

The Mount Observer

“Voices of the students of Mount Wachusett Community College”

PREVIEWS



COVID-19’s Worker Shortage Struggle

Covid has left a pattern of employment hardship in the workplace, with many businesses struggling to find employees and maintain standards prior to Covid.

For the full article, see page 5

Immigration Borders: The Line Between Life and Death

Do you know anyone who has walked 4,000 miles over three months? What about someone who did that while carrying their infant children? To a place they didn’t know the language or if they would be accepted? The ambition of an individual to risk everything for a start at a new life happens every day, and you might be in class with someone who could share their family’s story with you.

For the full article, see page 6

Creative Writing

Check out our new Creative Writing section, and feel free to add to it by submitting work of your own!

For the full section, see pages 9-10

(Vaccination) Shots All Around Mount Wachusett Instates COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate, Drawing Mixed Response

By Daniel Dow
EDITOR IN CHIEF
and Josilyn Straka
ASSISTANT EDITOR

MWCC followed suit with fourteen Massachusetts community colleges to instate a COVID-19 vaccine mandate for the January semester; which, has drawn support from many but also meets outright refusal from some, and in turn, has resulted in resignations or dismissals.

Pushback and refusal have come through the means of emails sent across campus by adjunct math professor, Mark Charalambous, and maintenance employee, Randy Haimila; additionally, a protest was held by a few individuals in the Fall of 2021, outside the Green Street entrance of the college. Although the mandate has been met with some protest,

the decision has since been upheld, and there has been zero hesitation by MWCC President, James Vander Hooven.

President Vander Hooven states, “I am in close contact with the folks at Heywood Hospital on a regular basis; I talk to their CEO almost every week and it is clear as day that the folks who are hospitalized or suffering the worst effects of Covid are unvaccinated.” He elaborated, “It’s on me to create a healthy safe environment for our students and our employees.” Vander Hooven also shared that people who oppose this view “have a right to do so,” but added that receiving vaccination verifications has not been an issue.

Adjunct Math Professor, Mark Charalambous, offered a very different perspective and

continued on page 2
“Vaccine Mandate” >>>



COVID-19 vaccinations are now mandatory for all students and faculty at MWCC.

Image by Daniel Schludi from Unsplash

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle (Emphasis on “Reduce”) MWCC Environmental Science Professor Weighs in on Effectiveness of Recycling

By Jailene Lopez
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Heather Conn expresses her concern on the dangers of plastics, its effects on our oceans and the usefulness of recycling; additionally, she included some helpful advice on reducing our use of plastics as she discussed how the material is one of the most overused resources, especially here in the United States.

MWCC environmental science professor, Heather Conn, is an expert in the environmental field. She states, that although plastic is

recyclable and is advertised as such with the recycling symbol, and this is supported by retailers, typically most of the plastics recycle will still end up in landfills with trash.

In most cases, the plastic that does not end up being recycled is considered to be economically unacceptable. Recycling programs do not want that type of mix, and specific plastics can cost too much to process and take up too much time for the programs.

Professor Conn stated, “There is almost as much plastic in our oceans as living organisms,

and when our bodies and the bodies of animals contain microplastics due to ingestion, we have a huge problem. While recycling is a great idea the reality is only about 10% ends up getting recycled. However, it gives people the feeling they are being environmentally conscious.”

Conn added that “The most important step is reducing the amount of plastic we use and generate into waste in the first place. Then, if it is unavoidable, we should try to reuse the plastic, so it isn’t used for a short time and thrown away. Think about

how little time a plastic bag from the grocery store is actually used compared to how long it lasts in the environment. The last step if others can’t be done is to recycle. Single stream has helped people feel like they are doing their part, and that making it easier to recycle means more plastic getting recycled.”

She shared that natural weathers like floods, winds, rains, and storms cause plastic and trash to be carried into bodies of water. This is how some oceans and waterways

continued on page 2
“Truth About Plastic” >>>

Vaccine Mandate

>>> continued from page 1

sent a series of emails throughout campus to share his perspective. Charalambous expressed “There is no question that the mandate is unlawful,” and proceeded by stating “The vaccine is an experimental drug with no long-term studies. Not only does the mandate leave MWCC open for a discrimination lawsuit, the deadly effects of the vaccines may lead to more serious legal jeopardy.”

Charalambous campus-wide emails were sent in response to maintenance employee Randy Haimila, who sent a campus-wide email after applying for vaccine or anti-mandate), but there are people who feel safer because there is a Mandate.”

Professor Michelle Valois of the English Department echoed this sentiment, stating “I have great faith in the medical teams and I believe the vaccine will help— it is a good thing.” She shared this after speaking at great length on the desire to return to in-person learning. She previously stated when asked about returning to the classroom that she was “over the moon” and went on to share how she misses “The students, not just being in the classroom, but seeing them in the hallway and

in a world devoid of in-person/ human connection.”

The Trump and Biden administrations have each taken different approaches to combat the virus to return life to normal. Regardless, Americans continue to see COVID-19 cases spike, recently with the Omicron variant outbreak. Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker recently stated, “We are definitely on what I’d call the backside of the Omicron surge,” and that “Average hospitalizations, which tend to lag changes in infections, have also started a downturn.”

Although this does draw some reasons to be optimistic, the

“I am in close contact with the folks at Heywood Hospital on a regular basis; I talk to their CEO almost every week and it is clear as day that the folks who are hospitalized or suffering the worst effects of Covid are unvaccinated...It’s on me to create a healthy safe environment for our students and our employees.”

– President James Vander Hooven

exemption on the grounds of religious beliefs, but was denied. Haimilia states that he applied for an exemption “based on religious reasons” because of the use of “aborted fetal tissue” and his belief that the COVID-19 vaccine will “change my (his) DNA.” Haimilia has since left the college, and Charalambous has been informed that he is no longer allowed on campus. Charalambous shared that he is “still eligible for future appointments if I satisfy the vax requirement.”

Although there have been some demonstrations of anti-mandate sentiment, Candace Shivers, President of MWCC’s Teacher’s Union, states that although “people are going to have their opinions” she “could not give a definitive number on either side of the issue (pro cafeteria– stopping by my office for informal chit-chats. I miss that with my colleagues as well; I work with great people and I miss them terribly.”

