

The Mount Observer

“Voices of the students of Mount Wachusett Community College”

PREVIEWS



A Day in Media Arts & Technology

The Admissions department recently held a guided tour for prospective students to the Media Arts & Technology program on the Gardner campus for Academic Preview Day. Attendees learned about the 6 different career paths available through the program, with a tour of the facilities and the new equipment.

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Profile: Kayla LeMieur

Kayla LeMieur, 28, of Templeton, has one semester left at Mount Wachusett and is pursuing a degree in Healthcare Sciences with a specialty in Radiology.

For the full article, see page 6

Editorial: A Duty to the Press

Across America, the nation has seen a decline in local news and an increase in what social scientists are calling “news deserts.”

For the full editorial, see page 7

Creative Writing

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Gassing Up for Class

Though Fuel Prices Add a Layer of Complexity, They Won't Impact the Summer and Fall Schedules

By Maddison Willigar
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Between the increasing availability of in-person courses at MWCC and the rising gas prices across the US, Business and Economics professor Elmer Eubanks brought a request to the Academic Senate on March 22 to consider increasing the number of online classes between the summer and fall semesters to combat this. However, because the schedules had already been set for both semesters, President Vander Hooven recommended that students communicate with faculty about any needs or struggles they might be facing.

Eubanks said he thought of posing this request after

observing and “analyzing” the gas prices with students in his economics class and recalling a past semester when there had been a “spike in gas prices” and students had stopped attending because they couldn’t afford to travel. As a result, Eubanks thought there should be other options. “In fall, we are going pretty much back to normal...so my view was [that] maybe we should consider having a little bit of a balance so that people have a choice,” Eubanks said.

Having used Hy-flex technology in one of his classes, Eubanks said that this could be a possible option, but that it can take more effort, be more time consuming, and



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not be as convenient for more “interactive” courses that don’t rely on lectures.

Eubanks explained he hopes there will be “a balance of courses that are online, or solutions for students who can’t

come;” however, he added that things could also change by the time fall rolls around.

Eubanks shared that he **continued on page 2**
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Lectures or Hard Hats?

The Choice That Faces Every High School Graduate, a Trade or a Degree?

By Jared LeBlanc
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Many students are faced with the dilemma of if they should attend college and although there may not be an easy answer to this one local electrician feels he was able to learn his job skills without college, while one Mount professor feels attending college was beneficial to him both professionally and personally.

Trade knowledge, money-making skills, no debt, better work ethic, a good relationship with your employer, and a greater sense of independence are just some of the benefits of getting a full-time job right out of high school according to Jake

Tonry, a residential electrician near Boston.

According to Tonry, all that is needed to become an electrician is basic electrical and safety knowledge, basic math skills, as well as familiarity and comfort with using hands-on tools such as ladders, hammers, and screwdrivers.

Tonry said he made his decision to skip college because he had a very positive role-model who was his teacher and taught him that success doesn’t revolve around college. As well as seeing older siblings and friends who went to college and came out with student debt.

When asked if he sees a time when advanced studies

or training might be helpful in his career, Tonry said it might be helpful because being an electrician is very mathematically focused, and in order to obtain your electrical journeyman’s license, you need to pass the electrical exam.

As stated by Tonry, a company called his high school looking for two potential apprentices when he was absent one day. Knowing he might’ve lost his opportunity he still advocated for himself by calling the company, and it just so turned out that one of the candidates wasn’t a good fit for the job.

Tonry stated some of the downsides of not going to college include missing out on a

social and college party life and experience, not making as many friends as you would in college, and less free time. He states, “I only regret not going to college sometimes when I have some free time because I imagine myself partying and having fun, but I quickly remember the benefits of the path I chose because of how demanding and how involved you have to be to become an electrician”.

According to Nicholas Cochrane, a business teacher at Mount Wachusett Community College, the biggest benefits of going to college is getting a better career with better pay and

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Classrooms or Online?

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believes gas prices could remain high because “the permitting process” has been moved “from the local areas to Washington,” which makes it take longer to “get permits to drill or to explore more oil, so our production has gone down quite significantly.” But at the same time, he explained gas prices could drop if interest rates get high enough to cause a recession.

Eubanks elaborated that since inflation has increased, the federal government has been compensating by raising interest rates. But if they raise the interest rates too quickly, Eubanks said, the economy could crash, and gas prices would decrease as people lose their jobs and gas is no longer in high demand.

However, the cause for inflated fuel prices remains a debated issue. According to a March 15 article from *The Washington Post*, reporter Glenn Kessler said, “figuring out the root

causes of inflation is subject to interpretation.”

Kessler explained that production-wise, “The oil business in the United States is run by private companies, not the U.S government,” and when the pandemic first hit, “production plummeted because it was no longer as profitable.” However, he explained that because crude oil is more expensive now, “there is more of an incentive to ramp up U.S production.”

President Vander Hooven, who attended this March 22 meeting, explained that though Eubank’s proposal was brought to him “as a new request” in that environment, he said, “it’s not a new concept for us to always be looking at what’s happening in our region...[or] world, to see if there are steps that we can take to help the students navigate, whether it’s difficult economic times or transportation issues.”

Vander Hooven said that classes are designed specifically



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to “anticipate the need” of students, and the method of delivery for a class is not easy to change once set. When Eubanks brought this request to the meeting, the schedules for the summer and fall had already been set. So, in the meantime, Vander Hooven explained that what the school is aiming to do is “directly assist” students either through the school’s foundation or student scholarship fund.

Besides the difficulty of the schedules for these semesters already being set, Vander Hooven said one downside to this potential change is that many students and faculty are eager to be back on campus. He said that though some learning styles may operate better in the virtual space, many students prefer and work better in an on-campus environment. In addition, classes like art or labs “lose a significant amount when you can’t do that in person.”

He added, “Across the board, we are really trying to get to a point where we’re getting students back on campus...to receive that level of interaction from the faculty and staff.”

Business Administration and Management major Janel Tralongo explained that while the gas prices have caused “more of a financial stress to drive,” she lives fairly close to campus, so the amount of gas she uses isn’t too bad. But Tralongo also added that she commutes to campus “almost every day.” Tralongo said, “Waking up in the morning when the tank is on empty is never a pleasant sight knowing

I’m about to have to spend so much money just to fill it up on my way to school.”

Even so, Tralongo said she wants to continue with in-person classes. However, she recognized that “this...could be different for those who do not live so close.” Tralongo said she found online classes stressful, noticed there was a “heavier...homework load” and said she learned better in person. Tralongo elaborated, “I much prefer the interactive atmosphere and learning in-person as it helps

they need it.

Vander Hooven added that similar to gas prices, another factor that has impacted the convivence of students coming on campus is childcare centers continuing to be closed after the pandemic as more classes are now in person. So, he explained that the challenge right now is balancing focusing on the curriculum delivery best for students and faculty, while also keeping outside factors like these in mind.

Moving forward, Vander

Trade vs. Degree



Photo by Kenny Eliason from Unsplash

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getting the tools and knowledge to start up your own business. Cochrane stated that he made his decision to go to college to advance his career and gain knowledge. He said he realized going to college was the right path for him because he came to realize companies were requiring college degrees for high level positions. According to Cochrane, “The most important takeaway from college is personal growth as well as making connections with people.” He said college opens your eyes to many things you

are unaware of, including self-discovery.

