

Student Enrollment: From ‘Empty Seats in Empty Classrooms’ to ‘Filling Up Fast’

MWCC President Feeling ‘Optimistic’ After Uptick in Enrollment

By Elysian Alder
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

After a decade of precipitous declines in enrollment, Massachusetts community colleges are now poised to experience an enrollment resurgence, signaling the potential for positive developments in higher education institutions across the state. Mount Wachusett Community College, in particular, has already begun to see the results of this shift. “We put a budget together to be perhaps down 6%, and

we’re up 12%,” explained MWCC President James Vander Hooven. “So it’s an 18% swing in our budget and 12% increase in students.”

This increase follows the implementation of Gov. Maura Healey’s recently signed \$55.98 billion state budget for Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24). The budget includes significant investments in various sectors, including education, housing, workforce development, public transit, health and human services, child care, and other critical areas of public life for Massachusetts

residents. The FY24 state budget plan introduced several programs within these sectors to address previously unsupported or underrepresented facets. One such initiative is MassReconnect, a program that aims to eliminate costs for individuals aged 25 or older who have graduated from high school but lack higher education, enabling them to obtain an associate degree or certificate through any public community college, tuition-free.

“It was the first time I was

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Hello (and Hello Again)!

Semester Kicks Off with Fall Fest Welcome Back BBQ

By Katie Holgerson
ASSISTANT EDITOR

On Wednesday, September 13th, MWCC held the annual Welcome Back Fall Fest. Students gathered at the Gardner campus to meet their peers, pick up a free meal from the Green Street Cafe, explore student organizations, and enjoy live performers and other fun activities. This fair was organized by Student Life—including Kathleen Matson, who stated she helped spearhead the event “so students have an opportunity to check out the different student orgs.” Matson went on to describe some of the different festivities happening in the Student Center—including a performer, novelties, sequin pillows, sand art, henna tattoos, and face paintings. “We were supposed to have alpacas and reptiles for petting,” she stated, “but we canceled those because of the rain. But they’re coming next week instead so we can be outside.”

Despite the bad weather, organizers were pleased to be able to host this year’s fair in person. Due to COVID-19, previous years’ events had been moved to an online setting. According to Matson, “That didn’t go very well. It’s very similar in the sense that we pretty much do the same type of thing, where we have some entertainment, some

Students who missed the student organization expo at Wednesday’s fair can look forward to another one being held in October—a first for MWCC, and a great opportunity for students to grow and engage with their education. Studies have shown that community college students who participate in a freshman orientation program tend to hold greater

well. There are many students that are starting their college career for the first time after high school, and it can be very overwhelming to be in a brand new environment, surrounded by people they’ve never met before. As Matson stated, “It’s a great way for them to figure out how to get involved on campus. I think a lot of students come to college and think, ‘oh I’m just going to go to college, do my class, and go home.’ But there’s really a whole lot more to being a college student. We try to create a very vibrant student life”.

Jessica Freeman, a nursing major at MWCC, attended the fair and explained, “At first I was nervous when I showed up to the fair, since I don’t know that many people here. But once I got food and started to check out the clubs, I felt more relaxed and got to meet a lot of really cool people”.

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“We try to create a very vibrant student life.”

— Kathy Matson

novelties, and the expo.” Now that pandemic regulations have subsided, the college can bring its functions back to campus and focus on re-establishing aspects of student life that were lost to the virus.

retention rates, complete their degrees, and earn overall higher grades than individuals who did not participate in orientation.”

The fair is an excellent place for incoming students to get acquainted with their peers as

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Filling Up Fast

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able to think about going back to college in a long time. When you have a bunch of ‘adult’ bills to consider, the debt can be a huge factor in those decisions, especially if you’re not sure what you want to study. It was cool to have the state funding help eliminate some of that uncertainty,” said Vana Mangiarelli, a first-year professional writing major at the Mount.