This statement made by Valois comes after MWCC limited access to campus in March of 2020, suddenly shifting to online learning in an eleven-day period. After almost two years of combating COVID-19, MWCC has steadily begun to offer more in-person classes. Valois states when asked about the shift back “When I’m on campus these days there’s no buzz, there are so few of us present. I cannot wait to have that buzz again! When coming in on a Monday morning, classes are in session, the hallways and parking lot are full.” she further elaborated that “Blackboard and zoom is a great tool, (but) I do not want or live

Biden administration’s strategy has recently come under fire, with the Supreme Court ruling that the COVID-19 vaccine mandate is unconstitutional. According to the New York Times this “block(s)ed the Biden administration from enforcing a vaccine-or-testing mandate for large employers.”

The Mount Observer has since reached out to Peter Sennet, Vice President of Human Resources, to inquire about the effect this ruling may have on the Mount Wachusett Community Campus. At this time, he has not yet responded to the Mount Observer’s emails. Currently, MWCC has not issued any changes to its COVID-19 vaccine mandate and requires that students or faculty who work or attend on-campus classes be vaccinated.

Truth About Plastic



Image by Erik Mclean from Unsplash

>>> continued from page 1

are almost completely consumed with plastic, and almost all marine life is affected.

A 2021 study by Yana Vermenych in the journal *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* states that: “In the 21st century, plastic pollution has become one of the most pressing environmental problems. The production of plastic increased exponentially, from 2.3 million tons in 1950 to 448 million tons by 2015, and it is expected to double by 2050. Discarded plastic pollutes every corner of our planet: oceans, forests, beaches. It harms animal and

human health. Since plastic pollution is most visible in developing Asian and African countries, quite a lot of people from the rest of the world still ignore this problem.”

In conclusion of her statements, Conn said, “The reality is that single stream has only increased contamination, making it less useful to companies willing to make products with recycled material and therefore means that more plastic being burned or thrown away, and often travelling miles before doing so. This is why it is so important to reduce the amount of plastic you use and generate first and foremost.”

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:

ddow@mwcc.edu

Therapy Through Creative Writing

MWCC Professor Shares Her Tips for a Healthier Creative Mind

By Pamela Day
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Students may want to consider choosing a Creative Writing class as an elective for mental health benefits. Student Isabelle Mascary said writing helps her “find an outlet to express negative emotions. I write when I’m sad, mad, aggravated, or even happy.” Mascary described the mental release from writing as a rewarding form of therapy. Mascary enjoyed Creative Writing I last semester and is now enrolled in Creative Writing

II. Mascary recommended taking this class and feels that “everyone has a story and can learn from each other.” Professor Michelle Valois, who teaches Creative Writing I and II, recognized there is a correlation between therapy and creative writing. Valois views writing as an opportunity to be creative by allowing us to “tap into something else, even if it is fiction, to overcome hardship” and that “putting painful experiences on paper can be profound.” Valois compared writing and therapy to catharsis. By using

fictional characters, Valois explained, “we feel what they experienced from a distance. It helps us to quiet the monster and let go of the pain.” Valois wants students to “gain confidence and feel like they have a voice. When we know we have a voice, and are respected, it creates confidence and helps people heal and grow.” One critical difference Valois noted between therapy and the creative writing class is the subject matter of the writing is not discussed in class. Constructive feedback is given on how to improve

the writing, not just advice on the circumstances of the work. Valois strongly emphasized that writing does not take the place of therapy and urged anyone to seek professional help if they are troubled. In the Creative Writing courses, Valois dedicates the first 15 minutes of class to freestyle writing for journal entries. A prompt is provided to aid students with ideas to write about, if needed. The prompts are either pictures, paintings or words to use. Students write whatever they want and in any style during this 15-minute

period. The rest of the class is focused on learning to write short stories or poetry. Works are shared during class. However, Valois recognizes that “some don’t want to share which is fine, they can just respond. Eventually they will have to share by the end of the semester, or at least with me. I understand it is scary to share.” For advice on writing, Isabelle Mascary said, “Don’t cut yourself short, just write. If it’s a line, let it be a line. Always go back to it and expand.”

College Book Buying 101

Communication Issues and Supply Problems Plague Bookstore



Image by Thomas Hill Jr.

By Pamela Day
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Although MWCC has an assigned staff member as a liaison with the bookstore, there is still a lack of communication according to students, faculty and staff, that is leaving students scrambling to find books. Student Josilyn Straka experienced a communication breakdown between the bookstore and the professor on at least three separate occasions. Straka said the bookstore told her the professor did not order the required textbook, therefore it was not in stock. However, the professor told her the book was

ordered but the bookstore did not order it. Ellen Pratt, Distance Education & Outreach Librarian and President of Academic Senate, has heard similar stories from faculty and students about the bookstore. She said in one situation textbooks were on backorder 6-8 weeks at the beginning of the semester. The textbook was not in stock even though faculty submitted the paperwork in time to be ordered. Faculty also expressed some frustration at the lack of communication with the bookstore. Professor Jessica Kuskey said she had students

that could not get the book, *V for Vendetta* in time from the bookstore for her ENG 102 class. She explained that the book is a graphic novel. Students physically need the book in order to analyze the visual graphics and participate in class discussions. Without the book, students fall behind in writing discussion board posts. Kuskey said it would be helpful if the bookstore communicated with professors on order and supply issues. She was unaware that the bookstore substituted a different edition for her ENG 101 class. The alternate edition did not match the page numbers

in the assignments on the syllabus, which made it difficult for students to follow along. Kuskey acknowledged that book delays are common industry wide in all colleges. However, she wished there was more communication on book availability and status updates. She said, “By communicating, it would help me to reach out to and reassure those students and let them know I am aware of the bookstore issue. It wouldn’t put students through that stress and anxiety and feeling like they failed the first task they were given”. Kuskey added that students receiving financial aid must purchase from the bookstore or pay out of pocket elsewhere and wait for reimbursement which is also stressful. The library may be able to offer a solution for some students depending on what is available in the collections. Pratt said every semester students come to the library looking for textbooks while waiting for books to arrive from the bookstore. Pratt explained there is a limited selection of textbooks that have been donated by faculty

and students as well as books purchased in the Textbook Reserve Collection. Pratt said the Textbook Reserve Collection was a program that purchased textbooks known to be on backorder. This program has ended for any new purchases, but Pratt is hopeful it will return soon. Pratt said textbooks in the Reserve Collection can be used for 2 hours intervals in the library. Textbooks in the regular collection or another library in the network can be borrowed for up to 28 days with possibility of renewal. Jason Zelesky, Dean of Students, said the bookstore is not run by Mount Wachusett Community College. It is under the management of Follett, which is a national college bookstore provider. Zelesky said he is the liaison between MWCC and Follett. He communicates regularly with Danielle Nelson, Follett’s bookstore manager, to discuss issues and concerns. Zelesky acknowledged mistakes were made by the bookstore. He added that the bookstore had been very

continued on page 5
“College Bookstore” >>>

The Positive Side of the Pandemic

Mental Health Counselor, Student, and Professor Find the Good in a Difficult Circumstance

By *Isabelle Mascary*
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The pandemic has wreaked havoc worldwide and continues to do so. There was a lot of focus on the negative impacts it had on society, but what about the positives?

