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The Essential Frankensteins to Watch Out For

BY WENDELL ZYLSTRA

Following the recent release of Guillermo Del Toro’s *Frankenstein*, debates flared up online regarding the quality of the representation of women in the film. Specifically, the interest was whether or not *Frankenstein* was a sexist film. Naturally, this brought up the long discussed, and almost overused, ‘Bechdel test’.

The Bechdel test’s premise is pretty simple: a film will pass if it has at least two fully fleshed out female characters having a conversation with each other about something other than a man. Today, the Bechdel test is almost the knee-jerk reaction for movie reviewers seeking feminist films or films with good female representations in general, but should it really be?

Alison Bechdel is an American cartoonist who has published many autobiographical graphic novels, including *Fun Home*, *Are you my Mother?*, and her most popular, *Dykes to Watch Out For*. The latter was a strip based comic depicting Bechdel and her friends’ lives as lesbians in an ever-changing world. One of these strips described a character only seeing movies that met the criteria laid out previously. Contrary to the belief of some that the Bechdel test is an immovable theory about media, the strip simply uses this test to comment on the lack of female representation in film.

The test exploded in popularity, in part for its simplicity and in part for its shocking outcome: that not many movies pass such a low bar. Despite that, I believe it is incorrect to attempt to apply it to films as a ‘gotcha’ to definitively prove if a piece of media is or is not feminist.

Returning to *Frankenstein*, many have brought criticisms to the character of Emily, who has little agency with her decisions throughout the story. The film does not pass the Bechdel test by any of its stipulations, and Emily’s life is mostly used as a plot device to further the stories of the rest of the entirely male cast. This has reasonably led to others criticizing the film as sexist.

The representation in the film is poor, but is it truly sexist? The original novel was written by Mary Shelley, a

was an immediate success and left a long-lasting impact on society as a whole.

All of this understood, we must ask ourselves if good representation of women in media inherently makes something feminist. Does a film with characters who accurately represent a very diverse group automatically promote feminist ideals? What even are those ideals truly?

Frankenstein is a distinctly feminist tale for its historical context and the discussion of ideas of othering and

of women and feminism is part of what has led to the misinterpretation of Bechdel’s comic, as well the misinterpretation of many modern films and their female characters.

The original Bechdel comic aims to point out a worrying trend in mainstream film about how women are depicted and what that says about both the people who make films and our society at large. It is not a guide on how to represent women in film. Having a female character talk to another female character does not mean your film has good representation, and having good representation does not mean your film is feminist. These components are heavily linked but separate and they are far more complex than a pass/fail test.

Film and popular media does significantly sway the opinions of the public, especially in a Western context. That said, if the peak of your feminist understanding and petitioning comes in the form of white-knighting in Letterboxd reviews, you have a very long way to go.

What is far more important in any venture of representation is the desire to make truly well thought out and accurate decisions in the film using research and experience. No test can really sum up what is innately understood by other women to be a good and accurate representation. Including more female voices and influences within popular media will ultimately shift the principals of others and lead to far greater diversity in the voices and opinions told in film.



Illustration by Iso Maaquod Rodriguez.

female author who published *Frankenstein* in 1818. Many of her peers and inspirations during her life in colonial and male-dominated London were men. Mary Shelley is seen as a feminist figure in history because despite the social stigma assigned to female writers, *Frankenstein*

monstrosity which come from Mary Shelley’s experiences as a woman, which she outlines in the novel despite its male-centered cast. However, this does not negate that the representation within the novel and film are often lacking. The lack of distinction between good representation

Sh*tshow Not Living up to Its Name: Artists Pleased

BY WENDELL ZYLSTRA

On Tuesday, November 25th, I attended the Visual Arts Course Union’s “Shitshow.” I first saw the collage styled poster donning the concrete poles of the UNC building a couple of weeks ago and thought it would be fun to attend. One of my friends later asked if someone would want to go and sell art there with her. I gladly agreed and we walked in on Tuesday at 11am to the EME foyer to set up the booth. What we found was an excellent event full of artists and art lovers all supporting each other.