Cochrane identified the biggest burden of college is cost. He emphasizes that student debt can place a burden on the future of students as well as become a conflict of opportunity—giving up full-time earnings for 4-6 years while in college.

When asked if he ever regrets going to college, Cochrane said that he does not regret going to college because he didn’t go to college until he was 29 and he learned things about himself that he never would’ve learned if he went to college at 18 years old.

“Waking up in the morning when the tank is on empty is never a pleasant sight knowing I’m about to have to spend so much money just to fill it up on my way to school.”

– Janel Tralongo

with the workload of homework and gives a better understanding of the course itself.”

Regarding solutions, Vander Hooven said that conversations like these are “ongoing.” But he said he knows that “our faculty are very much in tune with the needs of their students.” With that in mind, he recommended that students let their professors or advisors know what challenges they may be facing and that faculty work to provide students with assistance where

Hooven said that deciding factors for the method of delivery of classes would be determined by whether or not the content can be translated virtually and what learning environment is best for the students and faculty. Vander Hooven said, “while external forces like fuel prices...will inevitably play a role, it really has to be in how we can deliver the content so that the students are able to learn it in a way that will be useful to them for their careers.”

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

Hide Your Wallets

With a Surge in the Cost of Living, How Can the U.S. Adjust?

By *Shaye McKeen*
ASSISTANT EDITOR

The current rate of four dollars for gas and a predicted 5-6% increase over the next few months in U.S. food prices have struck the wallets of many Americans, as they continue to adjust their spending habits to adapt to growing inflation.

The current war in Ukraine, a large supplier of grain, sanctioning of Russia, a #1 and #3 supplier of petroleum and oil, respectively, and the avian flu killing thousands of chickens have affected the U.S. economy greatly, and Americans have been experiencing the results of cost lately. Food, gas, and oil prices have raised the current cost of living significantly for Americans, and some states are currently disbursing aid packages to help relieve the wallets of their citizens.

Mount Wachusett Community College professor of business Nicholas Cochrane spoke on



Photo by Towfiq barbhuiya from Unsplash

why federal or state aid packages may not be the solution to an increased cost of living. He states, "The three stimulus checks that went out during the pandemic haven't proven to be troublesome for economic activity. Better paying, long-lasting employment far outweighs temporary federal stimulus checks."

Professor Cochrane offers an alternative plan to more aid packages: "Trends through the past 40 years have shown that specialized jobs and careers

requiring higher education provide a more sustainable wage. I would suggest that people do the best they can to invest their time in education and work on advancing their career. Take full advantage of government programs and continue to advocate for more affordable access to education."

While he believes there is a need for raising wages, he also added there needs to be an acknowledgment of each state's respective cost of living.

Professor Cochrane referenced an increase in the national minimum wage as "...not a 'one size fits all' approach." He continues to state that "Raising the minimum wage on a national scale will have multiple different effects on the economy. For many, raising the minimum wage could begin to lift many workers out of poverty."

He elaborated that "People having more disposable income would have a positive economic impact because they would likely spend their money on goods and services, therefore creating more jobs and stimulating economic activity." With the positive effects of a raise in minimum wage, however, come potentially severe economic drawbacks as well.

Professor Cochrane stated that "On the other hand, some experts believe, that higher wages in many states have already become an added expense in a challenging market to businesses.

Businesses are [raising] their prices to consumers to offset the higher labor costs, henceforth wiping out gains workers have made with higher wages."

In short, Professor Cochrane would encourage Americans struggling with the current cost of living to pursue advanced career goals, which would yield a higher wage. He states the alternative is to "reassess their current jobs and if possible, change jobs to shorten their commute, or ask their employers if working from home 1-2 days per week is an option. I also know of a friend who asked a semi-retired relative to move into their home in order to help with daycare, and offset those high costs."

One student who is experiencing the heightened prices in food and gas firsthand is Abby Velozo, a commuting senior at UMass Amherst. Ms.

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Thanking Them for Their Service

A Look at What Military Holidays are Observed in Springtime

By *Mikayla Barrett*
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Spring is a time where many people celebrate and recognize many different things: the arrival of warm weather and flowers, Easter or Passover, and the return of spring sports, but something that not many people recognize and observe are the many military holidays that fall in the springtime.

National Vietnam Veterans Day recognizes all the veterans who served in the Vietnam War. This national holiday is on March 29 and has been a recognized holiday since 2017. On March 29, 1973, the last American troops that served in Vietnam during the war departed the country.

Bob Mayer, the director of Veterans services, served in the army during the Vietnam era

from 1972 to 1978. He served as an air traffic controller and radio platoon sergeant during his time in the military, but was not stationed in Vietnam. Mayer said that he did not enjoy his time in the military, but it had a "major positive impact" on his life. He stated that he would not be the person he is today without the experiences the military gave him.

When those who served returned, many of them did not receive the "respect and recognition they deserved." Mayer stated that all the service members easily stood out when they returned home because of their military haircuts. This marked them as a target for disrespect. Mayer stated that he is "glad that the county is at a point where we recognized the service and sacrifice" given by

those who served in Vietnam. He wishes that people take some time on this day to give some respect to those who served and sacrificed during this era.

National Former Prisoner of War Day is a holiday recognized and celebrated on April 9. This day became a recognized holiday in 1942, when thousands of prisoners of war marched in the Bataan Death March to a prison camp. Many of them died, but their spirit was not broken.

Since the Bataan Death March, our country continues to recognize the courage and sacrifice of the prisoners of war. Mayer stated that this holiday "serves as a way to give pause and recognize all prisoners of war." He said that "he can't imagine the stress as turmoil those brave people suffered."

May 8, 2022, is Victory in

Europe Day (V-E Day.) This day celebrates the achievement of overcoming the Nazis in Europe. This was a day that "changed the world." Mayer said that "you should never forget World War II in general" and that you should always remember those who served at that time. He stated that "you cannot overlook the sacrifices of the hundreds of thousands of individuals [who served in this war.]"

On the third Saturday in May each year, Armed Forces Day is recognized. This year it falls on May 21. This holiday celebrates the five branches of the military, and all the men and women who currently serve. Mayer said that this day is a day "to pay tribute" to those serving. He is grateful for this holiday because he "remembers when respect and honor did not exist [for service

members.]"

Finally, one of the most recognizable spring military holidays is Memorial Day. This federal holiday is celebrated on the last Monday of May, which falls on May 30 this year. Memorial Day recognizes and honors all the service members who lost their lives while serving. Mayer stated that "you cannot forget [the sacrifice of those who served]." He said that to recognize this holiday you can "individually stop and think about those who lost their lives in the service."

Mayer stated that he "hopes there is more respect for those who serve because those who served deserve our respect."

MWCC's Earth Day Events

Director of Student Life Discusses College's Celebration of Our Planet

By Amanda Fales

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Earth Day has been celebrated yearly on April 22 since 1970, and numerous events took place on the Mount Wachusett campus to show appreciation for this annual holiday that celebrates a place that billions of people call home.

