average of seven hours a day on entertainment media, including televisions, computers, phones and other electronic devices. Meanwhile, advertising aimed at children is no longer confined to TV commercials and product placement in movies. Today, children are exposed to messages from social media influencers, hidden ads in video games, data collection across many platforms, virtual reality encounters with strangers in games and targeted social media

advertisements that are intended to make children take action." The American Academy of Pediatrics added that "It's no wonder parents come to pediatricians with so many questions. It also underscores the importance of the need for continued research on the impact of media on children's health and useful resources that help improve a pediatrician's ability to counsel families on the healthy use of media in all forms."

Professor Maureen Provost advocates for children to spend less time using technology and more time outside building relationships through interactions. Additionally, she is suggesting, "that what educators and other professionals need to do is give families specific suggestions for what they can do instead of using media (electronic devices). Additionally, they can educate them and send them to (web)sites that show them the recommendations."

Gift Giving and the Pandemic

COVID Side Effects Give Consumers More Reason to Shop Local



By Tarra Kruse
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Many factors can complicate gift-giving this year, especially if you are a last-minute shopper. According to a recent article from CBSNews.com, experts say you need to shop now, not later.

Many people start holiday shopping at the end of November,

as Thanksgiving marks the start of the Christmas season.

The Port of Los Angeles, which handles 40% of US Imports, is facing a record high backlog. "Major retailers are expecting a strong holiday shopping season, but have warned of limited inventory, longer shipping times, labor shortages, and fewer discounts." Morgan Stanley economics recently told

By Jailene Lopez
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

As the winter and holidays are quickly approaching, the Leominster MWCC Director of Student Services, Sabine Dupoux, has sources, reliable outlets, and knowledgeable information on how to receive help and to assist students and

"It is important that we express gratitude, empathy, and compassion around the holidays. Everyone's circumstances are different, and we never truly know what each individual may be experiencing."

– Sabine Dupoux, Director of Student Services, MWCC Leominster

their families.

According to Dupoux, being kind during such a sensitive time of year and simple check-ins with one another is a way of demonstrating goodwill. Dupoux stated, "It is important that we express gratitude, empathy, and compassion around the holidays. Everyone's circumstances are different, and we never truly know what each individual may be experiencing. Giving ourselves gentle reminders to check-in on one another, simply asking someone how they are

doing and if there is anything you could do to help may lead to a beneficial connection and/or service someone may need."

If you are interested in helping during these times, Dupoux recommends "providing services, donating food/personal items, or a helpful gesture may be what someone needs to get through the holidays. When

but all year round. To name a few services, specifically for this time of year are: Veteran Services provides information on where students can receive local Thanksgiving dinners, coat drives and receive donated food items. CCAMPIS, (Child Care Access Means Parents In School) does a diaper and holiday toy drive for MWCC students and their families; Student Government Association collaborates with the Brewer Center and Food for Thought Gardner and Leominster locations for food donations and distribution of Thanksgiving baskets. But again, these are only a few services mentioned, MWCC provides so much more to our students and community!"

Altogether Dupoux shared, "We all can make a difference within our own neighborhoods and communities by seeking out locations within our community that provide direct service by becoming a volunteer, donating goods, and by sharing information with family and friends to pass along to those in need. Remembering that food insecurity and other needs are invisible and to never assume an individual's situation."

Programs that are within MWCC exist for students and their families.

According to Dupoux, "There are an array of services provided not only for this time of year,

but all year round. To name a few services, specifically for this time of year are: Veteran Services provides information on where students can receive local Thanksgiving dinners, coat drives and receive donated food items. CCAMPIS, (Child Care Access Means Parents In School) does a diaper and holiday toy drive for MWCC students and their families; Student Government Association collaborates with the Brewer Center and Food for Thought Gardner and Leominster locations for food donations and distribution of Thanksgiving baskets. But again, these are only a few services mentioned, MWCC provides so much more to our students and community!"

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investors.

According to the article CBSNews.com, "The supply chain issues are not only impacting imports from China, where many of this year's hottest toys are made, but are also affecting shipments within the United States."

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"Gift Giving" >>>

Brewing Conversations

Virtual Dialogs Bring Tough Discussions to a Safe Platform



Image courtesy of MWCC

Gift Giving

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Many local business owners have expressed the importance of now more than ever to shop locally. During the pandemic many local shops were forced to close for safety measures, and many have expressed how hard their business was hit.

Patti Bergstrom, has been a local business owner of *The Velvet Goose* in Gardner for thirty-five years. She depends on the local community to support her business. She shared, "Because my community supports me and my business, I support my community." She added, "As difficult as the Pandemic was, I think it did teach people that you get the downtown that you deserve. If you want to have nice stores in your downtown, you need to support them, and I will say that from the minute everything kind of hit, we felt the local love more strongly than ever."

If a consumer is looking to make purchases online, there is still a way to support small businesses, and that is by using online websites such as Etsy.

Etsy is dedicated to small businesses throughout the country, selling goods such as handmade or vintage items, and crafts. These items include categories such as jewelry, bags,

clothing, home decor as well as art and crafts. Gifts that can meet the needs of any family member.

Gabby Padilla, is a local and small business owner of Herbs & Soil Apothecary and has an online store located on Etsy. She says, "I would like to express that supporting small businesses is a moment to recognize the value and vitality of the locally owned businesses of our community and our economy. Visiting local shops and restaurants in our neighborhood is an easy way to pay it forward. Support small businesses and buy locally."

BeCozi is another online store found on Etsy, owned by Larissa Koedyker. She also is hoping for business to improve due to the shipping crisis. "I create a hand-knitting style, and all my products are hand-knitted. I love the topic of shopping (and) encouraging people to buy locally in the US!"

Holiday strategists also recommend hitting local stores early to avoid out of stocks. It is a great way to get gifts in time for the holidays and a way to avoid costs on shipping. Another option is to shop at local stores in your surrounding towns. This is also a way to guarantee you'll have gifts in time for the holidays, avoid shipping costs, and support local businesses.

By Kelly Johnson
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The MWCC Brewer Center Speaker Series engages an audience of students, staff, and faculty on a platform which encourages dialog amongst people who have varying views of current events. These discussions had been held monthly on campus for the past 8 years, bringing together small groups with trained facilitators to create a safe space to lead and guide tough conversations.