Some will raise an eyebrow at the mention of any kind of ‘shitshow’, but the name plays on the common conception of craft fairs as places for very seasoned and professional artists. The Shitshow is a nod to the show’s loose nature. Vendor applications were accepted up to the morning of the show and what the vendors were selling was entirely up to them. Some sold miscellaneous handmade goods and some sold zines. I personally sold prints of my art I had just done in the library that morning.

This looser structure allows students from all different academic backgrounds to feel less daunted by the idea of selling their art. There were many people there in the arts and humanities, but also some in STEM degrees, my friend included. For those who enjoy art but do

not have it as their main focus of study, it can be difficult to carve out time to do everything. What often gets cut is whatever you are not directly studying. The generally low-stakes and relaxed guidelines of the Shitshow gives everyone a chance to make art their focus, even just for a few hours. Setting just those few hours aside for art keeps you connected to what you love and to the community that loves it too.

My friend commented to me multiple times about how she feels like she just does not have time to draw and create anymore, but both of us drew for most of the time we were there. At home, she has connections to the thriving Calgary zine-scene. She makes wonderful zines and it hurts to think that she has no time to do that anymore.

Even in an arts degree, sometimes the kind of art one enjoys is not the focus of study. Things like textile arts may not get recognized until later in a visual arts degree. There are many different types of art and maybe academics just do not do your style justice. These are just some of the many reasons events like this are important.

A little bit after setting up, two of the members of the VACU’s executive staff came around the booths and welcomed all of us. Some of these executive

members even ran booths with their own art. This fostered a sense of community which only heightened throughout the afternoon.

People trickled through and looked at all the pieces, many even purchased and supported the artists by buying some of their assorted goods. Great conversation was had with those who stopped by, but also between the vendors themselves. Each vendor, at some lull in the crowd, did their own walkthrough of the vendors. We chatted while buying and selling each other’s wares. In the end, whatever money I made went right back into the art of others.

There was a great sense of community brought on by both the interactions between the VACU’s team and the other vendors. It really felt like being a part of an artist’s community. That feeling of being encouraged while also encouraging others really brings a sense of contentment, regardless of what you chose to sell that day.

While non-artists funding art is a very crucial part of keeping arts alive, community among artists is maybe the greatest jumping off point for many. Any art movement throughout history has not been the product of one person, but rather the product of many people sharing ideas. Think of any famous artist and I guaran-

tee they are associated with some kind of group that helped them forward in style and expression. Regardless of skill, being connected with other artists allows beautiful ideas and creations to come to fruition.

If you are at all interested in meeting and being around other artists, I would highly recommend keeping an eye on the VACU’s Instagram (@vacu_team). If you create art — no matter what major you may be — attending events like the Shitshow will benefit your practice and help you get to know other people that share your interests.

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“Maelstrom” by Brendan James
Estimated Difficulty: 2/5

On-Demand Streaming Services: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

BY GABRIELA CHAN

We are students of a digital age. Most days, we do not write assignments on paper, but submit lengthy word documents as Canvas assignments. We watch pixelated confetti rain down our laptop screens, give ourselves a pat on the back, then switch tabs to Netflix.

Both academic learning and entertainment platforms exist conveniently on the Internet. The Internet physically simplifies one's transition from the state of work to that of rest, but the fact that work and play have become so shoulder-to-shoulder also risks impeding students' abilities to learn and focus.

Among the many entertainment-related industries that thrive today, the Subscription-Video-On-Demand (SVOD) streaming services industry has grown rapidly over the past decade, its market size reaching an estimate of USD 95.50 billion in 2024.¹ On 20 November, 2025, 36 followers participated in a poll on The Phoenix's Instagram to answer the question, "How many streaming services do you have?" Nine people voted one subscription, another nine voted two subscriptions, six voted three, and twelve voted three or more.