The day also offers an opportunity to brainstorm ideas to help curb the impacts of climate change and discussions on what can be done to prevent environmental issues from getting worse. To help this effort, Mount Wachusett hosted its own celebrations for the week of April 25-28.

Kathleen Matson, the Director of Student Life at Mount Wachusett, stated that she had planned events for the entire week. Matson revealed the activities that were hosted each day, beginning on Monday.

Matson said, "On the 25th there was a discussion panel hosted by the Green Society," and that "It revolved around the topics of consumerism and the environment." It is often wondered whether consumerism and the environment can co-exist—the panel discussed this possibility.

Matson said that Kenny Shore performed on Tuesday and shared that "He's a folk artist and a historian." She adds, "It was exciting to have him come and try something new." Matson also discussed the two Wednesday events, which were "an Americana folk singer performing and another discussion panel hosted by the Green Society." The second discussion focused on what can be done to help stop climate change and conversations described why the issue of acting now is so important.

On the final day of the celebration, there was a plant sale organized by the Green Society. Matson said, "The emphasis of the plant sale was to promote the use of microgreens," and that "They're more [the microgreens] sustainable and eco-conscious."

According to the *Associate Degree in Natural Resources* section on the Mount Wachusett home page, the Green Society Club, which is led by Professor Heather Conn, aims to increase interest in the natural resources curriculum and the greenhouse, located on the MWCC campus. Besides this, the Green Society generates events and thinks of ways to improve Mount Wachusett's environmental footprint.

While each day hosted its own events throughout the week, there was a roadside clean-up effort as well. Matson shared that "The goal was having people take



Photo by Appolinary Kalashnikova from Unsplash

some time and look for trash," and that "It was a simple way to help get students involved."

Matson shared that Earth Day has been celebrated at the Mount for many years and that "We've hosted some sort of event even before I was here, and I've worked at the Mount for 6-years,"

It was shared by Matson that Earth Day activities have

always been well attended at the Mount, and with COVID numbers dropping, the hope for high attendance was present. She states, "In the past, we've had companies with reptiles come and have hosted some live shows, which are always a crowd favorite...But when we've had other activities, they've always been popular."

Spring and Fall Open House Events

Prospective Students Get a Preview of What MWCC Has to Offer

By Jared LeBlanc

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Students gain a sense of community, meet staff members, learn about academic support services, learn about certificates and programs offered as well as meet with academic advisors, and become exposed to financial aid while attending the student open house events at Mount Wachusett Community College.

The opportunity to attend an open house occurs twice per year, with one being in the spring and one in the fall. The Fall Open House is geared towards high school students who are making decisions about what to do in the fall. The most recent Spring Open House occurred on April 9, with nearly 150 students and families in attendance. In coordination with the open houses, there are Academic Preview days, which are designed to highlight certain programs.

According to MWCC student Kaylin Wiseman, the most important thing about the open

houses is the discussion of resources provided to assist students with work and other school-related activities.

Wiseman shared that the event she attended was beneficial to her because she was able to make an informed decision about the future of her education and be comfortable with her decision. Wiseman stated, "I would recommend other upcoming students attend the open house; it relieved stress pertaining to starting something new."

She said that she chose to attend this event because she didn't want to be blindsided by having to figure out how to navigate through the Mount and their system. As stated by Wiseman, the admissions staff does an awesome job organizing the event and makes everyone feel welcomed and part of the school community.

She stated that based on prior open houses and student feedback, the school has implemented readily available

academic advisors that will help students find a program and schedule that works best for them as well as financial service representatives that can help discuss FAFSA and/or other potential payment plans that are available. She stated that the staff at the open house are approachable and easily distinguished by their wearing of royal green and navy blue. She also said that every student who attended the recent event received a 20% coupon for the school bookstore.

Dean of Admissions and Strategic Enrollment, Marcia Rosbury-Henne, shared that a lot of planning and organization is needed to have a successful recruitment event, which usually takes about 60-days to plan. She said that they invite students through the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool, as well as staff from the Leominster campus to attend the event. She said it is beneficial for high school teachers and

families of prospective students to attend the open house as MWCC's academic deans showcase all programs available to students at the open house, and MWCC faculty offer a deeper dive into academic offerings.

"I would recommend other upcoming students attend the open house; it relieved stress pertaining to starting something new."

— Kaylin Wiseman

She said parents are also welcome to attend, as they can speak with a financial service representative to find out the total cost of attending college at the Mount as well as potential financial aid and payment plans. Rosbury-Henne stated, "Having

so many prospective students back on campus and sharing what MWCC has to offer was the highlight of my last two years. It's why we are here."

She said that the open house starts in the theater, where students get greeted by President Vander Hooven. They then meet with the academic dean for their program and then visit the cafeteria, where they discuss the available student services. Rosbury-Henne said they can then visit financial aid, take a tour of the campus, or even apply to the college on the spot, which can grant students immediate acceptance. When asked about alternative options for students who may not have been able to attend the event, she stated that virtual information sessions are available almost daily by appointment, and campus tours and information sessions are available on campus every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

A Medical Perspective on Ramadhan Fasting

Ramadhan 2022; How to Stay Healthy While Observing This Commandment

By **Bushrah Namirimu**

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Ramadhan is one of the toughest rituals of any religion in the world, which is mandatory for all members of the Muslim community, with a few exceptions like the sick, women who are menstruating, travelers, the elderly, as well as young children.

April 2nd marked the beginning of the month of Ramadhan this year for the 1.8 billion Muslims around the world. From dawn to dusk, the physically able among Muslims begin fasting, abstaining not just from food but water as well, as a way of worshiping their Lord and growing spiritually.

It is believed that it was in the month of Ramadhan which lasts about 29 to 30 days, that the Holy Quran was revealed to the Prophet by God, hence considered a pious and holy

month in Islam. People observing the fast are not allowed to consume anything during the day, with the first meal eaten at dawn, known as Suhr and the last meal of the day at dusk or evening, known as Iftar.

Fasting during Ramadhan is known to have a positive effect on health and cleanses the body of harmful toxins.

William Lefrancois, a nutritionist and professor at the Mount, noted that there is some benefit to the body of fasting during Ramadhan. Lefrancois said that “The only benefits that come to mind from fasting are that it gives the body a chance to clear any residual food and wastes from the gastrointestinal tract more completely than would be the case with regular consumption of food...This in all probability is offset by some of the negative effects of fasting.”

Professor Lefrancois added that “With respect to Ramadhan, being able to eat and drink after sunset is a saving grace as the body is only going without food and water for about twelve hours or so...” This is because the average human body can only healthily last without food or water for roughly the span of a day.

Lefrancois continued to state that “Each meal should be approximately 1,000 calories to ensure that a person receives adequate energy for the day. If this advice is followed, then the body should receive all of its needed nutrients in the correct amounts on a daily basis.”

He also emphasized that “The stomach may have shrunk a little due to fasting and eating too big a meal once the fast is over may cause some stomach distress.” Professor Lefrancois reminded fasting Muslims that “It is

especially important to consume liquids carefully. If too much liquid is consumed too quickly, it can cause water intoxication.”

Water intoxication, known also as water poisoning, is when excess water, if consumed too quickly, may lead to swelling of the brain. This swelling can induce a coma and even cause death.