When the pandemic hit

during the spring semester of 2020, the conversations ended as people were focusing on their personal wellbeing. But once the world watched George Floyd take his last breath while neighbors recorded the event, the staff at the Brewer Center knew they needed a safe and open platform to process what happened. Today, students, staff, and faculty can find the list of regular conversations through the MWCC InvolveMOUNT platform.

"The dialogs allow people to speak and perhaps be

understood. Consensus is not the goal of the discussions," said Shelley Errington Nicholson, Director of the Brewer Center for Civic Learning & Community Engagement. "Together, we seek a deeper understanding of how complex a situation is."

Nicholson said that attendees are empowered to take action, become an ally, and to make a difference. They are challenged to think about things differently in the future. Questions raised

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Tis the Flu Season

Flu vs. Cold vs. COVID: Which One Do I Have?

By Nichole Camelo
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

It's that time of year where the sniffles and body aches infect us. But how do we know if it is the flu, cold, or the dreaded COVID-19?

There has been a lot of speculation that the current vaccine might not be as effective as it was in previous years due to the low levels of flu activity from last season.

Dr. Dajia Angell, Fitchburg Urgent Care, was asked about the difference between the flu and COVID. From what was gathered from Dr. Angell, although both the flu and COVID-19 are contagious respiratory infections, they are caused by different viruses.

She also added that COVID-19 is caused by infection with a coronavirus, also known as SARS-CoV-2, while seasonal flu is caused by infection with one of the numerous influenza viruses that circulate seasonally among humans.

Dr. Angell said that at the same time, "it's possible to be infected

with both the flu virus and the virus that causes COVID-19. COVID-19 appears to spread more rapidly than influenza and can cause more severe illness in some persons. Compared to persons who have the flu, people who have COVID-19 may take longer to develop symptoms and be contagious for a more extended period.

Meanwhile, colds are typically less severe than the flu. Colds are more likely to cause a runny or stuffy nose than the flu and rarely result in major health complications, such as pneumonia, bacterial infections, or hospitalization.

Meghan Marrone, a nurse with a local elementary school, reported that she has seen a spike in colds this year. In her opinion, "this is probably due to the lack of mask-wearing and social distancing." She said that she was seeing symptoms among the children in her school, such as runny nose, congestion, and the occasional cough.

Her advice to anyone, not just the students at the elementary

school, is to "continue to social distance, wash your hands, and wear your mask."

The CDC states that "flu viruses constantly change and, based on the available data on how flu viruses are currently changing, CDC flu experts anticipate that the flu viruses that circulate this season may have small changes in comparison to each of the four major virus components used in the vaccine." They highly recommend anyone over the age of 6 months to receive a flu vaccine.

According to the CDC, "it's best to be vaccinated before flu begins spreading in your community. September and October are generally good times to be vaccinated against flu. Ideally, everyone should be vaccinated by the end of October. However, even if you are not able to get vaccinated until November or later, vaccination is still recommended because flu most commonly peaks in February and significant activity can continue into May."

A Hand Up, not a Hand Out

A Local Organization Helping to Build a Better Community



Photo courtesy of Nichole Camelo

By Nichole Camelo
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Ginny's Helping Hand is at its busiest during the Christmas season. According to their website, "Each year around this time, we create and distribute food baskets to hundreds of families that contain everything they need for a great holiday feast!" Along with food baskets, they also donate toys and clothing to families in need over

the Christmas season.

Susan Chalifoux Zephir, owner of Ginny's, said, "In addition to our food pantry we help provide temporary emergency shelter funds for homeless individuals and families. We also provide clothing and personal hygiene items for people in need. Our organization collaborates with other community organizations to assist in the provision of temporary shelter, the establishment of permanent

baskets are reusable bags, plastic utensils, condiments, spices, coffee, tea, hot chocolate, healthy kids snacks, jerky, nuts, pre-mix chicken or tuna, and other protein-packed items that require no cooking or cold storage. Zephir said, "We take donations year-round to support our programs helping those in need."

During the Christmas season, they prepare gifts for families that are not able to provide anything to their children. They accept unopened toys for all ages, new winter items, hats, gloves, mittens, snow pants, boots, along with monetary gifts as well. Warmer Winters is a local crafter who also donates hand-made hats and gloves as gifts.

A local shopper, Brenda Smith, added, "I come here often and always have. Not only do I shop here, but I also donate items as well. Ginny's has a nice selection of clothing and shoes. Today, I picked up some things for myself and a couple of Christmas presents for my grandkids as well, and they were reasonably priced."

Ginny's Helping Hand, Inc.

is a local nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting the less fortunate in meeting their basic requirements. Ginny, the founder of the organization, retired in September 2013 to South Carolina. Susan Zephir and her husband Ed Zephir took over the organization to continue Ginny's vital work after volunteering for her and recognizing the community's need for the services Ginny provided.

The pantry serves thousands of individuals each month, which requires a great deal of labor. Zephir said, "There are numerous food and clothing items that must be stocked, processed, and distributed. It's nice to have a group of people who are willing to help others." Ginny's also looks for volunteers to help in any way they can.

The pantry always receives and appreciates unopened food, linens, toiletries, and gently used clothing. Donated items may only be dropped off inside during regular business hours at 52 Mechanic St. in Leominster. Donations are also accepted through a PayPal link located on their website.

The History of Thanksgiving

What Are We Really Celebrating?

By Isabelle Mascary
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

In a recent "Brewing Conversations" dialogue series, questions arose around the topic of Thanksgiving. This segment began with a video from *Teen Vogue*, with five young native American girls, seated at a table set for Thanksgiving feast, mentioning what they are thankful for prior to flipping the table over.

One of the speakers, Fagan Forhan, Assistant Dean, K-12 Partnerships and Civic Engagement, shared that she grew up in South Dakota where there is a heavy native population. She stated, "My dad did a lot of work on the reservations, and

I knew that Thanksgiving was not the beautiful holiday that we made it up to be..."

Lee Ann Scales, Vice-President Enrollment and Public Affairs, shared that she grew up in Minnesota and went to college there, where she learned about the hidden horrors of what some of the Native Americans went through during an assignment.