For Melissa Manzi, the mental health counselor at the Mount, “the strength of Covid was also the weakness of Covid.”

“There were some positives and challenges, and it got us to think differently,” Manzi said. “We don’t necessarily travel for training or go to conferences that maybe cost a lot of money if we can see the person virtually.”

Manzi added, “A very big positive with work life and school life is that people had to think outside of the box and how they were going to communicate with others.”

The pandemic did have a positive impact on some students who are parents, with the convenience of not having to travel as much. “There wasn’t all of this running around trying to manage because they were managing it in the house,” Manzi

said. “The pandemic for those reasons made it easier for some. It gave families the opportunity to connect with each other more than they have been.”

The pandemic also provided an opportunity for students to be able to receive counseling services virtually. Manzi said, “I have a lot of students

to come in and see me. That in some ways opened up more doors for more students,” Manzi said.

For students who suffer from social anxiety, Manzi said, “all of that pressure to be integrated within this group and to go meet other students in the classroom went away.” Manzi added that

for you.”

Prior to Covid, student Jailene Lopez, who is majoring in Elementary Education at MWCC, found herself working multiple jobs, spending little time with people that mattered the most to her. “I was prioritizing things in my life that did not have meaning,” Lopez said. “Once the lockdown took place, I was forced to stay home just like everyone else. There was nowhere to go.”

While using a lot of time to reflect, Lopez realized the severity of the virus and concluded that she didn’t want to overwork herself. “I wanted to find myself one secured job with consistency, so I was able to make time for the meaningful things in my life. This realization is something that I turned into my reality,” Lopez said.

Lopez was able to turn a negative situation like the pandemic into something with a positive aspect. “[I]t made me have an awakening. Today, I spend much more time with my family. I prioritize them, especially my siblings, and love

how much of a drastic change I have in my relationship with them,” Lopez said. “Comparing my life now to before Covid, I would say that it’s going much better for me.”

From a sociologist standpoint, Professor Candace Shivers offered her perspective on the positive impacts of the pandemic on society and students. Shivers said, “All the people that died and are sick, it’s horrific... HERR-IF-IC! And I don’t know that any positives that come out of the pandemic will ever make up for the lives that have been lost. Let me be clear about that.”

Shivers has been teaching Sociology at the Mount for 18 years. She said that one of the positives of the pandemic for society is the mail-in voting, “It probably should be available for everyone all the time because it worked really well,” Shivers said. Secondly, the pandemic brought along the overuse of technology but in a positive way, and finally, the pandemic created survivors.

continued on page 5
“Pandemic Positives” >>>

“A very big positive with work life and school life is that people had to think outside of the box and how they were going to communicate with others.”

– *Melissa Manzi*

who weren’t able to come to counseling because they didn’t have the transportation, all of a sudden, that’s not an issue anymore.” Manzi added that she will always offer counseling in-person and virtually.

“[A] student can get to me easier if they have to get on their laptop versus making that time

the good and the bad about this is that “most people who have that level of social anxiety wish that they didn’t, and the only way that you actually work on that is to go be with other people.”

Manzi’s advice to students was: “On a day-to-day basis, wake up, do something meaningful and kind for others and pleasurable

Shortages Due to COVID-19

Business and Economics Professor Gives Thoughts on Supply Chain Woes

By *Jailene Lopez*
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Shortages have been at an all-time high due to the pandemic that the coronavirus disease of 2020 has caused. Food, labor, water, medicines/medical supplies, gas, toiletries, etc. are several of the necessary items that have dramatically decreased in supply.

Department Chair, Associate Professor, Business and

Economics Professor Elmer Eubanks-Archbold offers his viewpoint on the pandemic, the current economy and directs his outlook on how to manage.

When questioned on how Covid-19 changed the economy Eubanks stated, “I would say everything changed. The way we went about doing business. All companies had to figure out how to survive with everything being closed down. The supply

chain was disrupted in every way which slowed down the economy. The most affected are restaurants, they had to figure out how to operate.”

New variations of the Covid-19 virus continue, and according to Eubanks, the current struggles will only continue to worsen. Eubanks commented, “I think currently fear of more variants has people holding back. We have containers of supplies

stuck outside the ports, not enough truck drivers, people quitting their jobs. It’s a logistics nightmare that won’t end. Everything in the transportation world is in a mess. Holding up the supply side is making things worse, and it is bound to get worse in January as more vaccine mandates take hold, and I would venture to say we will have even more shortages in the supply chain.”

Professor Eubanks concluded by stating that he recommends everyone to stop watching or reading the news if you seem to be struggling, “Spend time with family and friends, enjoy the outdoors. Plan time to recover, time for yourself as well. Take the holiday break and do something different or something you always wanted to do. Look for support as well both for financial and mental health.”

COVID-19’s Worker Shortage Struggle

Economists, Educators, and Employees Discuss the Pandemic’s Impact on the Job Market

By Tarra Kruse
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Covid has left a pattern of employment hardship in the workplace, with many businesses struggling to find employees and maintain standards prior to Covid. Carly Olson, intern and contributor for the *Los Angeles Times*, published an article on July 2nd that questioned if the labor shortage was really about a lack of good-paying jobs and said many business owners had

increased wages to try to entice job seekers to apply for jobs. Within this article, Ashley Richardson, the owner of two “9Round Fitness kickboxing gyms” in California, added, “[w]e’re being ghosted by job candidates.” She shared that she has been looking to hire employees for months and has even raised the wages to lure more applicants into filling the positions at her gym. Olson mentioned that economists warn us not to just

call it a labor shortage. There are many jobs available; there is just a shortage of people who want those types of jobs. In this same piece from the *Los Angeles Times*, Sylvia Allegretto, labor economist at UC Berkeley, said, “it’s a wage and benefits shortage.” Olson says that economists feel that eventually, the jobs will be filled, but the lowest-paid jobs will be one of the last to be filled. One impact of the labor shortages has occurred within the

school system-- creating a lack of staff in the classrooms. Katey Komberg, a teacher at Head Start in Fitchburg Hosmer School, shared that the shortage in staff due to Covid has affected her teaching. “In my classroom, sometimes we need a substitute teacher, and they are impossible to find because students are not going into the teaching field anymore. I don’t know if it’s because they’re afraid of Covid or it’s that they are not offering enough pay, maybe both,” Komberg said. “When someone calls out sick, they have to close the classroom down completely. It affects the children’s learning.”