Joseph Isanga, a medical doctor at Case Hospital in Kampala, Uganda, echoes Professor Lefrancois’ thoughts about fasting, saying that there are no health benefits of fasting, rather that it is primarily a religious ritual.

“Medically, fasting predisposes someone to gastritis which ends up into peptic ulcer disease,” Dr Isanga said. He emphasized that not eating a balanced diet or hydrating enough between Iftar and Suhoor meals could lead to health issues or aggravate

existing ones.

He also noted that the purpose of these meals is to re-balance and recharge bodies and therefore effort should be made to eat food from all major food groups. “I would recommend foods rich in starch and carbohydrates to be used by people fasting,” Dr Isanga advised.

Meanwhile, Professor Lefrancois, whose passion lies in nutrition, is concerned that lack of fluid in the body will eventually lead to dehydration, electrolyte imbalances, pH imbalances, and difficulty in digesting what little food is available. After a month of scaling back on food, sleep, and workouts, it is important for a Muslim who has been fasting to gradually get back into the rhythm of daily life.

A Day in Media Arts & Technology

A Potential College Opportunity for Aspiring Artists

By **Eoin Haggerty**

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The Admissions department recently held a guided tour for prospective students to the Media Arts & Technology program on the Gardner campus for Academic Preview Day. Attendees learned about the 6 different career paths available through the program, with a tour of the facilities and the new equipment.

After getting the general information about Mount Wachusett Community College, the group met with John Little, chair of the Media Arts & Technology program for a tour of the campus. One of the aspects of the program people learned about was the studio and the updates made to it. The new lighting equipment will allow the students to instantly change the light settings, as opposed to

the previous manual method. The new audio studio on campus has equipment that is only available at two other colleges in Massachusetts.

Preview days allow people who are not enrolled at the Mount to gain insight into the programs and let them make more informed decisions about their future. The six paths discussed and what labs and lectures are involved will let students decide if they want to pursue a future in media communications. Little said all of the equipment that is required to complete the course is on campus, which means that students will have to schedule time to make sure their assignments are turned in on time.

Speaking on the turnout from the previews, Little said that preview days are 4 times more effective than open houses, and that “attendance of preview days

is much better.” This could be due to the casual nature of an open house, compared to the focus preview days have on specific programs. This allows interested, but still unsure, students to get an insight into the paths and careers from a Media Arts & Technology degree.

Six distinct career paths are available for Media Arts & Technology students, from a general MRT degree to concentrations such as audio engineering or photography. Some of the support staff also attended the preview day. They become a sort-of tutor to the MRT students, not to mention the teachers that will guide students through the training. The faculty in MRT have had experience in national and international productions. “We’re all from the industry and some of us keep our hands in it,” Little said about himself and the rest of the



Photo courtesy of MWCC

professors.

Little wants people interested in this field to know that doors will open for them, as long as they have the drive. Graduation rates have been impressive, with a lot of former students going to work in commercial and entertainment/sports work.

Media Arts & Technology is “a field with a wide range of training and career possibilities.” Little said. “Anyone with interests in any of the communications professions, whether using equipment or not, can find something here.

Profile: Amanda Fales

Pursuing a Future in Social Justice

By Eoin Haggerty

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Amanda Fales, a global studies major with three semesters under her belt, gives students advice about taking classes during the pandemic, as well as her experiences at the Mount.

She usually spends her free time walking her dog, watching *Unsolved Mysteries*, watching Youtube, and doodling occasionally. Her favorite book is titled *Eleanor and Park*, which she first read in middle school. She also enjoys going on trips with her family, having visited Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, and Maryland. One of her most memorable trips was when she, her sister, and her mom went

free-falling in South Carolina.

“Suddenly, I’m afraid of heights,” she said this was her initial reaction. But luckily, she ended up creating a great memory with her family.

Fales, 20, urged students to check their professors’ office hours and to schedule one-on-one time with them to ensure success. She also encouraged students to be open to feedback regarding their assignments. For Fales, taking a shower helps her destress from school, stating “It’s my night routine, so it helps me relax from my day and/or assignments.”

Fales plans to attend Fitchburg State to major in sociology, and her long-term goal is to become

a social justice advocate.

The pandemic, as with most people, has not been easy for Fales. One of the defining moments of the pandemic was when she learned her grandmother contracted the Coronavirus. She also spoke on the loss of social stimulation during the pandemic, and commented that attending in-person classes helps her be more social, as well as being involved on-campus.

However, the adjustment to online classes was not difficult for her. She no longer has to deal with the anxiety of icebreakers or worry about first-day outfits. Overall, Fales has found that she likes online classes more than

being on campus.

Fales talked about how day-to-day life will change after the pandemic, saying that she believes more events will happen outside, and that body language could change due to masks covering-up our normal social cues.

Initially, Fales attended Nashua Community College and studied nursing; however, she found that tuition was going up and she wasn’t exactly feeling committed to staying there. After transferring to Mount Wachusett, she signed up for a Global Studies class to learn about ongoing problems in society and eventually became interested in advocating for human rights.

Fales’ favorite class is Cultural Geography, which exposed her to the history of different cultures around the world. When asked about one thing she would like to change about colleges, Fales said, “I think making materials more readily available would be beneficial. Access codes, laptops, things like that could be rented through the school. That way, those who struggle financially can still access these necessary resources.”

Fales states that one day she plans to work for a nonprofit, or perhaps even the United Nations, saying she wants to travel “with an impact.”

Profile: Kayla LeMieur

From Retail, to Reading, to Radiology, She Does it All



Photo courtesy of Kayla LeMieur

By Amanda Fales

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Kayla LeMieur, 28, of Templeton, has one semester left at Mount Wachusett and is pursuing a degree in Healthcare Sciences with a specialty in Radiology.

When not in school, LeMieur can be found working at Planet Fitness or hiking with her dog, Dahla. “She’s the best girl,” LeMieur gushed. “She’s part of my family.”

Another one of LeMieur’s passions is reading, “Harry Potter is my absolute favorite, the way J.K. Rowling was able to fit so many small details into each movie is amazing.” LeMieur revealed she enjoys books with deep characterization because “it enhances the plot more.” LeMieur continued stating that she wasn’t always a reader. She sits back in her chair, gives a sigh, and then says with a little chuckle, “when I was little, I didn’t do anything, I didn’t

know what I wanted.”

LeMieur elaborated, stating that she was open to all career possibilities when she was younger, “I would think of a job I liked, but as soon as someone suggested something else, that’s what I wanted to do.” This vision has come true, as LeMieur is an experienced worker in many different fields. She has her cosmetology license and worked retail for 7 years. Now, LeMieur has intentions toward a goal much more difficult.

Becoming a radiology technician has been LeMieur’s dream for some time now, and as of late, she is more inspired than ever. “The pandemic really opened my eyes to how selfish some people are, and how in need others are,” LeMieur answered. “I want to be a helping hand and a stepping stone for people to get healthy.”

LeMieur discussed how healthcare is in her family and that she is no stranger to the endless amounts of paperwork and running around to get things done. “I just want to make things easier,” LeMieur said.