"I went to a town called Mankato; I didn't learn till I went to college that it was the site of the largest public execution in our country's history. Painful to read about," she said. "There were thirty-nine native Americans that were executed, all at once. Many of whom were protesting their innocence."

She added, "The people

housing situations, the provision of fuel assistance to those in need, and the provision of furniture, clothing, and other necessities of life."

Zephir added, "We just finished our Thanksgiving food basket project, which provided 450 turkeys and all of the ingredients to make a holiday dinner and we are planning our Christmas food basket and gift program."

Items currently in high demand for Christmas holiday

that were hanged to death that day were mostly people who remained there because they were confident that the system of justice would find them innocent because they had not done anything wrong." She said how there were no historical markers nor was there a lot of discussion surrounding that event, "It was shocking that it wasn't until I was 20 years old and writing a college paper that I learned news of that magnitude."

Shelley Nicholson, Director of the Brewer Center, grew up in Rhode Island, right off the Wampanoag trail and learned that the historical context behind many of the monuments that were named after historical figures was not based on



photo from pixabay, by Jill Wellington

historical facts. She stated, "The history was whitewashed in school especially when visiting Plymouth plantation." She added, "It was definitely not an accurate representation of the times and the experiences of the

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Gas Prices Soaring Once Again

Low Oil Stockpiles Send Prices Soaring at the Pump

By Nichole Camelo
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Americans are once again experiencing agony at the pump; this is due to the traditional economic battle of growing demand and limiting supply.

Last year at this time, a gallon of regular unleaded gasoline in Massachusetts averaged \$2.10, last month it was \$3.09, a week ago it reached \$3.27, and currently the state average price is \$3.35.

Samantha Burnlap, a Lunenburg city resident, was filling up her Jeep Rubicon Sunday afternoon on the way to her sister's house in Worcester. She said that she was appalled that premium-level gasoline

was almost \$4 at the Mobile in Leominster. "I can't remember the last time it was this high," she said.

Burnlap travels from Lunenburg to her sister's house in Worcester every Sunday for a family dinner and to watch football. She added, "I have been driving a lot more now that I am not working from home and back to having family dinners; I'm paying almost \$60 to fill my tank up a couple of times a week. It's ridiculous."

According to AAA, three factors contribute to an increase in gas prices: increased demand, decreased supply, and the price of a high barrel of oil.

On average, it will cost drivers around \$10 more to drive from Boston to New York City in a

compact 12-gallon automobile on standard petrol than it did last year. Traveling to Washington, D.C., will cost an additional \$22. Even a journey to neighboring Portland, Maine, will add nearly \$5 to the driver's bill.

In late August, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) reported in mid-September that Hurricane Ida shut down a huge portion of the United States' oil drilling and refining facilities in the Gulf of Mexico.

While rigs and refineries have quickly returned to service since then, crude oil stockpiles have remained low, implying a continued supply shortage.

According to the EIA, as of late September, oil held at Cushing, Oklahoma, one of the country's

major petroleum depots, was down 40% year to date.

As of summer 2021, Americans are back on the road. The Federal Highway Administration (FHA) observed a decline in vehicle miles driven in spring 2020, but highway traffic has returned to levels seen in midsummer in the last several months.

The price rise is explained by classic economic supply and demand-- Americans have increased their driving this summer as the pandemic has subsided. Thus, a combination of domestic supply disruptions and volatility in global energy markets has increased the price of crude oil.

Broader energy markets have also been experiencing supply

constraints. European natural gas and electricity costs have risen dramatically, and traders anticipate that oil and other energy prices will continue to rise for months to come. In addition, The Russian Federation-- a major natural gas supplier to the European Union-- has refrained from increasing exports to Western European Nations; this has contributed to the volatility and high prices of oil and gas.

When you combine rising demand from the United States economy with domestic and global supply constraints, it's unsurprising that gas prices have continued to skyrocket.

Have a Story to Tell?

If you've got the scoop on the latest community news, feel free to contact our editors about adding your voice to the *Observer* crew! To reach out, send an email to:

mountobserver@mwcc.mass.edu

Brewing Conversations

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during the discussions may stump people into silence but that's viewed as a sign that people are not reacting but thinking about their feelings and how they can respond.

The Brewer Center team leads these discussions with room for open dialog. Nicholson said that no one has ever been asked to leave or been muted, and respectful language is encouraged. She stated that when "disrespectful language" is used, facilitators lead people to correct themselves as a learning experience. The open space is meant for all sides to foster growth of community and vulnerability.

Some remaining topics for 2021 include 'Conversations During the Holidays' and 'The

COVID Vaccine.' 2022 is looking forward to discussions around Black History in February, Women's History in March, as well as LGBTQ+ dialogs. Larger topics can become sub-points with multiple discussions throughout a semester and there is always space for reactive conversations when incidents arise.

If you would like to learn more about the 'Brewer Conversation' series, you can visit <https://mwcc.edu/campus-life/brewer-center/> or follow the Brewer Center at a MWCC on social media. All the events are posted through the InvolveMOUNT platform where students are encouraged to sign up to receive an online link to join the conversations which interest you. Your suggestions for topics are welcomed!

History of Thanksgiving

>>> continued from page 4

were able to conclude that they were taught similar lessons, whether it was from family or educators. Maria Vasquez shared, "In school we did the turkey hands. Every time we would bring that stuff home my mother said we can't keep it... Grandpa said today is the day of mourning. Our ancestors were slaughtered on this day."

Another important question asked was "how can we reclaim Thanksgiving and what would we reimagine it to be?" Vasquez said that she believes it is the place of educators to teach children the true history behind this holiday. She said, "If you're proclaiming you're teaching history, teach it, not just one piece." She added, "Children are way more resilient and capable than we think. Take the time to let them ruminate, give them the time and space to ask

all their questions."

Sharmese Gunn, Resource Specialist, Gateway to College, presented a challenging perspective. She said, "Look at our own curriculum at MWCC. What type of classes are we offering our students to decolonize their mind to this type of narrative?" She added, "We have to look at the education system and we also have to look within ourselves. At least at a community college, we have a responsibility and obligation to teach critical race theory and really have those conversations."