Myranda Bishop, a long-time employee of Great Wolf Lodge in Fitchburg MA, works in a busy restaurant that has felt the pressure of short staff and lack of employees. “The public doesn’t understand, and workers are burnt out. They are making their self-value depleted. Even a billion-dollar company...is so short-staffed. We increased our wages in hopes of receiving more applications in some positions,” Bishop said. Bishop added that “the world has changed” with people moving to more remote jobs that offer better benefits, such as in healthcare and commuting time. Bishop stressed the emotional toll the shortages have taken on employees and urged the public to be patient.

Pandemic Positives

>>> continued from page 4

“People who have made it through this far are survivors,” Shivers said. “It may not feel that way, but we made it through. Even though we’re very divided...our human spirit has survived.” Another positive is the appreciation of educators’ and students’ abilities to become self-sufficient. “People at least for a

little while started to appreciate the educators,” Shivers said. “I try to tell this to students: if you can thrive in the pandemic, there’s not much else that stands in the way of you doing what you need to do.” The pandemic also opened many eyes to social and racial injustices that couldn’t be ignored. “It’s going to be difficult for people to sort of put their head

in the sand now when it comes to racial and social justice,” Shivers said. “The pandemic has opened our eyes to a lot of things that I think people probably knew in the back of their mind but didn’t want to admit, and then it was put right in front of them.” Shiver’s advice to students was to “believe in themselves and in their abilities. Don’t be afraid to ask for help.”

College Bookstore

>>> continued from page 3

responsive to rectify problems. Zelesky said response time on issues has improved since he became the liaison one year ago. He works directly with students and faculty to resolve problems as soon as possible. Zelesky said it is not unusual to hear complaints about the bookstore. Complaints are common with any retail space and things don’t always run smoothly. He also noted additional circumstances such as limited in person hours, conducting business remotely

and unforeseeable nationwide shipping delays also compounded problems. Zelesky explained that sometimes the bookstore is not able to get the number of books or editions requested from faculty due to the chain supply process. Follett is required to source books from certain vendors and publishers and is restricted from getting them elsewhere. Zelesky said emails are sent to faculty to remind them to order book adoptions early. He explained early ordering gives the bookstore more time to locate the requested material and

get them on the shelves earlier for students. Zelesky said, “Our goal is to have a better Spring than we had in the Fall with our adoption software and get those books on the shelves so students can buy them when they want them.” Danielle Nelson declined a request to be interviewed. Follett is under contract until June 30, 2024. About 1 year before the contract ends, a request for proposal (RFP) will open up for new bids on the bookstore. Barnes and Noble managed the bookstore prior to Follett.



Image by Nathan Dumlao from Unsplash

Immigration Borders: The Line Between Life and Death

MWCC Student shares Her Family's Experiences With Travelling to the U.S.

By Kelly Johnson

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Do you know anyone who has walked 4,000 miles over three months? What about someone who did that while carrying their infant children? To a place they didn't know the language or if they would be accepted? The ambition of an individual to risk everything for a start at a new life happens every day, and you might be in class with someone who could share their family's story with you.

Isabelle Mascary is a Professional Writing major at MWCC and is first-generation born in the USA. Her mother immigrated from Haiti at 17 years old, seeking better opportunities for herself and the future of her family. America provided many options over the years for Mascary's mother to make a living, including attending

cosmetology school, owning a children's clothing business, and working as a CNA for more than 20 years.

Mascary is one of six children, raised in Dorchester in a home which regularly hosted family

to be professionals, a path which is very important to Haitian culture.

Growing up in America, Mascary said the children in her family were always on the lookout for household goods and

for others.

While growing up, Mascary can remember several aunts, uncles, and cousins staying with them for short periods of time when they first arrived in the U.S. from Haiti. In recent

around the world find their way to Southern and Central America, eventually traveling to the U.S. border for new opportunities. It is a journey which some people don't complete, where death and attacks on migrants are witnessed. One cousin of Mascary's, on the journey walking to the U.S. for medical care for kidney issues, hasn't been heard from in several months. Another person on the journey with another cousin's family broke their leg and had to be left.

When asked to provide advice to others regarding immigration, Mascary said, "Don't pass judgement, assuming they're here to take away from you. You can create opportunity for someone else, whether in pointing them in a better direction or physically helping."

– *Isabella Mascary*

"Don't pass judgement, assuming they're here to take away from you. You can create opportunity for someone else, whether in pointing them in a better direction or physically helping."

as they immigrated to the United States for a better life than Haiti could provide. Her mother would sometimes work 7 days a week and even worked 24-hour shifts on occasion. Mascary said that her mother worked hard because she wanted her children to educate themselves

toys to collect. They regularly packed boxes of food, clothing, medications, and merchandise to send to family in Haiti. "Many resources have a purpose beyond what some Americans use them for," Mascary said. Their family knew that things could be given a second life which hold value

years, natural disasters in Haiti were in regions where Mascary's father's side of the family lives. About half of her father's side of the family have been affected, including some family members who died during earthquakes and hurricanes.

Immigrants from nations

The Texas "Heartbeat Act"

Students and Faculty Give Their Views on the Controversial Abortion Ban

By Jaiene Lopez

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The Texas Heartbeat Act has become a national issue, with the constitutionality of the laws now being weighed on by the Supreme Court. This new law took effect as of December 2021, and with the Supreme Court not issuing a verdict on the matter, it is allowing lawsuits from abortion providers to transpire.

The Texas Heartbeat Act is a collection of laws that ban abortion after the detection of a heartbeat, according to the Texas government's website. Included are the testimonies of professor of law, James Korman, Maia

Baker, a Care for All Public Awareness Coordinator at the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts, and student Viridiana Serratos, which provide a number of perspectives on the issue.

Paralegal program Professor James Korman when questioned on the constitutionality of restricting abortions at 6 weeks, Korman stated, "There is no overt language in the U.S. Constitution regarding abortion and reproductive rights to privacy. However, there has been significant caselaw that outlines some basic privacy interests for women regarding abortion rights

and rights over their reproductive processes."

Professor Korman provided an example of the complications surrounding abortion law: "the most significant has been the Roe v. Wade Case of 1973 that set a basic parameter about when and under what circumstances that state has an interest in the protection of a viable fetus and when a women should have the choice or her decision on whether to seek an abortion or not."