“Life doesn’t have to be so hard, especially when people are in a hospital.”

LeMieur’s older sister and mother are nurses, and her boyfriend is a firefighter and a paramedic. LeMieur cited her boyfriend as her main source of support, humor, and motivation: “I see what he does each day,” said LeMieur, “and I know I want to help people, too; watching him help people reaffirms my goal.”

LeMieur understands the importance of receiving her education to succeed in her career field. “I like school for the most part,” she paused to laugh and said, “depending on the week.”

LeMieur began her schooling at MWCC just after the pandemic began, which resulted in her taking a mixture of in-person and online classes. Hybrid classes have been a great improvement for colleges, LeMieur said, “being able to have flexibility with your schedule and still being involved on campus is a great mixture.” While mixing class schedules is an improvement LeMieur stated that there’s still

more that can be done.

“Mental health still needs to be addressed during the pandemic,” LeMieur said. “Many students struggle with anxiety in classrooms, and they should be able to get help when they need it, not make an appointment and wait.” She continued, “I used to go to the gym at Mount Wachusett every day for yoga, but it shut down because of the pandemic.” LeMieur asserted that her mental health was impacted by this, and she’s sure others struggled with it as well. She suggested, “if there is a way for virtual classes to be done, I think it would help greatly.”

Working, academics, and personal relationships keeps LeMieur very busy, and regardless of how packed her calendar maybe, her vision for her future has not changed. She added, “I can’t wait to become a person for people to depend on. I’m a committed person, and I know that helping people is what I should be doing.”

Christianity and Satan in Politics

An Opinion on the Separation of Church and State

By Andi Cunningham

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Religion in the United States is a hot-button issue. Christianity has 230-250 million members or 65%-75% of the US population. Often, other religions are looked down upon by the Conservative right. Say the word Satanist or Islam within this circle, and all hell breaks loose.

With that said, The United States of America is a pluralistic nation in its forming. Originally founded for its religious freedom, it has been confused that the United States is a Christian nation, founded on Christian principles.

Christian fundamentalist Jill Rodriguez, is striving to become as famous as the Duggars and other Christian “royalty.” She has been “preaching” that the *good ol’ U.S. of A* was founded on Christ. I grew up in school and learned that the Constitution is a flexible document in design. “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a

redress of grievances.” The First Amendment—How did we stray so far away from this? When did we become a “Christian” Nation?

As we all know the pilgrims came to the United States in search of religious freedom from King James, ironically the commissioner of The King James Bible. Aboard the Mayflower, which traveled here in 1620, were Puritans wanting to separate themselves from the Church of England. The puritan colonies eventually died out from lack of breeding according to Thomas Fuller’s “Church History.” Literally, they didn’t believe in sex, so no future generations were produced— weird right?

When our nation’s Founding Fathers broke off and started forming the constitution, they ensured it could be a nation of absolute freedom, so people can choose to practice any religion they want. Many of the colonies were founded because of religious freedom—with many of the Founding Fathers practicing different religions. The very idea of the Constitution addressing the concept of the separation of church and state came from

Roger Williams; he was a baptist and founded Rhode Island.

Many of the founding fathers also renounced religion and followed the practice of Deism. According to the Los Angeles Times, “early presidents and patriots were generally deists or Unitarians, believing in some form of impersonal Providence but rejecting the divinity of Jesus and the relevance of the Bible.”

Cut to the mid-twentieth century and the Moral Majority, an organization founded by Jerry Falwell Sr. Many people will know this name from watching TLC’s *19 Kids and Counting*, or from Liberty University. According to Joseph Tamney and Steven Johnson’s “Explaining Support for the Moral Majority” a Sociological Forum, this prominent political group helped fuse the American far right with the Republican Party. Tamney and Johnson discuss how the group was key in the elections of Republican presidents in the 80s. The pair adds that Jerry Falwell helped fuse the idea that all Christians are conservative and need to vote Republican, which in turn, helped promote the idea amongst republicans that America is Christian.



Photo by James from Unsplash

Now Satanism. The Satanic Temple in Salem Massachusetts has made it their mission to spread equality amongst religions here in the United States. **continued on page 12**
“Church and State Separation”
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Have your own opinions on current events, hot-button issues, or events on campus?
Write an opinion piece and send it to
mountobserver@mwcc.mass.edu
It may just end up in our next issue!

Editorial: A Duty to the Press

By Daniel Dow

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Across America, the nation has seen a decline in local news and an increase in what social scientists are calling “news deserts.” News deserts, or media

deserts, describe an area that has little to no local news coverage. Although this may not be the norm for all Americans, as news deserts tend to affect more rural areas, it is a growing trend that bears national consequences.

The rise of media deserts is a choice by citizens to not financially support local news that connects the community—local journalists who stir city and town conversation by breaking the latest news to its readers. This

should cause concern for all US citizens, as the lack of news is a threat to social and democratic values.

A recent 2019 study by PEN America, a nonprofit organization for literature and

freedom of expression, found that as a result of news deserts “Americans are not adequately informed and less likely to engage in political and civic

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“A Duty to the Press” >>>

A Duty to the Press

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life.” Viktorya Vilks, a co-author of the report states that the lack of availability of local-trustworthy news in a time of rising polarization and disinformation have “consequences [that] can be really dire.”

The study by PEN America indicates that the decline of local news and participation in democracy is a symbiotic relationship—for informed voting to occur, an individual needs access to reliable and trustworthy news. And as a result of this tarnished relationship, we have seen a rise in the spread of disinformation and cracks forming in our democracy.

One of the major rises of disinformation in the United States started back in 2016 with Pizzagate, which has been said to help spur the Qanon movement that started in 2017.

These instances of individuals turning to internet conspiracy theories directly coincides with the growth of news deserts—the inability for communities to interact with their local news—a once trustworthy member of their community. The other alternative is to turn to the national news networks, and with many being caught in scandals, it is easy for their trustworthiness to be called into question.

It is also not uncommon for some of these national news networks to market their opinion as news or fact—causing another concern when it comes to the trustworthiness and reliability of news sources.

This all comes at a time when The Poynter Institute reports that “more than 100 local newsrooms closed during the coronavirus pandemic” and that “Since 2004, about 1,800 newspapers have

closed in the United States.” This indicates that many must go elsewhere for their news.

For those that have lost their local news outlets, it is easy to see why an individual would flock to a city or town’s Facebook page to try and connect with their community. In fact, According to the Pew Research Center, “20% of adults in the United States in 2018 said they get their news from social media “often,” compared to 16% who said they often get news from print newspapers.”

Unfortunately, that one-click on a link with an outrageous headline may be all it takes to fall into the trap of consuming unreliable news, which can then easily be shared, often causing the news to spread without regulation or fact-checking. Sara Fischer from Axios reports “In 2020, nearly one-fifth (17%)

of engagement among the top 100 news sources on social media came from sources that NewsGuard deems generally unreliable, compared to about 8% in 2019.”

Though the cause for concern for the decline of local news in 2009 may not have been evident at the time, a clearer picture is being painted that individuals are going to social media to fill this void. And with the rise of groups like QANON, it is clear news deserts are having an effect on the democratic process.