Another question asked was, "Why is that information suppressed and who does it benefit to have that information suppressed?" Senator Stephen Brewer stated, "To comfort the inflicted and to inflict the comfortable." He added, "Apparently, we like being just plain old comfortable about

these things." He shared that a lot of our history will do well if the truth is told because there is a lot of history out there and it's not being utilized.

The final question Nicholson asked was "if we know the narrative that we have been taught is false, how can we reclaim Thanksgiving? What are some ideas for us to start that in our own families and our own communities?"

One person suggested that people should try to enter into the conversation, that critical race theory isn't something for people to be afraid of." She added, "If we recognize history isn't one story that's told once forever after, why should critical race theory be any different? We should be encouraging educators to go where the facts lead them, to go where their analysis takes them, no matter what it is."

Profile: Gabriel-Riley Drouin

Student “Lives Life by Information Through Experimentation”



photo courtesy of Gabriel-Riley Drouin

By Pamela Day

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

MWCC student, Gabriel-Riley Drouin, continues to find ways to cope with the various physical and mental illnesses in his life. At 31, Drouin does not let their illnesses interfere with pursuing

illnesses, Drouin has a healthy attitude. Drouin promotes this by saying, “If I can frame a situation or task as some kind of experiment that could give me new information or a new experience, I am more enticed to try it and learn something new. Instead of asking yourself why, ask why not?”

Drouin shared that their mental illnesses are known as disempathetic alienated sociopath, with type 1 bipolar disorder, psychotic features, and AD-HD. These conditions cause a range of cognitive, emotional, mood swings, hallucinations, a lack of empathy, and behavioral difficulties.

Drouin also has a physical condition known as Vasovagal Syncope. Drouin said this condition causes their blood pressure to drop suddenly during physical exertion, which can result in unconsciousness. Treatments for ailments include mental therapy, medication, wearing compression socks, restrictions on physical activity, and getting up slowly to a standing position.

Drouin said that friends are the family they depend on. They are in contact with each other daily;

they provide emotional support, friendship, and anything that is needed. One friend gave Drouin a laptop to use for college. Having another computer keeps Drouin focused and organized by using one for work and the other for play.

Drouin said playing TTRP games, such as Pathfinder 2nd Edition and Dungeons & Dragons, allows them to express themselves emotionally as intellectual characters. Drouin broadens each role through character growth along with a wide range of vocal variations. The games provide Drouin with the opportunity to work on empathy, by imagining and acting out the feelings of the various characters played.

Drouin’s scale babies are a female ball python named Medusa, and a male African fire skink named Smaug. Besides unconditional love, the scale babies give Drouin a purpose and something to look forward to every day. Drouin said having to be responsible for the well-being of Medusa and Smaug is rewarding and improves their self-esteem.

Both reptiles are originally from Africa but were purchased

through a reputable pet store. Smaug does not like to be handled but is receptive during feeding time. Medusa enjoys curling up while being held during movies.

Drouin’s motto is, “I Live my life by information through experimentation.” Drouin explains the meaning as “something I use constantly to trick myself into doing things I would not normally try or have difficulty doing.”

One way Drouin tricked himself was by joining the United States Air Force to learn discipline by following through with choices. Drouin’s logic was, “I literally can’t quit the military. They won’t let me.” However, Drouin was medically discharged with honors due to Vasovagal Syncope. Even though Drouin did not complete basic training, Drouin was recognized with honors for aiding a fellow airman.

Drouin was born Casey Scott Drouin but changed their name to Gabriel-Riley Casey-Scott Drouin. Drouin lives in Winchendon.

Profile: Emily Turner

From Student to Nurse to Professor



photo courtesy of MWCC

By Isabelle Mascary

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Home is where the heart is, even if it is at Mount Wachusett Community College. Emily

Turner of Leominster is a nursing clinical instructor. Starting as an adjunct professor, January will mark two years since Turner has been teaching at the Mount. She has just been hired as a full-time faculty member.

Familiar to the settings, Turner was once a student in the licensed practical nursing program in 2013. She said, “I just love the Mount. I loved being a student there. It’s something familiar to me.” Turner also graduated from the Registered Nursing program at the Mount in 2015. But she didn’t stop there; she earned her Master’s degree at Worcester State University in 2020.

Although Turner started out

as a part-time adjunct professor, with the years of experience and the qualifications to follow, working for MWCC is truly where her heart is. “I really like Mount Wachusett,” she said. “It’s something about being able to work with first generation college students who maybe have done other things first

before they decided to go back to school.”

Turner added, “We have a lot of students that are not from the United States. We have a lot of

students who are single parents and just trying to get a nice job to take care of their children and make their children proud. I love working with those kinds of students. I gravitate toward more the community college type of students because that’s who I am, and I like that journey.”

The pandemic proved its

“I just love the Mount. I loved being a student there. It’s something familiar to me.”

– Emily Turner

negatives for students and the instructors. Turner stated, “From a student’s standpoint, they weren’t able to gain the hands-on experience because they were

deprived from the restrictions hospitals had in place due to covid. Students got the short end of the stick.”

For those unaware, the nursing program consists of clinical outside-the-classroom time. This is where the students go to assigned locations to gain the hands-on experience needed in junction to the classroom lectures. The pandemic added hurdles that students needed to overcome even if it meant not being able to have the hands on clinical experience.

She added, “The pandemic

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Living With Fire

Professor LoCasio Discusses the Importance of Forest Fire Control



photo courtesy of Pamela Day

By Pamela Day

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Professor George LoCasio professed that the Forest Fire Control course simulates his life as a firefighter. Students enrolled in the course will learn about S13190 certification, prescribed fires, and wildland fires, similar to the wildland fires in California and other western states.

LoCasio was a firefighter in Flagstaff, Arizona from 2007 to 2011. He worked on a Type 1 hand crew, also known as “hot shots”. LoCasio’s job was to “lead the dig” where he “led

half the crew in digging and moving burnable material away from the fire”. Students will be performing the same tasks on field days, said LoCasio.

LoCasio explained the first half of the course is focused on S13190 classes such as basic fire behavior and weather, as well as the Incident Command System (ICS). The second half of the semester will focus on wildland fire ecology and how to use prescribed fire as a management tool.