He explained that "based on the legal standards previously

**continued on page 7
"Texas Abortion" >>>**



Image by AnonMoos from Wikimedia Commons

Texas Abortion

>>> continued from page 6

articulated by the Supreme Court, I do believe the Texas Abortion Prohibition at 6 weeks from conception runs contrary to the history court precedents that previously identified a women's right to make a meaningful decision about their reproductive rights." Korman added, "at six weeks, many women might not have actual knowledge about a pregnancy and thereby creating a chilling effect over access to a meaning choice."

Along with the prohibition comes the right to charge and prosecute anyone and any provider who attempts to help or does assist the patient in acquiring the abortion. Professor Korman expressed his personal opinion on this matter and explained, "The bounty system is shocking to the conscious and quite frankly one of the most repugnant proponents of vigilantism that I have ever heard or read about in a proposed piece of legislation. Just bizarre and undermines our sense of fairness and civility within our community. One might argue it violates the substantive due process clause because it creates an abhorrent method of implementation of law."

In regard to the Texas Heartbeat Act, Korman concluded that there will always be a group that is advocating for or against abortion access and that each will use every legal policy available "to meet their philosophical ends."

In relation to supporting abortion access, Maia Baker advocates for and speaks on women's rights. Baker voiced, "Abortion bans like S.B.8 in Texas have devastating effects on abortion access. By politicizing sexual and reproductive health care and pushing abortion out of reach, bans not only make it difficult or impossible for someone to get an abortion; they also damage people's mental and physical health. Pregnancy is a major health event with serious consequences, even in the best circumstances; furthermore, someone being forced to remain pregnant against their will has dire consequences for their mental health."

Baker explained that this ban not only affects women, "While politicians may start with attacks on abortion, that's far from the only care they're targeting. Contraception, sex education, and all sexual and reproductive health care is under threat right now. Additionally, access to abortion has long-lasting effects on someone's mental and physical health and economic stability. Abortion bans don't only affect whether or not someone can get an abortion: bans have countless sequelae (undesirable consequences), affecting their long-term mental and physical health and their economic stability."

In Baker's opinion, "Abortion restrictions target people who can get pregnant - women, trans men, and nonbinary people.

These restrictions don't improve people's health - they're political attempts to impose outside control over someone's personal medical decisions. These bans are about nothing other than control."

Monty Tech business graduate, Viridiana Serratos, is a Jehovah's witness and does not believe that abortion is ethical. According to Serratos, "First and foremost, there are several options that can and should be considered. There is adoption or having someone in the family take over as the guardian. I believe that the baby is not at fault and was created for a reason."

She added, "If the parents cannot afford the baby, there are lots of different programs that can assist. There are options like section-8 housing, Fuel Assistance, DTA Food Stamps, WIC, rental assistance programs, shelters, etc. The baby has the right to live a full, happy, and healthy life. The mother always has alternative resources and benefits."

Other states with abortion-restrictive laws as recent as September 2021 are Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, and many more. States like Oklahoma, Kansas, and Kentucky are going as far as taking away medical licenses for those who provide abortions, or any abortion-related medical assistance. With the Supreme Court's unwillingness to offer an official ruling, the controversial debate will continue.

OPINION

Living in the "Rat Park" Drug Addiction Proves A Common Connection Between Rats and Humans

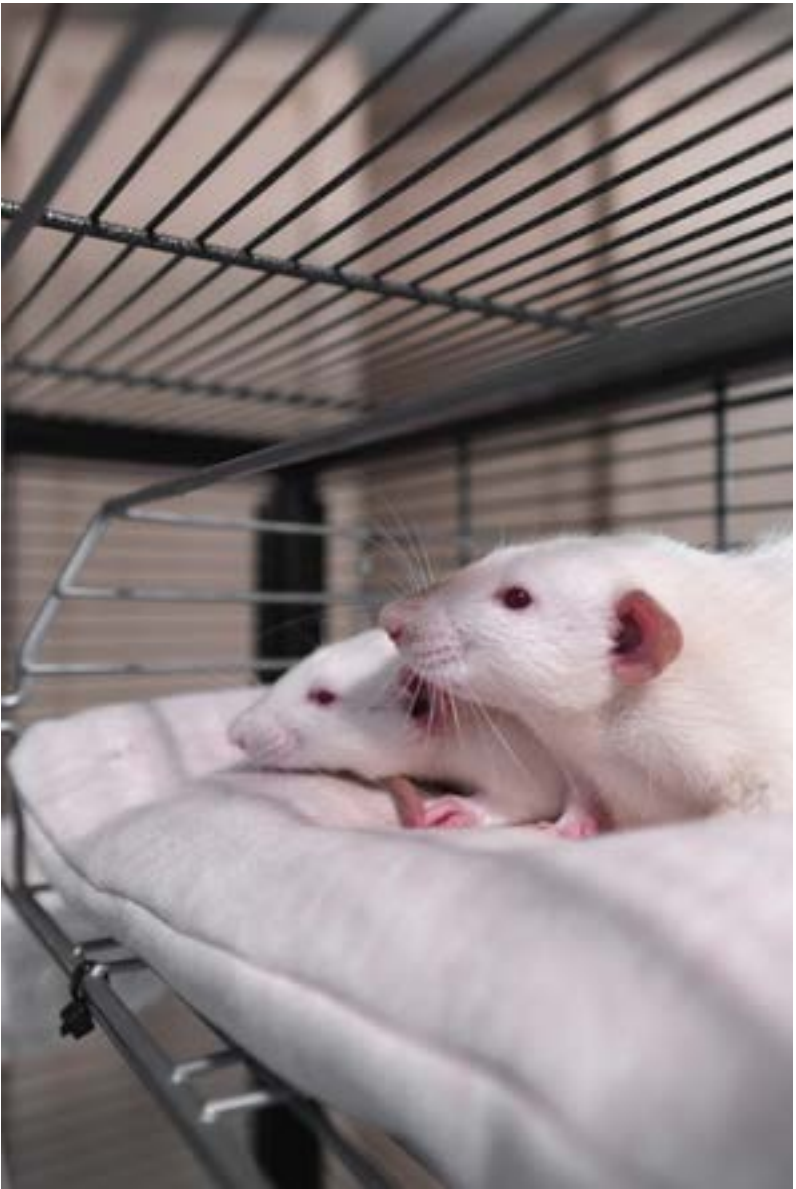


Image by Riccardo Ragione from Unsplash

By Andi Cunningham
Observer Contributor

I'm going to put it bluntly, everything you know about addiction is wrong -- we are led to believe that addiction is black and white, this is wrong.