In the past, faculty members and staff at the Mount were actively involved in outreach to local K-12 schools. They took part in in-person events, such as college fairs, to represent the college and connect with students to encourage enrollment. These efforts were temporarily paused during the pandemic but have now resumed. “We begin that outreach for students when they’re freshman, or when they’re sophomores and juniors,” explained President Vander Hooven. “I would say that played a big role in our increase this fall—being able to get back out to in-person events, to being able to actually spend time in the high schools. [...] Those opportunities where we actually bus students into the college for events. I’m feeling very optimistic about the future, based on [the enrollment office staff’s] ability to do the outreach that they haven’t been able to do for quite some time.”

With MassReconnect targeting an older demographic, however, the staff at the Mount has had to market the college by using social media, radio advertising, and utilizing statewide marketing campaigns in partnership with other community colleges to spread the word. “The number of inquiries from that population leads me to believe that they’re getting the message. In fact, we started receiving inquiries from prospective students prior to the budget even being passed,” shared President Vander Hooven.

The Mount has also been conducting virtual information sessions that aim to provide an overview of the MassReconnect program and address any inquiries participants had regarding the program and the

college experience at the Mount. Mangiarelli, who attended the August 9th session, said, “You could tell the hosts were really excited about the program and the value it brought to the new demographic, myself included. And we had an open forum

explained that Mount Wachusett Community College staff have already begun adjusting class offerings and schedules to accommodate the needs of the college community, particularly keeping in mind the demographic aged 25 years and older. “That

session in the morning, but this year, they held one in the morning, and one in the evening. “Recognizing that we’re dealing with a different population of students—we should have been doing more of that in the past. It wasn’t just the announcement

towards creating more academic schedules that work for the diversity of our students.”

A study by the Pioneer Institute found that enrollment at Massachusetts community colleges has dropped a steep 32.61% over the past decade, but with initiatives like Gov. Healey’s state budget, Mass Reconnect, and the Cherish Act on the horizon, college officials are finding themselves with renewed hope. “I think that MassReconnect is a huge step forward to where the State will need to recognize its role in supporting students to achieve that ultimate educational path,” said President Vander Hooven. “I’m really excited about the way the fall semester has gotten started, and we look forward to seeing the growth that this can bring about.”

“Recognizing that we’re dealing with a different population of students—we should have been doing more of that in the past.”

— President Vander Hooven

where we could ask questions, which was great for putting my mind at ease when it came to the financial aid process and the specifics of what we could study. People asked some really great, detailed questions—like some asked about specific majors, or how certificates worked, or about immigration and degrees from overseas, and the MWCC staff was able to give us all a rundown of how the program would work for us.”

“I believe that the impact of MassReconnect is going to be even more fully felt in the spring semester and perhaps even more so next fall,” speculated President Vander Hooven.

Back in 2021-2022, the MTA Legislative Agenda advocated for the passage of the Cherish Act, aimed at establishing a more stable budget determined by the Board of Higher Education. The Cherish Act also encompassed provisions to create possibilities for hiring additional full-time educators and enhancing working conditions for underpaid adjuncts and professional staff. Although the Cherish Act is still pending, President Vander Hooven reassured that even without that funding, the increase in enrollment has not disrupted the learning experience. “We were definitely prepared for the increase that we saw this fall, at least from a faculty perspective.”

By using the data acquired from the fall enrollment increase, President Vander Hooven

data is actually driving the creation of our spring semester,” he said, going on to explain that up until this year, the Mount has only ever held one orientation

of MassReconnect that should have prompted us. But COVID shined a light on the disparity of what we were offering. So we’ve already started to take steps

ENGLISH 237

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Massachusetts' Response to Climate Change

MWCC Professor and Microbiologist Discuss Global Warming

By Halli Coulter
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR
& Elysian Alder
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Climate change is known to be one of the most important issues today. After years of industrialization, a growing population, and continuously burning fossil fuels, the earth has felt its effects. Fortunately, the state of Massachusetts and many of its residents have stepped up to do their part.

Heather Conn, the department Chair of Natural Science at Mount Wachusett Community College, shared that although she does not usually consider herself an activist, she believes that raising awareness about climate change, helping change others' behaviors, and being mindful of the way we live our lives can go a long way toward slowing the effects of global warming. "We need to learn about modifying behaviors to slow it and live with it," Conn explained. "It's happening."