Students will also be engaged in the physical and mental

demands of firefighting during lab and field days. LoCasio said the best way firefighters stay in shape is by doing the job. He advised students “to tone their bodies to their own weight” by doing push-ups, sit-ups, jumping jacks, etc. He also recommended long walks on uneven terrain carrying a weighted backpack.

LoCasio explained the west and east wildland fires each have their own distinct vegetation and burn differently. He added that each vegetation and ecosystem have a “naturally occurring fire return interval.” He explained,

the ponderosa pines in Northern Arizona naturally burn every 3 years whereas the pitch pines in the east burn every 30 to 80.

He also noted prescribed fires reduce vegetation that fuels fires and produce less smoke than wildland fires.

LoCasio said MWCC is the only college that offers this course east of the state of Mississippi. He gave credit to Dr. Bill Patterson for bringing prescribed fires to New England. He learned the course from Patterson at UMass Amherst as a teacher’s assistant and later became the co-instructor of the course with Patterson. He

LoCasio no longer suppresses fires but now actively offered every Spring at MWCC sets prescribed fires with

to continue on with Patterson’s

“Fires are natural occurring events that are ecologically good for the environment. We want to live with fire, reframe how we think about fire and smoke.”

– George LoCasio

MassWildlife. Students will

experience this firsthand on field days. He named various ways why prescribed fires are an ecological benefit such as induce some plants to flower, assist in seed germination, and help maintain whole habitats.

LoCasio encouraged “everyone who wants to take that class; take it. It’s an exciting topic and I want students to be excited about it and learn about it.”

Emily Turner

>>> continued from page 6

was a challenge for faculty members because they had to figure out a format to give the information to the students in a way, they can understand it.” Despite the hurdles in one’s life, Turner’s advice is to “Work hard. Find a way to practice and give everything you can to your nursing program when you’re in it because it’s going to go by so fast.”

Most importantly, she added, “take advantage of any opportunity to self-care, spend time with the people you love

when you can and let them build you up. Nursing programs are hard and there is so much to be proud of that you have made it here. That’s anybody in a community college setting, especially our nursing students. There’s a lot already to be proud of.”

Lastly, she said to “keep your head and nose down. Try to focus on the end game. It will be worth it in the end when you get there. Just don’t neglect or lose yourself in the process. Nursing is fun, have fun, and let yourself have fun with it.”

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A Dirty Little American Secret

Electroconvulsive Therapy: A Tool Used To “Treat” Homosexuality and Transgenderism?

By Andi Cunningham
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

I arrived at the border of Texas and Louisiana, in June 2013, I was 16. I had arrived at a conversion therapy camp called Heartlight. The humidity masked the shame and feeling of being alone. I was 1493 miles from home, and for the first time truly alone.

I was outed as gay just a couple of months earlier, in the locker room at school. My parents and the church I was a part of decided that conversion therapy was the best option. Online, the camp poses as a therapeutic place for troubled teens and a boarding school. They even deny that they are a conversion therapy camp.

This camp is one of The United States’ dirty little secrets that many know about, but does not want to discuss.

Pray the gay away camps, first and foremost, do not work. I showed no changes when I tried to pray the gay away, so my parents consented to allow them to use more “unorthodox” methods. This included electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) performed by untrained medical professionals.

I remember the “doctor” explaining the procedure. What he explained is not what happened. I can not remember what he explained, but what

happened next is not what he told me. I was walked out of my bedroom and taken to another building on the other side of the ranch. I was escorted inside and down a long hallway. We took a sharp turn into another bare room. I was told to undress and

region that is disconnected in a lobotomy.

According to the Mayo Clinic, “(ECT) can provide rapid, significant improvements in severe symptoms of several mental health conditions. For some patients, this is beneficial

ECT damage is sufficiently gross to show up on an MRI -- but we are told it’s good for the patients. This is what I call ‘the brain-disabling principle of psychiatric treatment.’ Lobotomy, ECT, and psychiatric drugs all share the common factor that they ‘work’

media monitoring organization to protect the LGBTQ community against deformation in media-conversion therapy victims are eight times more likely to attempt suicide, six times more likely to report high levels of anxiety and depression, three times more likely to try illegal drugs, and four times more likely to overdose. Unfortunately, I am all these statistics.

In 2021, only 19 states have tried to ban conversion therapy, and three of those states have passed laws to stop the use of federal funding to pay for conversion therapy. One of the more surprising states was the state of Utah, which banned conversion therapy in 2020.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is notorious for pushing conversion therapy on the youth of the church, regardless of the public statements made by the Mormon Mental Health Association. If you know anything about the state of Utah, The church has its hands in everything. 88% of the Utah House of Representatives are a part of the Church.

This pseudoscience is unfounded and has no real results of working. This practice has been outlawed in every major first-world country. So why not here in the United States of America?

“This practice has been outlawed in every major first-world country. So why not here in the United States of America?”

– Andi Cunningham

put on a medical gown. I walked down the hall to the very last door. The room had no windows. I laid down on the table and the anxiety of what was about to happen. The nurse came in and put in the IV. I remember feeling alone and scared. These people would put me under anesthesia and shock me at high levels. I would later learn they were untrained and unlicensed through filing a police report and a plea to the American Medical Society to have their licenses suspended.

A study done by American Psychologist, Peter R. Breggin M.D., shows that ECT gives the same dysconnectivity in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortical region, which is the same

when they have severe depression and anxiety.”

Before I was submitted to this “treatment” I had no issues with anxiety or depression and was all around a happy and pleasant individual. I had a different way of thinking or loving a certain person, which we now know is not unnatural, as we see homosexuality and transgenderism in nature.” I was subjected to an unnecessary form of medical treatment or “therapy,” run by people who were not licensed.

Dr. Breggin explains, “For a long time now, I have been scientifically demonstrating that ECT is a closed-head injury in the form of an electrical lobotomy. Now we find that the

by damaging the brain and suppressing brain function.”

This kind of unethical treatment set me up to fail. This unethical and illegitimate therapy set me up to fail; to battle forms of depression and anxiety that left me struggling to find happiness. As an adult, when the depression hit, I couldn’t function. My anxiety is out of control when it isn’t treated. Through countless years, medication, therapy, hospital visits, and 4 doctors later, I am in a place where everything is managed. I can’t help but wonder if conversion therapy had not happened would I have had these issues?