In 1978 Canadian psychologist Bruce Alexander conducted a study on rats. He found that if a single rat in a cage was given two water bottles, one laced with Cocaine and heroin and

the other just plain water, the rat would always choose the one laced with drugs. Alexander realized that drug addicts do not sit alone in a cage, they have a lot of activities, they are people. So what he decided to do was to put many rats in a cage and gave them many activities, along with the laced and unlaced water. Not

Continued on page 8
"Living in the Rat Park" >>>

Have your own opinions on current events, hot-button issues, or events on campus?

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It may just end up in our next issue!

Living in the Rat Park

>>> continued from page 7

one rat chose the laced water, even compulsively. The rats never choose the laced water; he found they were less suicidal because they had “support.”

Until ‘78 this was our understanding of addiction; the idea that an addict will always choose drugs over the alternative is false.

In the year 2000, Portugal had one of the worst drug problems in the world. According to the New York Times, 1% of the population in Portugal was addicted to drugs. Every year the government tried harder to prosecute drug addicts, known as “The American way.” The more they prosecuted the worse the problem became.

This is similar to Reagan’s “war on drugs”—the mass incarnation of addicts grew from 50,000 to 400,000 in 17 years according to Encyclopædia Britannica. This further isolates minorities and addicts who desperately need help. Pushing them into sentences that last years and destroying any sense of community that is outside of prison.

At the end of 2000, the prime minister of Portugal and the leader of the opposition appointed a committee to come up with a solution to the drug epidemic. The committee of psychologists and drug and alcohol counselors concluded that the system of outlawing all drugs wasn’t working. They advised that all drugs should be decriminalized and that the money used to prosecute drugs be reinvested into treatment rather than punishment.

It was decided that the money would be relocated to rehabilitation and to reconnect drug addicts to their community. This plan was put into action and today the epidemic is down 50% in Portugal.

Like Alexander’s rats, much of our society is built upon being alone. We are taught to look out for ourselves. We have spent our lives looking out for ourselves that the world is a cruel and scary place. It reflects in our living spaces also. According to HUD, our floor space has doubled in the last ten years. We have

traded floor space for friends and connections. The opposite of addiction is connection. Are we seeing a rise in drug use that coincides with our floor space?

Obviously what we are doing in the United States is not working. A study by Libid states, “In the first two weeks after their release from prison, individuals are almost 13 times more likely to die than the general population. The leading

cause of death among recently released individuals is overdose. During that period, individuals are at a 129 percent greater risk of dying from an overdose than the general public.”

Could applying these principles work in a place like the states? The stigma that all drug addicts are bad is something that needs to be broken. People need and get the attention they crave, interaction with their community,

and have communication. Our society is one of the most lonely in the world. In a study done by Alison Cashin at Harvard University, she found that 36% of all Americans—including 61% of young adults and 51% of mothers with young children—feel “serious loneliness.”

In my recovery, I am taught that my disease will never be cured, but can be arrested at times. Could connection be

the cure? A cure may be found in the future in the form of a pill, or a program, or a medical procedure. I know that the one thing all recovery programs have in common is a connection to one another.

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Creative Writing

Greetings MWCC students,

Moving forward, the Mount Observer will feature a creating writing section spotlighting students' poetry and short stories. In an effort to drive creativity and to interact with our community the paper will also post a writing prompt each month that is selected by random by rolling writing dice. Dice will be rolled to create a prompt for each of the five w's (who, what, when, where, and why); the author will then need to use each of the rolled themes in their creative piece, which should be around 1000 words. When completed, your pieces can be submitted to ddow@mwcc.edu and the journalism team will choose the most relevant, creative, and polished pieces to publish. All members of the college are encouraged to participate in this activity!

The following prompts for this month are:

- **Who** - A.I.
- **What** - Supernatural
- **When** - Spring
- **Where** - Plains
- **Why** - Hatred

I am feeling a battle between the hated A.I. and supernatural may be occurring on the barren plains of Lethe during the Great Spring. Or maybe, the U.S. Government is engineering new A.I. technology to farm the Great American Plains come spring to combat famine caused by global warming, but is faced with a supernatural being driven by hatred for past misdeeds!

Best of luck with your pieces! The Mount Observer Team looks forward to reading your work!

Let Your Voice be Heard!

Send your stories, poetry, artwork, photography, or other content to

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Broken Record

The Old Man and the Old House

By Cami Stephens

I listened to our song, again.
Over and over, I listen.
I immerse myself in the lyrics,
I fixate on the tempo,
I wonder if it has a meaning?

I am doing it, again.
I know each drumbeat as if it were my own heartbeat,
The lyrics are singing to me,
But all I can do is focus on you.
How did you stop listening?

I hear our song, again.
It isn't ours anymore.
You are playing a new song now.
Our song is now her song,
Does she know it used to be ours?

I play the scratched, overused record, again.
The needle threatens each groove, waiting for me to
stop playing.
The record player is tired of the gloom
It keeps turning and turning, with the same song on
repeat.
Why does it keep replaying the song?

I am humming the song, again.
It won't stop until I understand it.
And I never will understand the song
Because you never told me what the lyrics mean.
What does it mean?

Replaceable

By Cami Stephens

"There is no one else I would rather be with," is what
you say to me.
As your heart beats and your eyes lie
And your cheeks flush with red anguish.
Yet, there is no one you would rather be with.

You tap your foot up and down, panicking with each
moment.
Your mouth speaks with pure love,
But your mind speaks with utter vexation.
Yet, there is no one you would rather be with.

Your love bombards me with an icy-heat;
I cannot escape your twisted infatuation.
I feel insincerity with every word
Yet, there is no one you would rather be with.

"I love you," is what you say to me;
Those words never meant anything to you.
It's easy to be in love when you are pretending
Yet, there is no one you would rather be with.

Your guilt speaks before you do.
Anyone can see that your "love" should be called
deception.
Even your blood was laced with lies
Yet, there is no one you would rather be with.

I knew the moment it was over before you did.
Your mouth danced in a sinister way: each lie ran faster
than your truth.
I could feel the demise of our falsified love
Yet, there is no one you would rather be with.

"I am sorry" is what you say to me.
I know you aren't sorry.
Why?
Because there was someone else who you would rather
be with.

By Daniel Dow

The beat-up black BMW pulled up to the house next door, like so many times before, the old man leaned forward in his rocker. He peered out over the railing, hoping it would be the last time he would see the vehicle. Hoping, that the owner of the BMW would not be taking down the "for rent sign" yet again, and handing the keys to another renter.

As the old man played the memories over in his head, the moment played out before him like so many times before. The owner of the BMW took down the sign, a red car pulled up behind the BMW, and a couple pranced out of the car- meeting the man to sign a lease for their new home.