Some of the ways Conn has modified her own behaviors in the hopes of helping the planet are by driving a hybrid car, installing solar panels on her house, growing food herself, reducing her use of plastic, avoiding fertilizers and pesticides, mowing her lawn less, and so much more.

Massachusetts resident Chelsey Pellegrino also has a vested interest in climate change and a similarly strong passion for the environment. Pellegrino is a quality control microbiologist at ElevateBio—a cell and gene therapy biotech company—and hopes to become an environmental researcher in the future. "If I were to sum up the way I view the global warming crisis in one word, I would use outraged," Pellegrino shared.

She admitted that when she thinks about the condition of the planet, she is "saddened and worried, knowing that it may be close to the point of no return."

Like Heather Conn, Pellegrino



Photo by Markus Spiske from Unsplash

contributes to helping the planet by being environmentally conscious when making daily decisions such as avoiding single-use items, preventing

only ones trying to take action. The Massachusetts government has been doing its part to help the global issue, as well. In August of 2008, the first state bill that

sector-specific sublimits every 5 years."

"I really wish I could say this will be a quick and easy fix; however, it is missing vital

environmental activist group Environment Massachusetts proposed a series of bills to state legislators addressing various critical areas that were absent in previous legislation, including: "Clean, Green, and Renewable Energy; Zero Carbon; Clean Water; Waste Reduction; and Protecting Public Health and Reducing Toxic Chemicals." Although many of the projected dates for the actualization of these bills extend to 2035-2050, the ambition and urgency behind these proposals puts emphasis on the need for immediate action to address pressing environmental issues.

Similarly, Pellegrino shared that the most important part is "uncovering the truth of global warming," stating that people "need to be aware of the actual issues," which can be accomplished by larger organizations such as the federal government and major corporations ceasing to conceal the truths surrounding our planet's critical climate crisis.

"If I were to sum up the way I view the global warming crisis in one word, I would use 'outraged.'"

— Chelsey Pellegrino

waste, being vegan, and living a minimalist lifestyle to leave little-to-no carbon footprint behind.

Pellegrino shared that one of the best ways to combat global warming is by eating a plant-based diet, explaining that "this is because there is a large amount of methane by-product, land deprivation, and overuse of resources to produce meats and other non-plant-based foods."

Conn and Pellegrino aren't the

targeted climate change was signed into law — the Global Warming Solutions Act, which focused on limiting greenhouse gas emissions with a goal of 80% fewer emission levels by 2050. It was not until March 26, 2021, when the Governor signed into law An Act Creating A Next-Generation Roadmap for Massachusetts Climate Policy, which, according to mass.gov, "requires the EEA Secretary to set interim emissions limits and

aspects, and there is no way it will help us come close to the goal of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions," Pellegrino said while speaking about Massachusetts' response to the climate change crisis. Although she feels there is still more to be done, she applauded the state government for caring about the climate and attempting to make an impact.

Pellegrino isn't the only one with doubts. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, the



Profile: Kerrie Griffin

MWCC Professor Shares Her Passion for Psychology

By Isabelle Mascary

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Assistant Professor of Psychology & Human Services Kerrie Griffin has been teaching at the Mount since 2008. Her greatest passions involve socialization, advising, and helping her students grow, often drawing on her own experiences to do so.

Griffin attended the University of New Hampshire, where she obtained an undergraduate degree in psychology and a graduate degree in counseling. “I went back for a second degree because I was comfortable there and had such a great undergraduate experience,” she shared.

Some courses she has taught at the Mount include Intro to Psychology, Psychology of the Self, Psychology of Death and Dying, and Human Growth and Development — all of which she has a personal tie to. “I took most of the courses that I am teaching now!” she explained. “I’m not sure if taking them impacted how I teach, since most of the courses were taken over 10 years before I started teaching. But I do think about what made my classes most memorable, what my favorite classes were and why, and try to approach the classroom in similar ways. So I took away more about teaching styles that I liked, and I try to incorporate those.”

What she likes most about her profession is witnessing the development of her students. “I like interacting with students,” said Griffin. “I like seeing students grow throughout their time here and go from maybe not the most confident student in the world to really enjoying certain classes and coming out of their shell a little bit.”