According to independent studies curated by GLAAD --an American non-governmental

and fan reviews on sites like RottenTomatoes.com.

I cannot remember a time when I listened to a critic’s review of a movie before going to see it. I was always the “see it for myself” type. This caused me to become baffled every time someone insisted a movie was not worth seeing because it was panned by critics.

In the era of the Covid-19 pandemic, it would seem people are more willing to trust their gut over a critic’s opinion. Even theater majors, a group of people whose future careers can depend entirely on the word of critics, agree this facet of the industry is becoming vestigial. My own acting class talked about this at length only to keep circling back

to critics being obsolete.

Time and time again movies that are scored poorly by critics end up knocking it out of the park at the box office. This means that despite terrible reviews, people are paying to see these films. They then go out into the world

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“Film Criticism” >>>

A Criticism of Critics

Out of Touch and Out of a Job: Film Critics

By Gabriel Drouin
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Our own opinions matter more than anyone will ever give us credit for. The proof is in the box office receipts. Critics of the entertainment industry are becoming more and more obsolete by the day, which can be seen by looking at the stark differences between critic



Film Criticism

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and tell other people these films are worth seeing.

This has happened several times in the past few years. In 2018 *Venom* was critically panned but exploded at the box office. Despite critics saying *Venom* didn’t know what kind of movie it wanted to be, fans couldn’t get enough of it. Critics gave *Venom* a score of 30% on RottenTomatoes.com while fan reviews resulted in a score of 85%.

This led to this year’s *Venom 2: Let There Be Carnage* which was also panned by critics. Regardless of the poor critical reviews, it had the highest grossing opening weekend in the pandemic era.

Nearly every movie in

Legendary Entertainment’s monsterverse has received similar treatment. Critics claimed the human characters were underdeveloped or that the special effects were too dark. We now have four movies in the franchise and this year’s *Godzilla vs Kong* had the highest grossing opening weekend at the time despite also being released digitally on the same day.

Perhaps the greatest evidence that this is not a recent development is the horror genre, slasher films in particular. Two of the most iconic horror franchises are *The Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Friday the 13th*. The former has nine films to its name and the latter has a staggering twelve.

These are movies that have gone through a multitude of

directors, have been rebooted more than once, crossed over with each other, and panned for repetitive gimmicks. Despite all of that, the love of fans and word of mouth have caused these movie franchises to do so well over the last few decades that we still keep getting more.

Professional critics are probably not going anywhere anytime soon. There will always be someone who wants the opinion of someone they consider to be a professional.

People care about the opinions of others. That is why critics get paid to do what they do in the first place. That being said, there is not much use for them in an industry where the studios still create sequels to movies critics claimed were horrible.

A Precarious Concept, Indeed

COVID in 2020 vs. 2021: (Mis)Information Changes but Our Opinions Remain

By Alex Ruehlicke
SECTIONS EDITOR

In November of 2020 I wrote an article titled “A Precarious Concept” that tackled the idea of herd immunity regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time, information available on the virus was limited, and yet people’s opinions on the matter were concrete. Now, as we are about to enter the second year of the pandemic, information changes daily, but opinions remain as immovable as ever. This has raised many questions as to the cause and effect of information vs. opinion.

Currently, the information available on COVID-19 and its effects is vast in comparison to that of a year ago. While the topic of herd immunity is still debated frequently, it is miniscule compared to the most current debate: vaccine mandates. The topic may have changed but what remains the same is the sharp division in public opinion. The ultimate question Americans are now faced with is whether these are worsening symptoms

of misinformation, party divide, or both.

For example, a September Gallup poll found that 44% of Americans oppose mandatory vaccines in the workplace, 76% of whom were Republican. This points to the stark contrast in public opinion and the little room left for compromise, as the issue is nearly split down the middle.

However, while it may be easy to disregard the right’s opposition as party bias, it’s worth considering the bias on the left. In the same Gallup poll, 88% of Democrats were in-favor of vaccine mandates in the workplace, a notable incline from the 76% Republican opposition on the same topic. Here we begin to see the root of the issue that has persisted throughout the pandemic and beyond: Matters of public health being manipulated into political virtue signaling.

Both parties are guilty of this, and the evidence speaks for itself. A Gallup and Franklin Templeton poll conducted in December of

2020 showed that Democrats believed the COVID-19 death rate among the 24 and under age group to be 8.4%, when in reality it was a mere 0.1%, showing the exaggeration of the virus among the left. Equally misinformed were the views of the right as seen in the same poll. 40% of Republicans believed that there were more deaths caused by the flu than COVID-19, which was simply not the case.

Ironically, 95% of Americans agree that misinformation is a problem, according to a Pearson Institute poll from October. If nearly all Americans agree that misinformation is a problem in our society, why is there such animosity between political parties? The answer to this question, once again, is a bi-partisan crime: The Media.

The Media plays a crucial role in our ability to assess situations on a macroscale and vote accordingly. In most cases, each party blames the other for