It should be stated that freedom of the press does not mean a press that is unaccountable—quite the contrary, citizens should be engaging with their local news agency as it is a member of their community. This, after all, is what stirs local conversation and what inspires or drives people to participate in the voting process.

Unfortunately, the United States is now seeing another growing threat to its national news agencies, as millionaires and billionaires are buying out reputable news outlets such as The Washington Post, The Atlantic, and The Los Angeles Times. This move by the wealthy to purchase some of the most reliable national news networks may be another threat to democracy, as this brings about a concern for news censorship, bias, and distrust in a once-reliable source.

The fact is, like any business, news outlets need to be financially supported by the community it serves, on the national and local level. The support of a more inclusive and informed democracy does not come at a great cost—just the price of a monthly Netflix subscription.

Op-ed: A Mount Wachusett Experience A Long Look Back by the Editor-in-Chief

By Daniel Dow

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

My journey started at Mount Wachusett at the height of the pandemic after leaving a 10-year career, with a GPA of 1.8, and on academic probation. I will transfer in the fall to the University of Wisconsin-Superior as I start my own business as a copywriter and editor, a GPA over 3.0, and as a member of the TRIO program. My return in 2021 could not have been a more different experience, and as I leave the Mount to attend my transfer school, I know I will miss the community I found.

My first educational pursuit in 2009 may not have brought me “educational success,” but it was still a learning lesson. I lacked a support structure, motivation, and goals. I learned from my failures that to succeed, you need to set yourself up for success. Without structure and motivation, an individual is going to have a much harder

time achieving their goals. And if one does not have goals, then it can be hard to find motivation and to build structure.

Although I knew that I needed a support structure, motivation, and goals when I returned to school, this did not come instantly. It took me a lot of readjusting after being out of school for thirteen years and learning to manage a schedule around my son, who is now a year old, and my daughter, who is now three. But once I found my “groove,” I never felt more at home in my educational pursuits.

What I found as started to become more involved at Mount Wachusett, the thing that helped me find my “groove,” was a sense of community. As a distance learning student, the uniqueness of the Mount Wachusett community did not register at first; I did not realize what made the school so special.

In my second semester, I met with campus president James

Vander Hooven while writing a piece for Journalism II about the effects of COVID-19 on the MWCC campus. In that interview he shared one of his biggest struggles was “not being with students” and he followed this up by stating, “I don’t want to normalize all of this [online learning]; I want to bring back what makes us a *community* college.”

After hearing this and mulling it over for a bit, I realized I was missing something. That I needed to connect with the community and spend more time on campus to find what I was missing. This is when I met Professor Conn and Valois while writing an article about their *Beyond Vikings and Volcanoes* course and learned they were not only trying to put together a class that includes an opportunity for students to travel to Iceland but that they were also trying to find funding to cover student’s travel expenses.

They have since found this funding and I am excited to follow their inaugural course.

One of my motivators while pursuing a degree in professional writing is the passion I found for *The Mount Observer* in my Journalism I course—a class recommended by my advisor during my first semester. The guidance I received from Professor Sue Goldstein quickly altered any doubts about my ability to succeed as a student. She has been an incredible mentor to me as I elevated my way to managing editor of *The Mount Observer*. I will miss meeting with her monthly (Tom and my editorial team as well) for feedback on the latest issue and I feel truly blessed to have been able to work with her as she plans to retire at the end of this semester.

I was struck with a moment of clarity while working on my *Beyond Vikings and Volcanoes* article, or *beat* as we call it in the

Journalism field. After leaving the interview with Professor Conn and Valois, I learned that the passion that Professor Goldstein has for her students is not just unique to her but a passion that is truly shared amongst many other faculty and administrators at the Mount. That these *teachers* are willing to go the extra mile and then some for their students.

There are so many other experiences that I could share and so many faculty and administrators that have inspired or motivated me. There may have been a disruption in the Mount Wachusett *community*, but I know that the Mount Wachusett *spirit* is still there. The professors and administrators live it daily, and I know it is only a matter of time before the school returns to the *community* it once was.

A&E



Art on Campus



Photos courtesy of the MWCC Art Department

Creative Writing

Bitter Taste

By Maddison Willigar

A drink so sweet, but just as cruel and vile
to sit and taunt me with its lasting spell
of drowning out the ache with a denial
that pours its antidote on every cell.

The champagne felt so warm on frozen lips,
like shocks that would resuscitate my heart.
It blurred the lines between companionship
and filling the void with numbing counterparts.

I poured so many cups of endless wine
to wash the bitter taste of our love down.

The innocence of us once bonafide,
but now a mulling ache in which I drown.

Though glass feels like the only hand to hold
I hope to age like wine, refined like gold.

Stained Glass Window

By Mandy Limbaugh

The sun...
Shines through the crystal blue trees
As the ground warms to a rose-colored field.
The green leaves grow with every touch of the sun.
Mother earth then takes a deep breath.

As the ground warms to a rose-colored field,
The beauty of the forest comes alive with a magnificent
display of colors.

The colors are so vibrant that they could take your
breath away.

Mother earth then takes a deep breath,
Knowing that she was the creator of it all.

The fragileness of the forest could give away at any
second,
Colors could be shattered without a second thought.
Life could be taken away from us in a heartbeat,
If we are not careful about how we take care of it.
The fragileness of the forest could give away at any
second.

The sun shines through the crystal blue trees
Wakens life that is living in the magnificent forest.
All life gives patronage to mother nature for what she
has given,

The beauty that shines every day.
Life could be taken away from us in a heartbeat.

The Eyes

By Daniel Dow

“Ring-a-ring-a-rosies, A pocket full of posies. Ashes! Ashes! We all fall down!” A simple nursery rhyme, but the first time I heard my daughter sing it, it sent shivers down my spine. My daughter, who is nearly three, shouldn’t know this song and yes, a children’s playlist put on shuffle could easily play it. But I do not recall her ever hearing it. That being said, I still find it strange that this is the song she regularly runs up to me and sings.

I know it is just a nursery rhyme, but it does have a strange history. One that is surrounded by some of the world’s darkest days of death and disease. An interesting fact I learned many years ago was when I studied the Black Plague during high school history class. Thinking about this vivid memory and where the world finds itself now—dealing with a mass pandemic—certainly emphasized that eerie feeling. Every time I heard it, I just thought of all the negative connotations the song held. However, I tried to ignore it. It made my daughter happy and that’s all that mattered.

I would grab my little girl’s hand and sing along with her merrily, and while doing so try to introduce different songs. But like any three-year-old, she just wanted to sing that song, and as a loving father, I accepted it—holding her in my arms as we sang together. That was until I asked her where she learned the song and she replied by pointing to the corner ceiling in her room. I tried to find out more as I repeatedly asked her about where she heard it, hoping for an answer. But in toddler style, the more I wanted her to do something, the more she would ignore me.

That was the evening of the first-night terror.

I awoke to my daughter crying, and I rushed to her room. Not fully awake, but not completely asleep, she lay in her crib, mumbling as toddlers do and occasionally letting out a cry. Sweat covered her forehead and tears streamed down her face. I grabbed her in my arms and tried to console her. She eventually came to and started to calm down. I put her back in her crib, but I was she would not allow me to leave her room. She started to cry any time I made for the door as she watched me intently. So I curled up next to her bed and spent the night on her floor.