According to Griffin, psychology plays an important role in higher education, with all majors requiring a behavioral social science elective. This allows students to dip into a psychology class and explore the subject without total investment. “Intro to psychology provides a framework for students to figure

out whether they are interested in doing more in psychology,” she explained. “And you can apply it to your own life. Everyone can gain something.”

To further elaborate, she added, “We may be caregivers or [we’re] going to be caregivers. We were adolescents or teenagers. Some people have babies, or they’re planning on having babies. It’s nice to see that they can tell each other stories, and they can go into the world and see concepts where: yes, you have to learn the term, but you can see them happening and unfolding in real life.”

Griffin’s classes also encompass discussions on challenging topics, including mental health issues such as suicide. “In Psychology of the Self, there is a QPR suicide prevention training that the school offered. I’ve had the college counselor come in and do that training with my students.” The QPR training—which stands for Question, Persuade, Refer—teaches students how to identify, comprehend, and effectively engage with individuals who may be having suicidal thoughts.

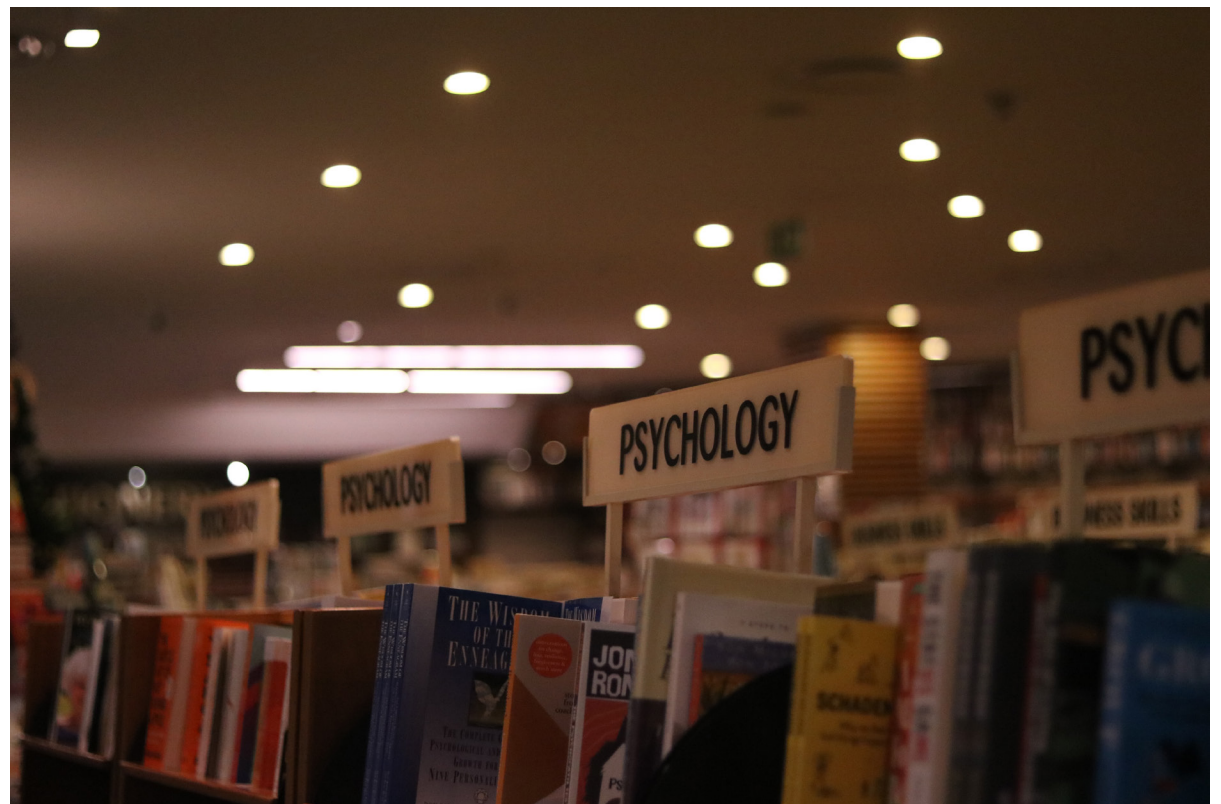


Photo by Alicia Crisitin Gerald from Unsplash

training is accessible both on campus and online and is spearheaded by the Mount’s counselor, Melissa Manzi. While Griffin holds a degree in counseling, it’s not a part of her current role. She appreciates the flexibility that lets her complete much of her work—including preparation and grading—from home. “I am lucky to have flexibility in my job which allows