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“Misinformation” >>>

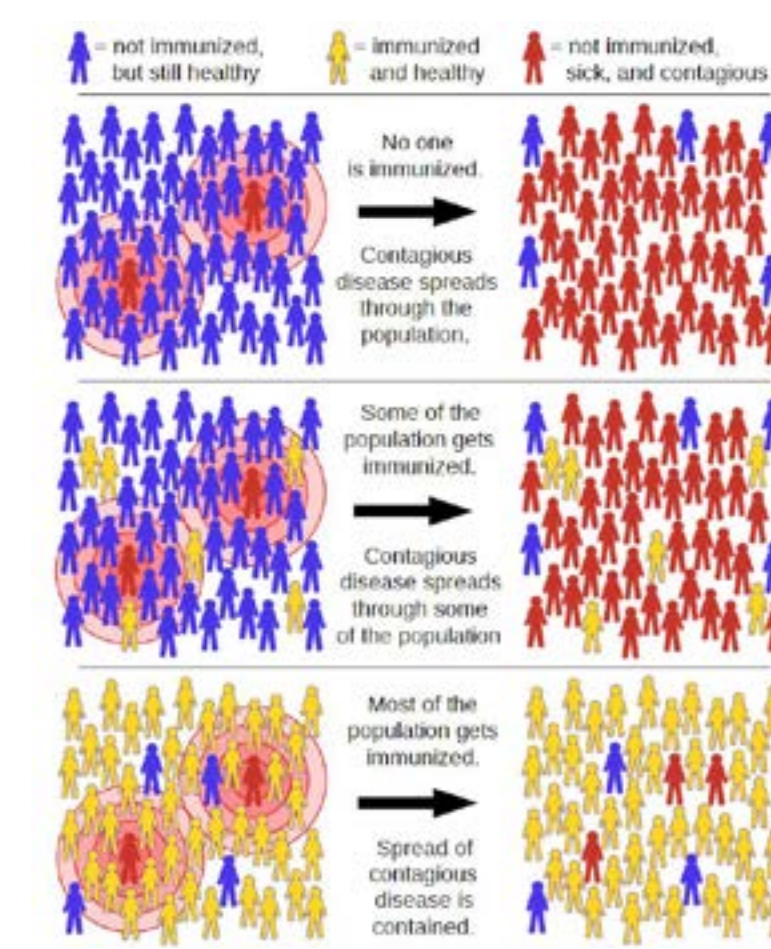
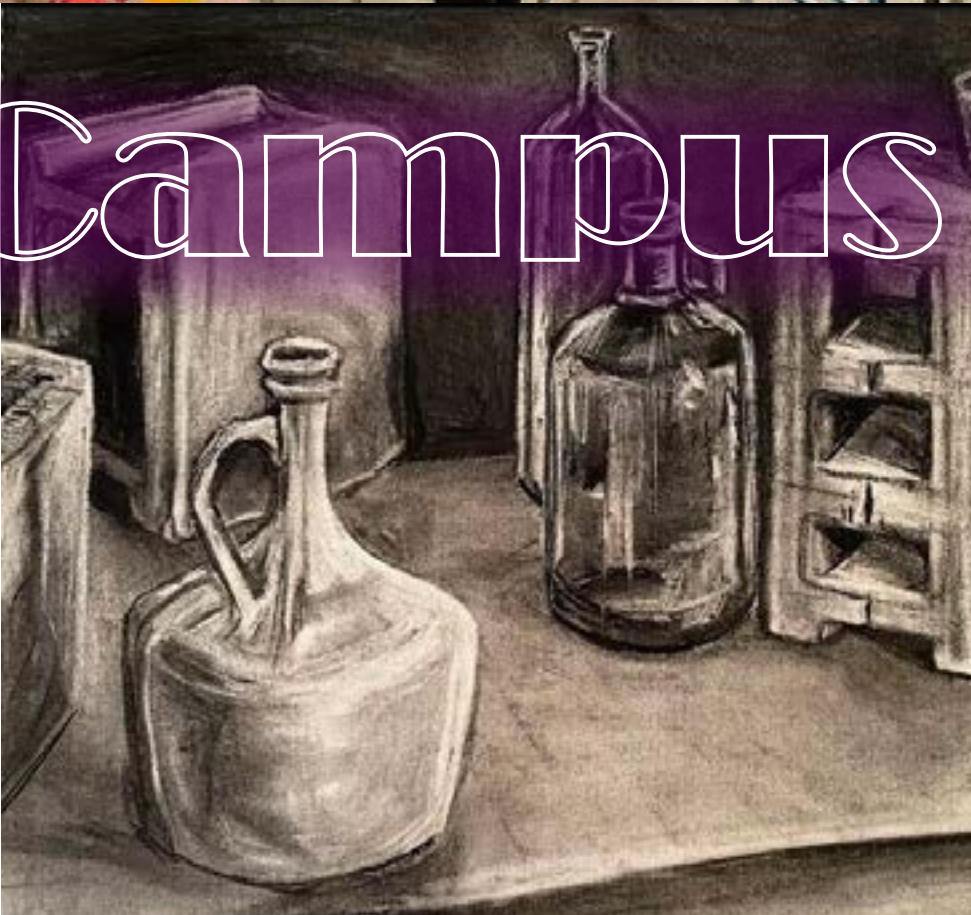


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A graphic depicting the idea of “herd/community immunity.” “The top box depicts a community in which no one is immunized and an outbreak occurs. In the middle box, some of the population is immunized but not enough to confer community immunity. In the bottom box, a critical portion of the population is immunized, protecting most community members.” Whether this system would work to protect against COVID-19 is still under debate.



Art on Campus

Photos courtesy of MWCC Art Department

(Top Row) Painting II students work on landscapes. (Left Page, Bottom) The 2-D Design class, working with color and composition. (Right Page, Bottom) Graphite drawings from the Drawing I class, and the Art Club at the Fitchburg Art Museum.

Ghostbusters: Afterlife Review

A Supernatural Family Affair



Image copyright Columbia Pictures, Ghost Corps.

By **Gabriel Velez**

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

It's important to know going in, that Ghostbusters: Afterlife is written in part and directed by Jason Reitman. A talented director on his own, who's made some big films of the 2000s. Up in the Air, Juno, Thank You for Smoking, and other films. He's

Ivan, had quite the shoes to fill with Afterlife. He had to please fans, who have proven to be quite fickle with the 2016 reboot of Ghostbusters directed by Paul Feig. He had to honor the legacy of the franchise and specifically Harold Ramis, who passed away nearly eight years ago now. And, he had to live up to his own family legacy, as this franchise was started by his father.

Safe to say, he pulled it off. This film feels like a love letter to the franchise and to his father. It's filled with incredible heart, and emotion. Even if sometimes, the overall plot and character doesn't add up. The film stars McKenna Grace as Phoebe. The granddaughter of Egon Spengler, one of the original Ghostbusters. After Egon passes away, his estranged daughter and her kids (the mother played by Carrie Coon, and the son, Trevor, played by Finn Wolfhard of Stranger Things which is irony upon itself), go to his home to pick up the remains of his life as the mother is broke. Once there, Phoebe starts to discover that things are in fact strange in their neighborhood, and so isn't the history of her grandfather, which might just happen to involve ghosts.