Streaming services charge close to CAD 20 per month, and have been continuously increasing their costs,² yet 33% of respondents, who are mostly students, willingly pay the cost thrice or more. Even if their parents pay that cost for them on the basis of household subscription plans, these statistics reflect a curious allure about SVOD platforms to university students.

The statistics also beg three questions: Why do students like to own multiple streaming services? How does this form of entertainment impact our lives? How do we strike a balance between academics and entertainment?

One of the obvious allures of having multiple SVOD streaming platforms is variety. Be it movies, reality TV, or documentary, streaming services gather many forms of content and make them readily available to users within the same digital space. In that space, content is varied not only in form but also genre, language, and the time of release.

If you wanted to, you could watch *The Godfather* (1972) and *KPop Demon Hunters* (2025) in one sitting — I would be very curious, though, to hear about your emotional trajectory within those four-and-a-half hours.

In all seriousness, students often crave a self-curated emotional rollercoaster. Watching a classic mafia crime film followed by an intercultural animation musical is far more stimulating than the typical university routine: wake up, go to class, study, sleep, and repeat. A sense of lost agency and numbness comes with a routine lifestyle like one of a student. That is where on-demand streaming comes into play, giving users a feeling of empowerment in being able to choose



Photo by Sabhya Arora.

what they want to watch and feel what they want to feel.

These streaming platforms have become intertwined with our lives, and have had significant impacts on our modes of social interaction as well as our bodies and minds.

These days, dates or hang-outs with friends often involve watching a show together on Netflix. One can even find friends through the content hosted on the platform. Just think about the millions that gathered online at the same time on 27 June, 2025, for the release of *Squid Games* Season 3.³ Community can be found in discussing such shows on social media. In these ways, SVOD platforms bring people together by giving us something to look forward to and talk about together.

However, despite the variety of choice, emotional relief, and sense of community, too much time spent on SVOD platforms turns into an unhealthy form of escapism. Relaxation becomes far too easy. The broad streaming catalog and seamless skips from one episode to the next offer constant stimulation and a possibility to be entertained endlessly. Not only does that escapism tempt a person to stay in front of the screen for long stretches of time, it also encourages a sedentary lifestyle, entailing repercussions like worsened eye-sight, reduced physical exercise, and an increased risk of illness, among other consequences.

Psychologically, it can lead to "Netflix Syndrome."⁴ In a study on the effects of content

choice deferral, Hun Kim, Choi Junghwan, and Bao Tantan write that "as users' range of choices has diversified and become overloaded, the time spent thinking about what content to watch rather than watching content is increasing."⁵

In other words, Netflix Syndrome is spending your whole study break scrolling down the streaming catalog, comparing your options, debating which is more worth your time, and rarely, if ever, landing on a pick before break time is over. This habit of choice deferral can cause negative internal states. What could have been a time of rest becomes filled with "self-criticism, regret, and despair"⁶ because the more options you have to choose from, the harder it is to settle on one.

Besides disrupting one's headspace with moments of indecision, on-demand streaming also impacts our abilities to focus and think critically. When acts like fast-forwarding and clicking out of a movie halfway become habitual, our attention spans become narrower. While these acts free us from the need to sit through a bad movie in theatres, that freedom is ultimately made up of dopamine hits that reward a passive brain.

What is more, the Internet has churned out more temptations than just SVOD that keep us from learning actively. Generative AI (GenAI) tools, for example, quicken or even replace the analytical process of students writing lab reports or summarising academic readings, encouraging a prioritisation of efficiency over depth in learn-

ing.

Even though the use of GenAI is prohibited in many courses, some students pay professional writers to do their essays for them through essay writing services like EduBirdie. These services operate legally on the basis that no plagiarism is involved since they technically produce original work for students, but from an academic standpoint, not only are such online tools ethically questionable, but they also combine with the endless streaming content on SVOD to impede students' intellectual development.