that one of the major obstacles is, “getting students to show up and complete their work in a timely manner.” She understands and empathizes with the fact that students have a lot on their plate, whether that means juggling the demands of school, work, and other responsibilities, or dealing with a lack of access to transportation and other vital resources. “Social support and

nature, spending time with her family, traveling, and keeping active. “I’m a central Mass girl,” she explained. “Life for me is being a soccer mom; I spend a lot of time on the soccer field. I have one daughter, and she is very much into soccer. I like being active; I like going for walks and hiking. And I love traveling. I try to travel any chance I can get, whether it’s just an hour or two outside of where we are, or on an airplane somewhere far away with white sand and blue water.”

Griffin offered some final advice for students, highlighting: “Organization is key to success. Keeping some sort of planner, whether it’s digital or not, and communication with your instructors is important.” She also emphasized the significance of self-care, stating, “Taking time to care for yourself outside of school is going to be key to being successful because if you let that part go, your health will go. Your stress levels will increase. You’ll make bad decisions. Get sleep,” said Griffin. “Take a break.”

“[...] You can apply it to your own life. Everyone can gain something [from psychology].”

— Kerrie Griffin

Griffin explained that one of the repercussions of COVID-19 was an increased rate of suicide, especially for college-age individuals, making it easy to see why training for suicide prevention is important. QPR

me time for the important things like getting to soccer games, having the summers ‘off,’ and taking weekends away,” said Griffin.

Reflecting on some of the challenges of the job, she shared

access to resources both on and off campus are important for student success, as they can often help with these roadblocks,” she said.

Aside from teaching, Griffin loves being outdoors and in

To access MWCC’s counseling services, visit [bewellthemount.com](https://www.bewellthemount.com) or call the 24/7 Support Line at 833-434-1217



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Review: AMC's *Interview with the Vampire*

The Perfect Gothic Drama to Sink Your Teeth Into This Fall



Image copyright AMC Studios

By **Elysian Alder**
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

AMC's "Interview with the Vampire" is a sumptuous reimagining of Anne Rice's timeless gothic novel by the same name. Laced with humor, irony, and creeping tension, complete with the representation of the inherent eroticism that any vampire narrative should have, "Interview with the Vampire" is many things, but perhaps most

of all, it is a visceral exploration of immortality's existential complexities. Directed by Rolin Jones, this series—originally released on AMC and its streaming platform in 2022—is currently available on Max until October 31, and it's a perfect addition to any autumn watchlist. The series introduces us first to journalist Daniel Molloy, played by Eric Bogosian ("Law and Order: Criminal Intent,"

"Succession"). The opening scene—a commercial for what appears to be a journalism Masterclass—might catch some viewers off guard, perhaps feeling more like an unexpected ad from the streaming service, playing before the actual episode starts. But that's not the case, and as the camera pans out, Daniel Molloy sits on his couch, watching the commercial for his own class with a deadened expression. The decision to depict Molloy as a disillusioned and weary septuagenarian instead of a fresh-faced, excitable youth is only the first curious departure from the source material of Anne Rice's novel, but it's one that serves to strengthen the rest of the narrative tremendously. Shortly after Molloy's introduction, it's revealed that the titular "Interview" actually took place decades prior, in the 1970s, and the subject—the vampire—wants a redo.

Opposite Bogosian, the series stars Jacob Anderson ("Game of Thrones") as Louis de Pointe du Lac, Molloy's vampiric interview subject; Sam Reid ("Belle," "The Riot Club") as Lestat de Lioncourt, Louis's "murderer, mentor, lover, and maker"; and Bailey Bass ("Avatar: The Way of the Water") as Claudia, their shrewd adoptive daughter, turned into a vampire at a young age, forever trapped in the body of a teenager. Every

scene between this spectacularly chosen cast is electric, their chemistry undeniable. Even at their campiest—which, yes, this gothic series has plenty of cheesy moments—the performances are a tour-de-force.