This continued for weeks, not every night, but often enough that the thought of sleeping on her floor made my back scream and where the two ritual morning coffees were not cutting it anymore—it was all starting to catch up to me. As I continued to consider the situation, it appeared there was not much I could do. My toddler would act like nothing happened the following mornings of a night terror and when I spoke to the doctor about the situation, she did not indicate a real solution. She would say, “it is just a phase.” She would say, “It is just one of those things toddlers can go through.”

I continued to tell myself this until I saw the figure.

It was another tears and night terrors and the exhaustion had caught up to me. I grabbed my phone from the nightstand when I heard the first cry to check the cameras for once—wishing she would just fall back asleep. That’s when I saw...it. A figure...a shadow, in the corner of her room, above her bed. I rushed in—staring at the corner. Nothing except a stirred, upset daughter, dealing with another night terror. I flicked on the lights and searched the room. Of course, I found nothing. I told myself I imagined things, that it couldn’t be real. But that shadow, the outline of the face, it was so vivid that I knew I couldn’t have imagined it.

I took her to my room and slept on the situation—trying to find some explanation for the night’s events. And when the next morning came, I did what any rational parent would do, turned to Google.

After multiple Google searches and a cup of coffee, and only finding results explaining “How to explain that there is no monster in your children’s bedroom” I started to feel mocked. But after thinking about the situation, some relief overtook me. I must have been imagining it. “This is ridiculous,” I told myself.

I tried to talk to my daughter about the near-nightly events, but she didn’t have much to share. Today she had no interest in nursery rhymes, and just wanted to play outside. She seemed her normal self. It just all seemed like a bad dream.

We proceeded with our nighttime routine as usual, and although I had some reservations, I continued to tell myself it was nothing. We read her favorite book, exchanged hugs and kisses, and she smiled as she went off to bed. It was all reassuring.

Leaving the door propped open, I went about my nightly routine and found myself falling asleep on the couch. I felt reassured.

That scream...a scream like I have never heard before. I ran into the room and found her wide awake, unlike before. Picking her up, pulling her close to me, she whispered, “The eyes.” That was all she said as I pulled her toward me. I looked at her briefly and saw her staring above her bed.

I calmed her and brought her to bed, trying to make sense of it all, and that’s when she started to sing to me:

“Ring-a-ring-a-rosies, A pocket full of posies. Ashes! Ashes! We all fall down!”

Review: *Scream* (2022)

What's Your Favorite *Scream* Movie, and Why Isn't It This One?



Image from IMBD, copyright Paramount Pictures Studios and Spyglass Pictures

By **Gabriel Velez**

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

In 1996, Wes Craven released *Scream* into the world. A slasher film that acknowledged the trappings of the slasher genre that Craven himself helped pioneer, while also being a surprisingly smart, and witty film that knew exactly what it was. Since then, the franchise

has been entirely known for that, as well as being misrepresented for its *Scary Movie* counterpart, who screamed “wazzup” in our ears for a long time. While the subsequent films have varied in quality, the one consistent element was that Wes Craven was always involved. However, with his unfortunate passing in 2015, the franchise lost its main

voice. Thus, a sequel seemed to have a much different question mark attached to it. Who would direct?

Enter Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Golpin— Hot off the trails of their moderate success, for the film *Ready or Not*. A film that was rather unique and featured strong and unique premises. Bettinelli-Olpin and Golpin seemed to be the most interesting pick to direct a *Scream* sequel. James Vanderbilt (*The Amazing Spider-Man*) and Guy Busick (*Ready or Not*) penned the screenplay. This was the second film that original *Scream* screenwriter, Kevin Williamson, didn't write (the last being *Scream 3*).

Now, with all the technical things out of the way, let's actually talk about the film. Right out the gate, the film feels rather indicative; using Jenna Ortega as the Drew Barrymore stand-in for the opening scene. The film even uses a similar introduction with Ghostface on the phone asking questions about horror films. This time, tackling ideas of elevated horror like *The Witch* and *The Babadook*; giving you an idea of what the film is going to kind of riff on for the rest of the film.

Once you get past a surprisingly good opening, you are introduced to the film's main cast. The film's first issues are regarding the script and characters. While none of

them are poorly acted (some characters even have some funny lines) they feel rather bland. Furthermore, in Jasmin Savoy Brown's case, the characters are directly mirroring past characters from the franchise's history. With her being mirroring Jamie Kennedy's Randy, from the original *Scream*. The film feels as I said earlier, very indicative of the original *Scream*. The film doesn't stand on its own two feet.

However, there are interesting ideas included in the film, like the idea of the mystery being tied to the cliches of “requels” as they coin it. That being a reboot sequel in the veins of *Jurassic World*, *Halloween* (2018), and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. Thus, they tend to fall back on some of those cliches. This leads into the legacy cast, with actors such as Courtney Cox, David Arquette, and Neve Campbell. The former gets the most focus. David Arquette gives an extremely solid performance as Dewey and was in my opinion the most well-acted performance of the film. Contrary to his role, the other two characters feel incredibly tacked-on, and in Neve Campbell's case, are basically saved until the final act.

As for the mystery and the killings, I'd say while the mystery most certainly did not keep me on my toes, the killings did. One murder had me incredibly tense to the point of nervous laughter. The murders are brutal, and for

some fans of the slasher genre, the film does what it is intended to do.

As for myself, I fancy a well-written script, with interesting characters, and this film had a bit of a rough time dealing with certain characters. There was a particular issue with the film's main protagonist Sam, played by Melissa Barrera. Barrera's character has an interesting past that the film spends quite a bit of time dealing with. However, in context to the entire film and particularly its final act, I was left feeling rather confused at what the film was trying to say about her, and what they wanted me to understand about her. Then, comes the film's twist. There are two twists in the film. One involves Sam, and the other being who the killer is. While both were interesting, I believe they both kind of fell flat. In the killer's case, that reveal was a neat idea, but it didn't have enough time to marinate, and just led to a very long exposition dump, which made the final act lose whatever tension it had.

Overall, I had a decent time with this iteration of *Scream*. The movie is definitely watchable and should satiate fans of this franchise. Personally, I was hoping for just a little bit more meat on the bones of this slasher flick. I'm going to rate it a 6/10.

Review: *From Blood and Ash*

A New Adult Fantasy Series by Jennifer L. Armentrout

By **Mikayla Barrett**

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Inhabited by Ascended and mortals, the Kingdom of Solis is one of two kingdoms born after the war. *From Blood and Ash*, a high fantasy, coming of age novel, tells a story of how sometimes, everything you have ever been told can be a lie. The story starts slow as it

depicts background information that is needed for the readers to understand. Although the pace is initially slow, both the pace and action included in the story soar.

Jennifer L. Armentrout a #1 *New York Times* and #1 International Bestselling author, brings the world of Solis to life in her best-selling series, *From Blood and Ash*. The book series

includes titles such as: *From Blood and Ash*, *A Kingdom of Flesh and Fire*, and *The Crown of Gilded Bones*. In addition, *The War of Two Queens* will be published this spring.