Considering the physical, psychological, and intellectual consequences, it is important that students are careful not to indulge in on-demand streaming, but when subscribed to three or more SVOD platforms, that is easier said than done. How might you break out of the streaming cycle?

1. Set screen time limits on your devices, and stick to them. Most phones and tablets these days contain built-in settings that help you monitor your device usage. You can customize screen time limits as a whole or for individual apps, such that those apps automatically get locked after you have used them for a set amount of time each day. Start by limiting your screen time on SVOD apps to an hour a day — maybe less — and when your device tells you your time is up, do not ask it for an extra fifteen minutes.

2. Just pick a show! The options seem limitless, but your time is limited. Instead of overthinking your pick, go with your gut and watch the first show that catches your eye. Even if it ends up being a bad one, you can get a good laugh out of trashing it with your friends.

3. Cut down on subscriptions. As mentioned earlier, on-demand streaming services can provide emotional relief in the mundane and build community, but these benefits only sustain when streaming is done in moderation. So, despite what the ads tell you, perhaps you do not want to be subscribed to three or more.

In transitioning from cable TV and DVD media to on-demand streaming, we have traded many valuable parts of our lives in exchange for convenience. We have given up picking a Blu-ray disc with our families in favour of algorithm-generated recommendations, and ownership of physical media in favour of a lifetime-supply of content that is temporary and leaves us with nothing to keep for ourselves when we unsubscribe. It is by taking measures to protect ourselves from falling into the rabbit hole of on-demand streaming that we might start to reclaim some of that lost interaction with the phys-

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crossword mania

Crossword by Iso Maauad Rodriguez.

DOWN

- 1 This band's song is the theme for The Batman
- 2 A complete DNA sequence is a gen-
- 3 Computer built on a single circuit board, for short
- 4 Vampires on Twilight renounce to this
- 5 Scrambled version of "sices"
- 6 What the dead do in Night of the Living Dead
- 7 The Godfather's famous actor
- 8 Paris,
- 9 The two countries who led the cold war
- 14 Scarier version of 28 down
- 15 Mexican director of The Shape of Water
- 17 ___ Gump, with one less r
- 21 Like "Unbreakable Vows" in Harry Potter
- 22 Cranes, in Spanish
- 25 Scrambled version of "iPod"
- 28 ___ Movie (bzzz bzzz)
- 29 Home to the Hollywood film industry
- 31 Redhead singer who plays himself in Yesterday

ACROSS

- 1 The first vampire movie
- 10 You could call the guys in Grown Ups this
- 11 Time for lunchroom chaos
- 12 Smallest size available, usually
- 13 Peralta's favorite Christmas movie
- 16 "Extremely" is the PG version of this
- 18 It ___ what it ___
- 19 "unfortunately, no one can be told what the matrix is. you have to see it for yourself."
- 20 12 hours before they wake up in Inception
- 22 Growling sound cut short
- 23 UBC program to help with challenging courses, for short
- 24 Character who breaks his toe in the filming of LOTR
- 26 Most famous alien, perhaps?
- 27 Rango ends up in one, in Spanish
- 30 What you'll do after watching Hachi
- 32 No clue! Appologies, no word fit here

contest!

Send us a picture of your solved crossword by email or Instagram for a chance to be the **first to own** a limited-edition, one-of-a-kind **Phoenix hoodie!** Entries valid until December 14th comics@thephoenixnews.com

Archivists, the Internet, and Piracy

BY AIDEN MALCOLM

The preservation of knowledge is highly important to the development of arts, culture, and science. Without the preservation of knowledge, all forms of teaching would be severely handicapped, and our growth in every discipline important to the meeting of our ever-evolving needs would be severely shunted. This preservation, in its organized and intentional form, is given the moniker “archiving”. Archivists are responsible for the collection and preservation of vast amounts of data. This data can take many forms, including, but not limited to, books, magazines, movies, historical artifacts, and biological specimens.