In another departure from the source material, the series sees Louis as a Black businessman in 1910s New Orleans instead of a plantation owner, a controversial change that adds layers of depth to his character. Anderson depicts all of the nuances of Louis' character and his journey—from his tumultuous role in the society of the time to his initial transformation into a vampire to the toxic and passionate relationship that ensues with Lestat—with a magnetic blend of vulnerability and ferocity.

For those familiar with Neil Jordan's 1994 film adaptation of the same novel, there might be a genuine worry that the series could fall into the same trap of "not being gay enough"—a complaint that many viewers had for the film. Rolin Jones' "Interview with the Vampire," however, pulls no punches with its representation. And how could it? There's no holding back in this regard, especially after witnessing Sam Reid's portrayal of Lestat. From the moment Reid graces the screen, Lestat is deliciously and unabashedly queer. Beyond that, his presence is captivating, effortlessly

exuding the charm and terror that define Lestat's character.

The series seamlessly shifts between time periods, with Molloy's contemporary interview with Louis serving as a portal to the early 20th century, where Louis delves into his experiences with Lestat and eventually Claudia. The dynamic between Louis and Lestat is an endless dance of lethal desire, power, and vulnerability, and as Louis recounts their complex relationship to Molloy, the world-weary journalist doesn't shy away from digging into every detail and challenging the veracity of events. This unwavering pursuit of truth, however discomfiting it might be for Louis, or how perilous for Molloy, a mere human, adds a gripping layer of tension to their interactions. Molloy's role in the narrative invites the audience to question the unfolding events and, by extension, Louis' reliability as the narrator.

"Interview with the Vampire" is a series that demands attention, offering a fresh perspective on a classic tale that's as timeless as it is captivating. With its remarkable cast, daring departures from the source material, and unapologetic queerness, it breathes new life into the vampire genre.

Have your own thoughts on a TV show, film, book, or video game?
Write a review and send it to mountobserver@mwcc.mass.edu
It may just end up in our next issue!

Welcome Back Fall Fest

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Student Life recognizes that socialization at a community college may be more difficult for some students since they are not living on campus and do not have as many opportunities to interact with their peers. Speaking for

the department, Matson stated, "Being a completely commuter campus, we try to replicate that. But obviously during the day, more than at night...But it really helps students get connected to the school, especially if you're struggling. It's a great opportunity for them to find the

different opportunities we've got."

Ultimately, the Student Fair turned out to be full of vibrant students getting involved with student organizations, enjoying food and performances, and getting to know their fellow Mountain Lions.