In the story, a new era rests on the shoulders of nineteen-year-old Poppy. Poppy is the Chosen, the Maiden. Her Ascension will bring about new change for the

kingdom of Solis. As a result of her circumstance, she is sheltered from the world; she is limited on what she can say, whom she can talk to, what she can wear, and what she can do. The Maiden must always be veiled in white and can never have anything for herself. Her life is not her own until she meets Hawke.

With the heart of a warrior,

Poppy never fit the cookie-cutter life that was set before her. She strongly believes that “everyone should be able to live a little, even for a few hours.” She was trained by one of her guards, Vikter, who is a father figure to Poppy.

Never without her trusty

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From Blood and Ash Review

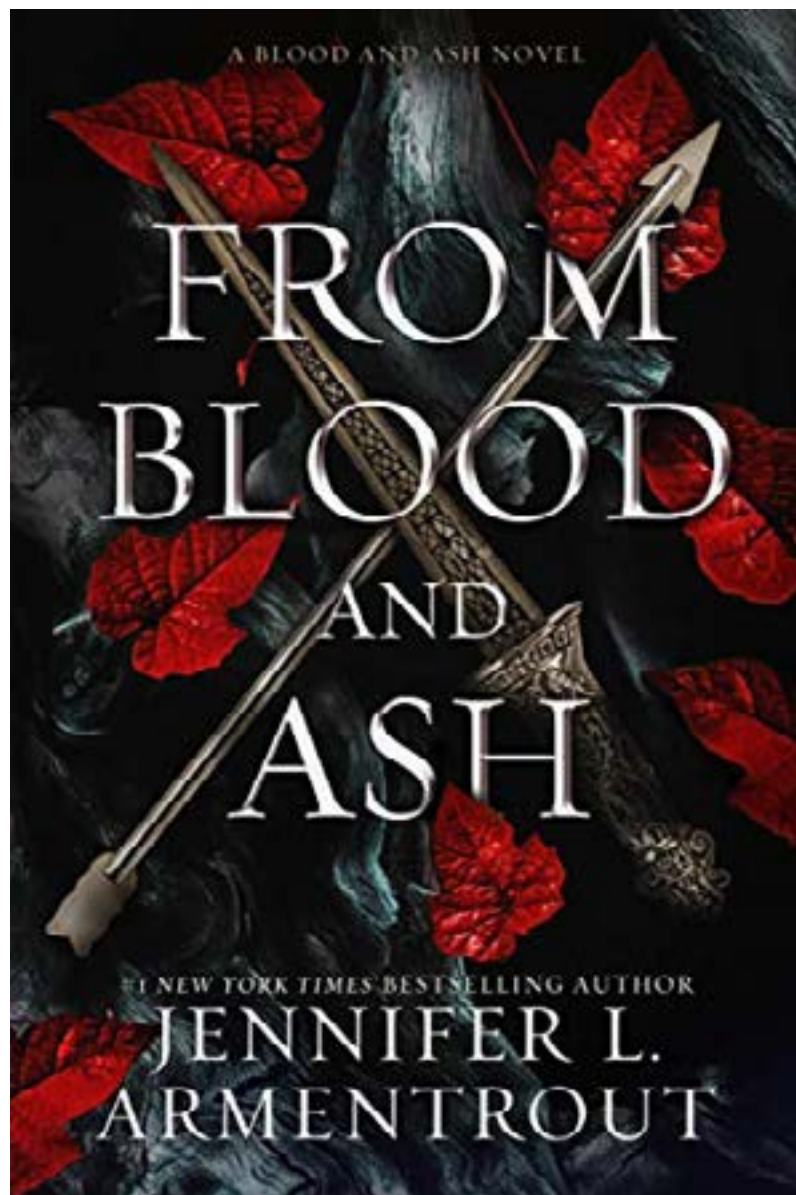


Image from Amazon.com

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dagger, Poppy learns to live life by her own rules. She “was reclaiming [her] life” little by little. However, her journey is not without its ups and downs, as Armentrout writes, “as sheltered as [she] was. [she] saw death all too frequently.”

The series resonates with young adult readers, as they are learning to navigate the world much like Poppy is. As they progress through life, young adults learn that not everything they have been told is true. Furthermore, young adults learn that they must deal with the hardships and heartbreaks that life brings them, like Poppy.

The language that Armentrout uses in her stories instantly transports you into the world. You feel as if you are right by Poppy’s side, as she navigates forging new relationships, and dealing with betrayals.

Despite the first half of the first novel being relatively slow, it builds background information

for the remainder of the series. Once the climax of the story hits, it is an endless tumble of action that makes the book hard to put down. The story may begin to feel comfortable after a huge plot twist, then BAM! Armentrout throws something else into play. Her writing always keeps you on your toes and you never know where she will take you next.

One thing to beware of with this series is that it is still unfinished. It has been confirmed that there are two more books to be published after the fourth one comes out, but other details are still unreleased. At the end of each book, you’ll want to immediately grab the next one, and if it isn’t readily available, the wait feels much too long.

While reading, the themes of growing up and finding your true path stand out as many readers of the genre can relate. Fans of fantasy, romance, and paranormal stories are sure to fall in love with this New Adult series.

Church and State Separation

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States. They have been known to do this by “trolling” organized religion.

In the 2019 documentary “Hail Satan” they explain that if Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church can protest, why can’t Satanist? This was very intriguing to me. In Arkansas, the state capitol put the ten commandments out in front of the capitol building. What if I am a Muslim? What if I am a Buddhist? Are you also going to put the words of Allah or Buddha out in front as well? This

is a classic misuse of the First Amendment. An Amendment literally stating “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...”

The Governor of Arkansas swears that he will protect the laws of the US constitution, and yet they allow this breach of the first amendment to happen. The practice of excluding religions outside of Christianity is not exclusive to Arkansas and has happened in many states, cities, and counties. For example, I

grew up in Redlands, California and the city seal has a Christian cross in it. The city was sued and asked to remove it. This is a valid claim. Many on the city council argued that it should stay because of the city’s legacy. The city has a rich history of beautiful churches of every religion and the cross stayed until the seal was changed in 2010. The change finally occurred on the grounds that it could not separate church and state properly.

I love seeing people claim they are “true Americans” and say we are a Christian nation.

Throughout our founding, we have seen we are not. After doing research while writing this op-ed I am quickly realizing I know very little about the Constitution, which is the most first-world problem ever.

According to the National Archives, the First Amendment “prevents the government from creating or favoring a religion.” This begs the question, how can a civil servant, specifically someone in congress, the presidency, or the judicial branch, under good conscience have a religion?

Hide Your Wallets

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Velozo noted that with recent prices she has been “...spending a heavily increased amount on transportation and food. These costs add up quickly and have

been taking a huge chunk out of my paychecks.”

As a working, full-time student, Ms. Velozo has to support her commute and bills all on a pre-inflation wage. She stated that “I do feel that overall,

the recent increase in expenses should warrant an increase in wages, but I believe that is unrealistic for many companies. Especially small businesses that can barely stay afloat as is.”

Whatever solution the

government can provide is most certainly necessary for students and parents alike as families try to stay financially stable as prices rise and as inflation is expected to remain an issue for the foreseeable future.