With keys in hand, the couple nearly sprinted to their new home and just as fast as the couple made their way to their new home, the owner in double-time action would make for his car and pull away from the property. It was hard to gather what drove the man to move so quickly- was it from fear or his conscience. Either way, at his point there was the driver of the BMW could not deny what this house held for its residents, and what befell the folks living in his home was truly his fault.

The old man sat back down in his rocker—he already knew how the next steps would play out, but no doubt he would still try. By God, he couldn't live with himself if he didn't try. He would wait out on the porch until the night began to set, and if he didn't catch the couple tonight, he would the next morning- for he did not dare approach the house.

The old man shot up, blinking several times he realized that the sun was down and the cool air of summer nights was upon them. He licked his lips and took a moment to acclimate himself to his new reality as he peered over to the house next door: yes, the "for rent" sign is gone, yes the man in the beat-up black BMW was there, and yes the red car remained parked out front of the house. The moment was nice, the moment where he could pretend as if this was not real, but it was, and he had some kind of responsibility to try and make things right. He would try to do so tomorrow and went inside to prepare himself for an early morning and the responsibilities that lay before him.

The sun was just about rising and the old man found himself on the porch—coffee in hand. Sipping it slowly he waited, eyeing the house next door, draining his cup. Just as the sun was at the point where he could feel its warmth, he saw the door open next door. A man emerged, followed by a female and as they left the house he began to rise. Moving with determination, he made his way to the edge of his porch, and then to the end of his walkway, while trying to make eye contact. But he was conscience not take a single step or movement towards the neighboring house, he didn't dare.

The couple were too preoccupied with the events of the day though, and did not notice him. He shouted "Hey!" Which made the couple jump as they were caught off-guard. They both moved in a similar fashion as they turned to meet his eyes, shock rested on their faces. The old man said "hey" in a gentler, milder tone as if trying to reset the situation. It registered with the young man and the old man could see his guard begin to drop; he didn't waste time with introductions- "You're aware of the history of that house, right? You know what's happened there?" the old man narrowed his eyes and gritted his teeth as he said this—he wore the severity on his face. The young man's eyes widened as he registered what was happening, replying with "aaaaa nice to meet you too" as his thoughts began to form in his head. The old man cutting through the bullshit replied, "that's not what I asked you—you heard me?" The young man taken-aback steps forward, "yeah—we've heard, but it's all nonsense—there's no reason to fear a house. There are always logical reasons for these kinds of things; they just have not been answered yet." The old man shaking his head responded "sometimes there are no simple answers and I have lived next to that house for 70-years, nothing good has happened there. I am telling you, leave, this is not the first time I've had this conversation." The young man nods, "I think we'll take our chances."He looked over to his lady-friend and nodded toward the car.

The old man is left standing at the end of his walkway as the couple drives off; he watches the car until it is out of sight, hands crossed in front of his chest. He knew they would not listen, but he tried. He only hoped that they would eventually learn that they were wrong—that there was something diabolical happening within the house before it was too late. He would wait it out till then, help in any way he could. He made his way back to his porch, sat, and watched.

The days went by and slowly but surely, things began to go south—first, he heard some arguments that steadily grew more hostile, and then the couple began to appear more disheveled and in disarray. Until, finally, one day the young man approached his porch—hair unkempt, clothes mismatched and unwashed, his face pale, and his eyes bloodshot; It had looked as though he had not slept in days. He only had three words for the old man, "you were right." He walked back to his house, that peppery step he once had long gone and replaced with a slow pace that exaggerated the length of the walk.

This could have been the night the couple escaped, the day they chose to leave, but now—it was the same old tale. The police arrive in the middle of the night, waking up the old man. They received a call of distress from the next-door neighbors, but the couple was nowhere to be found. The old man tells the same story, like so many times before, and the officer leaves. The couple is never found.

About a month later a black BMW pulls up, no longer beat up, but brand new. The man gets out to put up the "for rent" sign and makes it back to his car wasting no time. He added to his measure of the haste with a burnout.

The old man grips the side of his rocker and finally rises; he knows he can't go through it again. He makes for the shed to locate his gas can and matches—this curse will no longer be on his hands.

Album Review: 30 by Adele

30, A Glorious, But Emotional Rollercoaster



Image copyright Columbia Records, from Walmart.com

By Cami Stephens

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Adele's notorious album entitled *30*, innovatively named based on the age she wrote the songs is extraordinarily versatile. Different songs are so immensely somber they evoke tears; whilst other songs are intensely boisterous. Adele uses a beautiful duality to elicit a unique whirlwind of emotions for the listeners.

Adele's album is a melting pot of different musical genres. In

songs like "Oh My God" there is a modern twist, as there is a delightful blend of electronic beats and drum bass. On the other hand, Adele's song "Hold On" pays homage to the R&B genre, as there are soulful melodies and an encapsulating piano accompaniment. Each song embodies contrasting styles and genres, furthering the album's infallible versatility. Instead of sticking to a monotonous album where all the songs resemble a singular genre, Adele challenges

listeners to branch out and experience a plethora of styles and genres.

The album encapsulates themes of divorce, guilt, depression, and her battles to be a present mother whilst dealing with a dreadful divorce. The themes in Adele's album are masterfully intertwined, as each theme is so hauntingly apparent.

In a November 2021 *Instagram Livestream*, Adele was asked by a commenter what her album was based upon.

Adele answered with incredible wit that her album was about "divorce, babes." Many of her songs emulate the theme of divorce and relationships, yet the most prevalent theme is about how her divorce affected both her and her son.

In a November 2021 *Apple Music* interview, when asked who the album was for, Adele said the album was "for my son, Angelo." Adele emphasized how after her divorce she felt an emotional divide between herself and her son. Adele said that although she was physically present, she felt "consumed" (Adele) by her life. In the same interview, Adele's son said to her "I can't see you," meaning that her son felt her emotional absence.

The poignantly magnificent song entitled "My Little Love" pays a beautiful homage to her son and provides perspective on Adele's emotions. The song initiates with smooth and soulful background, that paints a somber picture. Throughout "My Little Love," she includes conversations between her and her son. In the song, Adele says to her son "Just like (how?) Let me... I'm, I'm feeling as trapped, like, hm (what?) (I feel a bit confused)". Adele's use of including authentically

vulnerable moments between her and her son was devastatingly genuine. Adele is desperately trying to tell her son why she feels so lost and distraught. Adele's song to her son was the most heartbreaking for me, as each note reflected Adele's guilt for how the divorce affected her son.