The film is immaculately directed. It feels like something straight out of the 1980s, Spielberg era of filmmaking. While it is missing some of what made those films so magical, this film is doing that but for the modern generation. Which brings us to its characters. Phoebe is the undeniable star here, and she is an incredible character. She is the heart of the film and drives the story forward. She's smart, but not totally inhuman. She lacks humor but has a lot of heart. She believes totally in the history of her grandfather.

As for the other characters, they fall a little flatter. Paul Rudd's Grooberson is simply fun in the role. But for the rest of the characters, they are, as I said, flat. They do not have much going on to be fully invested in. This is Phoebe's story, and you will feel that going in. The effects and action are also quite fun and well filmed. A particular chase in the middle act was genuinely exciting and was very well done. But that's because of the film's build up. Which is both a positive and negative to the film. The film takes a long time to get going even if it's appreciated. Gives us more time to know the characters and expand the plot, but it gives the film an issue. This film has some pacing issues. So much so that the characters don't do the whole "Ghostbusters" thing until over an hour and a half into the film. Which is two hours by the way. The film instead, has a lot of easter eggs and references to

the original. From the score, even lines said, the film is quite a goody bag for Ghostbusters fans.

Which leads to the film's final act which is rushed. It feels like studio notes in the way that makes it feel almost forced in. Yes. The original Ghostbusters are in the film. Yes, they are in it for only a bit. Yes. It is really fun to see them, and they add some good comedy. Do I wish there was a more fleshed out final act instead of just throwing them in at the literal last minute? Absolutely. The film basically recreates the original Ghostbusters at the end and feels like the film suddenly decides to not stand on its own. But it does save itself in its ending. Which is incredibly emotional and is what you came to see.

Overall, I had a great time with Ghostbusters: Afterlife. While I'm not a Ghostbusters superfan, I am a fan of respecting a franchise's legacy. And this film does that and more. It's got heart, comedy, action, and even some suspenseful moments that could really scare a child. It has solid performances, and a bit of a wonky plot and characters. But it has good intentions, and I can't fault it for that. This is a heavy recommendation from me, and I'm going to give it an 8.9/10.

The Status of The Mount Observer Going Forward...

With the exact future of the Spring 2022 semester uncertain, we at *The Mount Observer* are currently unable to determine the precise format in which we will be delivering the latest in campus news to you. We can confirm that regardless of whether physical copies of the paper return to campus or not, we will continue to make the *Observer* available online.

If you would like to keep up with us and any articles, announcements, or issues that we have planned, feel free to check out our social media platforms:

Website: www.mountobserver.com

Twitter: [@MountObserver](https://twitter.com/MountObserver)

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Thank you for your support!

Misinformation

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misinformation in the case of the mainstream media, i.e., political-leaning cable news and websites, and thus the data is redundant. Interestingly, though, the dislike of a single entity manages to unite both parties: social media.

According to the same Pearson Institute poll, 79% of Republicans and 73% of Democrats said social media companies have a great deal of responsibility for misinformation. Given the uncontrollable nature of social media, and the nearly unlimited access to it, it comes as no surprise that it's the leading source of misinformation.

These culprits are no excuse for uninformed debate. Take a moment to understand and listen to those you disagree with and assess your own views. What information, if any, supports your opinion? What is the source of this information? If we all strive to improve our understanding of opinions we disagree with, perhaps we will see the fault in our own opinions, or at the very least, strengthen them. Disagreement based on political beliefs is a recipe for further animosity and division and benefits no one. The concept of changing our opinions based on new information should not be a precarious one.

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Travis Scott's Astrofest

The Tragedy and The Lasting Effects on Concerts

By **Nathan Cobiski**

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

What was meant to be one of the highest grossing concerts in years, Travis Scott held a two-night festival, full of many popular artists. The night turned sour very quickly, as many were trampled, sustaining many injuries in the chaos of the crowd. Some in the audience even died.

With help being blocked off by most of the crowd, and the concert still proceeding, it was chaos. The aftermath of the event resulted in much controversy on who was at fault, what should have been done, and much more.

"It was very concerning to see," Fitchburg resident Taryn Lorenzen said. Lorenzen has attended many festivals for her father's band. Usually, Lorenzen said, she feels safe at concerts due to security and the kind of crowd that attends, as well as her faith in the performing artist. As an example, she talked about the last Trippie Redd concert that she attended. "It was a sold-out show, packed tighter than a can of sardines, and still when someone fell in front of the stage where he was singing, he stopped playing and asked them if they were okay and had the crowd pick the person up," Lorenzen said. "He did that for one person, all

because he knew how packed the concert was."

Another individual, Kyrrah Drake of Leominster, talked about the changes to future security. Drake stated that "there should be way more security and much better barricades so people can't just jump over or push."

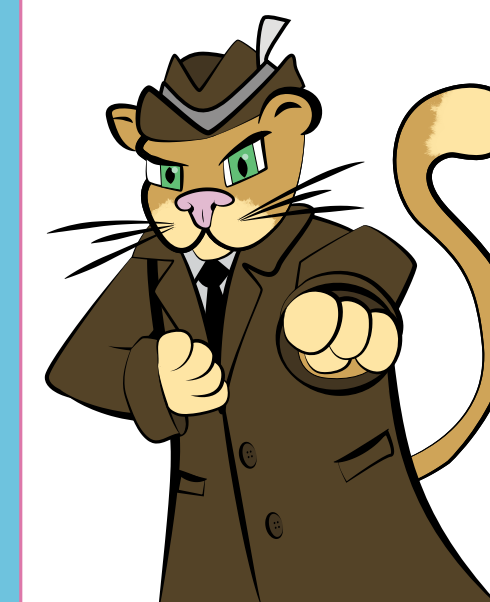
This would prevent fewer people being trampled at concerts."

Lorenzen also commented on this, saying that she believes concert rules, regulations, and protocols will drastically change as a result of Astrofest.

Fitchburg resident Charlie Lorenzen, a former security officer turned musician, stated that if he were at the Travis Scott

concert working security, "I would've started to use my body as much as possible to separate the crowd and help the police and EMTs as much as I could." He also believes that a lot of this had to do with the incompetence of the artist as well.

"I think that Mr. Scott had a lot to do with this and let this play out as he wanted," Charlie Lorenzen said. "Along with us (security), the artist has a big hand in the safety of these sort of events, and what happened that night was the result of not caring enough."



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