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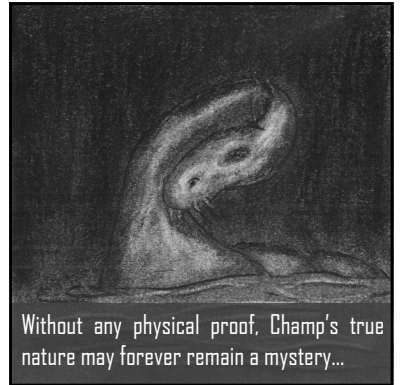
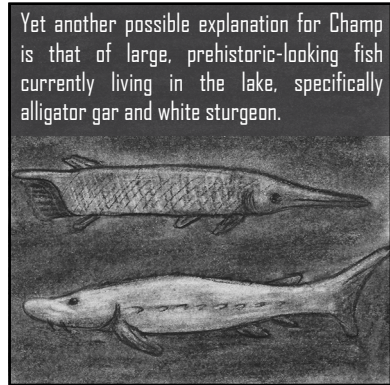
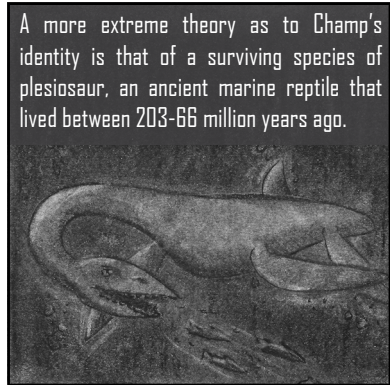
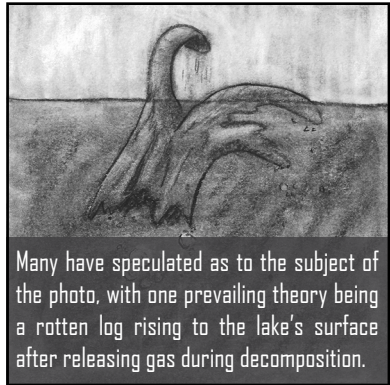
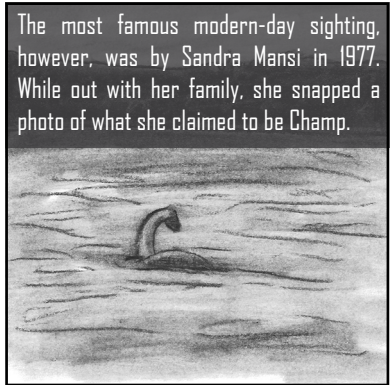
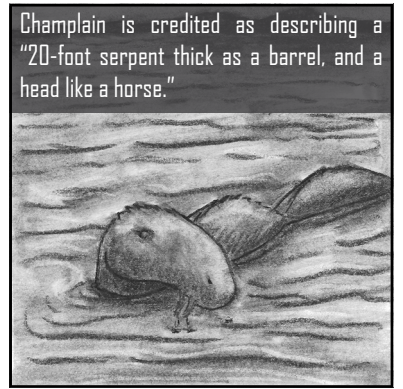
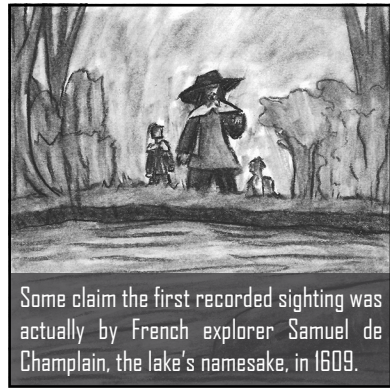
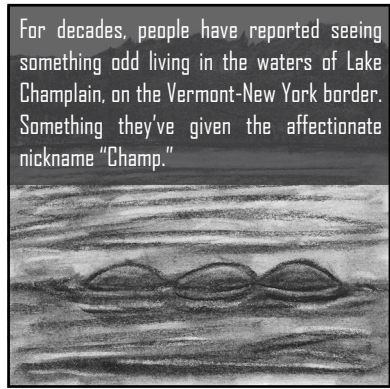
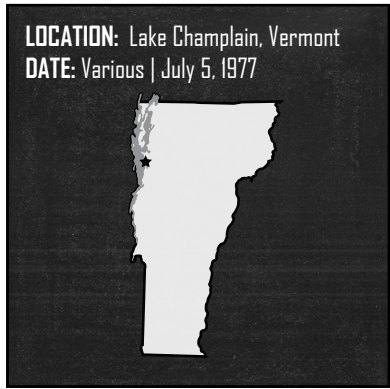
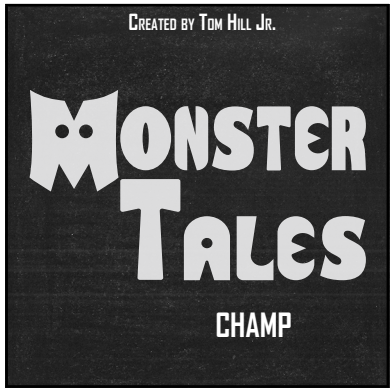
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COMICS