In the same November 2021 *Apple Music* interview, Adele talks about how her song "Cry Your Heart Out" is about depression. Adele sings "I can't get no relief, I'm so tired of myself," which alludes to her battle with depression. Although the song lyrics are doleful, the rhythm is upbeat. Adele talks about how the song can be sad if one listens to the lyrics, or it can simply be a song to dance to. The polarity of Adele's saddening song having a cheerful rhythm and beat is magnificent.

Adele's album has a song for every listener. Each song is distinctively blissful, and an absolute pleasure to listen to. Adele's new album provides listeners with a harmonious balance of important messages (such as talking about depression) whilst incorporating music that is enjoyable to listen to.



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Encanto – A Film Review

A Musical Masterpiece Where Friends Leave as Acquaintances



Image copyright The Walt Disney Company, from IMDB.com

By **Daniel Dow**
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Disney's computer-animated *Encanto*, which already has social media in a frenzy, is truly a musical masterpiece. With hits such as "We Don't Talk About Bruno," written by the infamous Lin-Manuel Miranda, and "Surface Pressure" hitting top ten in the *Singles Top 100*, it is hard not to enjoy the film. *Encanto* also sets itself aside from many traditional "Disney Princess" films, by featuring a young Colombian girl and her multigenerational family, the Madrigals. *Encanto*'s introduction of a new culture creates a fresh setting that is reinvigorating and gives a welcoming feeling that keeps the viewer interested and engaged.

The film follows the lead protagonist Mirabel, and welcomes the viewers by kicking off the theatrical number "The Family Madrigal." This opening number introduces the viewer to the mystical Madrigal family—who are gifted with unique magical gifts that allow

them to serve their community and family. The viewer comes to learn that a unique magic plays a dominant role in the movie, magic that can only enchant members of the family Madrigal, and this includes their house, often referred to as Casita. I mention

Casita because the house creates its own dynamic much like a character, and I found Casita to be one of the most entertaining assets of the film. It is also the place where Mirabel does most of her exploring.

This exploitation of Casita by Mirabel is driven by a need to break away from family traditions to better understand a family secret. Though Mirabel intends the best, she finds herself in a situation where she is battling inner conflict and in doing so, creates more conflict. These conflicts result in Mirabel uncovering additional family secrets that reveal a prophecy that creates more questions than answers. The only way to further uncover the truth of this prophecy is to locate her long-lost uncle Bruno, and everyone knows, "you don't talk about Bruno."

Although Mirabel is in search of a family secret that often results in drawing conflict, which in turn, reveals the toll secrets can have on a family. This results in Mirabel confronting her siblings to unite the family, and this may be her hardest challenge yet. As the middle child, she must learn the weight (figuratively and literally) and responsibility that bears upon the eldest child. Additionally, she is faced with having to

understand the expectations and the toll of perfection that befall the youngest sibling. This builds upon a theme of family values, and the importance of staying true to one's family, regardless of one's gifts.

While the musical renditions throughout the film are masterpieces and the story does introduce fresh themes, *Encanto* is the time-old tale of hearing a story, which leaves you with more questions than answers. The open theatrical act, "Family Madrigal" is about the extent of introduction the viewer gets to

much of the family. If it was not for the musical works of the great Lin-Manuel Miranda, the film would have been a dud. Though with the film's musical success, I am sure we will see a sequel sometime in the future. Let's hope the film focuses some of its efforts on meeting the family Madrigal, which as of now, I only feel are acquaintances. Although it is easy to be critical, the viewer can not forget theatrics are what Disney does best, and they nailed it with *Encanto*.

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Fraggle Rock: Back to the Rock Review

Let the Fraggles Play Once More



Images copyright Apple Inc. and The Jim Henson Company, from Apple.com

Thomas Hill Jr.

OBSERVER DESIGNER

Fraggle Rock: Back to the Rock is a reboot/reimagining of the Jim Henson classic *Fraggle Rock*, which originally ran from 1983-1987. Nearly forty years after its predecessor's debut, this new series perfectly captures the spirit of the original while appropriately modernizing it for today's streaming service audiences. From the sets, to the puppetry, to the music and to the characters themselves, just about everything has been captured faithfully—making the show feel genuine and not like a nostalgic retread of the 80s hit.

Centering on the adventures of Fraggles Gobo, Mokey, Wembley, Boober, and Red, *Back to the Rock* is a thirteen-episode musical romp that focuses on spreading the message of the importance small changes can have on an interconnected ecosystem, but in a way, that is fun and engaging for its young target audience (just as the original did). Where this series differs, however, is in its presentation, both visually and from a storytelling perspective.

In terms of visuals, the show is wonderful — completely embracing the advantages

modern CGI can bring to the special effects table, but not letting it entirely replace the already existing puppets and sets. It reminds me of another Jim Henson Company reboot from a few years ago, Netflix's *The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance*. A lot of similar techniques are used to expand the sets and hide the puppeteers to give as much credence as possible to the idea that these characters are real living creatures. And aside from the occasional wonky green-screen shots, it's pretty flawless.

As for storytelling, *Back to the Rock* embraces the modern long-form technique that has become so popular over the last ten or so years (meaning, there is one overarching story being told throughout the season as a whole). However, this is still done fairly minimally, with the main focus being on the individual story told in each episode. And this is where *Back to the Rock* particularly shines, by following in the footsteps of the original and tackling difficult/ relevant topics and themes. A few actually took me by surprise when I realized what the topics were (episodes two and three stand out immediately), but what surprised me more was how

well they were handled, barring the occasional hiccup; one side-story involving the internet felt particularly dated. The basic message of each episode should prove fairly relevant to the children in the audience, but the adults that read between the lines should also be able to take away relevant messages of their own; as with most things Henson, it isn't made "just for kids."

The show is also incredibly heartfelt and wholesome, and a lot of that emotional-weight is carried by the music. The soundtrack, made up of a healthy mix of classic *Fraggle Rock* songs and new pieces original to this series, is *incredibly* catchy; I've found myself humming pretty much every song at least once a day since watching the series (favorite returning song:

Follow Me; favorite new song: *Put it All Together*, but *Chase the Wind* is also an earworm). The use of old, but familiar puppets, effects enhanced with new technology, age-old issues and new contemporary ones, filling out the stories, and having a cast made up of returning (Karen Prell as Red and Dave Goelz the voices of as Boober and Uncle Travelling Matt) and new (John Tartaglia as Gobo, Donna Kimball as Mokey, and Jordan Lockhart as Wembley) puppeteers is a mix of new and old and is fairly representative of the show itself, I feel. *Fraggle Rock: Back to the Rock* is, in my opinion, what all reboots should aspire to be; faithful, but not afraid to be new.

Let the Fraggles play, indeed.