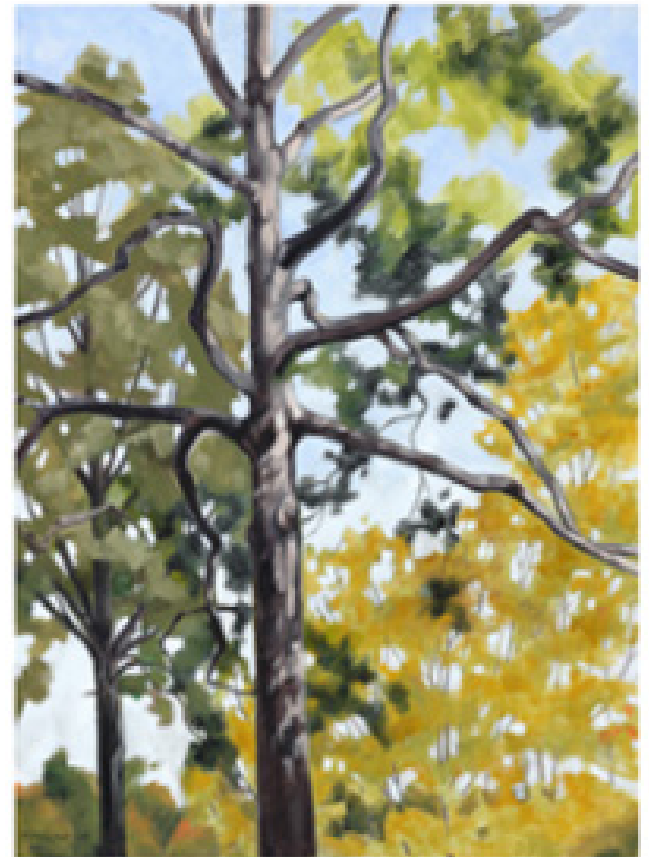
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Involvement MOUNT Events

Thursday, September 21 2023 at 5:00 AM to Thursday, September 21 2023 at 9:00 PM -
Open Gym Day @ Mount Fitness

Monday, September 25 2023 at 8:00 AM to Thursday, September 28 2023 at 2:00 PM -
Fall 2023 SGA Elections @ InvolveMOUNT

Monday, September 25 2023 at 10:15 AM to Monday, September 25 2023 at 10:45 AM -
Core Strength Training @ Mount Fitness

Monday, September 25 2023 at 12:30 PM to Monday, September 25 2023 at 1:30 PM -
CATS Programming Group Meeting @ W110

Monday, September 25 2023 at 4:00 PM to Monday, September 25 2023 at 5:00 PM -
SGA Biweekly Meeting @ Zoom

Monday, September 25 2023 at 5:00 PM to Monday, September 25 2023 at 6:00 PM -
Mount Observer Weekly Meeting @ Zoom (email for link)

Tuesday, September 26 2023 at 12:30 PM to Tuesday, September 26 2023 at 1:30 PM -
Preparing to Transfer @ Advising Atrium (H107) & Zoom

Tuesday, September 26 2023 at 1:00 PM to Tuesday, September 26 2023 at 2:00 PM -
Situational Awareness: Why, When and How @ Zoom

Tuesday, September 26 2023 at 5:00 PM to Tuesday, September 26 2023 at 6:00 PM -
Situational Awareness: Why, When and How @ Zoom

Tuesday, September 26 2023 at 7:00 PM to Tuesday, September 26 2023 at 8:00 PM -
JINDO- BINGO with a Beat @ Zoom/Online

Wednesday, September 27 2023 at 12:45 PM to Wednesday, September 27 2023 at 1:45 PM -
Weekly Art Club Meeting @ Room 104 (Studio One)

Wednesday, September 27 2023 at 12:30 PM to Wednesday, September 27 2023 at 2:30 PM -
Unpacking 9/11 A Historical Account @ South Cafe

Thursday, September 28 2023 at 10:00 AM to Thursday, September 28 2023 at 11:00 AM -
THRIVE: Coffee Conversation Hour @ THRIVE CENTER - Room H106

Thursday, September 28 2023 at 5:00 PM to Thursday, September 28 2023 at 6:00 PM -
Learning Styles- Online @ Zoom/Online

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Editor in Chief:
Elysian Alder

Assistant Editor:
Katie Holgerson
Cody Nathanson
Vana Mangiarelli

Graphic Designer:
Thomas Hill Jr.

Contributors:
Hallie Coulter
Isabelle Mascary

Adviser:
Katie Fuller

Address:
Room H353, MWCC,
444 Green St.,
Gardner, MA 01440

E-Mail
mountobserver@mwcc.mass.edu

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