For most of the last several hundred years archive collection was subject to costly physical limitations, and thus almost exclusively limited to large institutional collections. Famous libraries include the Smithsonian Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Louvre. Many works and pieces held in these archives are maintained in tightly controlled conditions to prevent degradation of the collection, but these do not come at a small cost.

Although archiving programs can be well funded, information is still frequently lost, especially in the case of private archives. Works are frequently destroyed by accidents or natural disasters, the deterioration of the medium they were created on, and private firms who do not wish to incur the expense of maintaining an archive.

All three of these are exemplified by the preservation of many American silent films produced 1912-1929. In 2013, the Library of Congress found that only 25% of films from that era survive today.¹ This is due to many factors, the foremost of which was the fact that movies were produced on a nitrate film, which was highly vulnerable to fire, and many of the studio’s own archives literally went up in flames. Movies were also frequently recorded over, as film was prohibitively expensive, and studios did not want to pay the high costs of archiving their films.

At this time piracy was almost non-existent. While formal copyright laws have existed since 1710, they served almost exclusively as punitive measures against producers, not consumers.² The crime was in the unlicensed production and sale of a work, not in its consumption.

However, this paradigm was fundamentally changed by the creation of the internet, and the takeover of the digital age, due to two primary factors that acted in concert.



Illustration by Iso Maatad Rodriguez.

The first was the simplicity and high quality of copying. While the tradition of reproducing works has existed for millennia, this replication was frequently a long and arduous process or introduced significant losses in quality to the work. Significant developments, such as the Gutenberg press, did truly revolutionize their mediums with their inexpensive and efficient production, but many other avenues of human expression still suffered from the complexity of copying.

This was forever changed with the advent of the computer. Now, information on a broad range of mediums could be simply copied between digital systems, with minimal to no loss in the quality of data, at a very low cost. This especially changed the vast archives of personal pictures and films, which had quantitative limits on reproduction due to the inferior nature of technology used and the expensive development process.

Advancing the significance of this advance was the formation of the internet, and the enormous distribution potential it contained. Humans had a level of access to an enormous volume of material, surpassing anything seen before. Works of all kinds could be shared across tremendous distances with little wait or risk of damage, and it changed the way users interacted with data.

This, in combination with revolutions in reproduction that the digital age offered, presented an unprecedented number of people the ability to access information at a never-before-seen scale. As millions joined the internet to experience these benefits, the information it contained also grew. Quick-

ly, the web became the largest collection of human data ever, unrivaled in both size and scale.

The quantity of information, alongside the revolutions in copying presented by the digital age and the simplicity of sharing, led to an unrivaled opportunity for the many amateur archivists across the planet. With relatively inexpensive technology and software, vast amounts of data could be stored by those without the billion-dollar budget of the Smithsonian.

However, many of these would-be amateur archivists were actually considered thieves. As services like Limewire exploded in popularity, millions of albums were downloaded onto personal devices across the world. While these works were often downloaded for personal enjoyment, they still served to create a massive amount of redundancy, while simultaneously increasing access to information, essentially preserving and spreading the works. Embodying this, Radiohead, an English alt-rock band renowned for their experimentation, released their 2007 album *In Rainbows* as a direct-download, pay-what-you-want model. According to Tom Yorke, a band member, that album made the group members significantly more than any other Radiohead album.³

Importantly, the computer and internet transformation not only represented a significant shift in the amount of data that could be collected and maintained but also signalled a larger change in the safety of that data. In archiving, where malicious actors are considered a minor threat when compared to circumstances that often amount to

bad luck, redundancy is key. Instead of a few major archives who maintain works, now millions of individuals could store these works, creating a number of copies which accidents or natural disasters would be exceedingly hard-pressed to destroy.

Almost equally importantly, this advancement greatly democratized access to information. Instead of archive copies being restricted to relatively few locations, where travel or access might be expensive or restricted, all that was required was internet access. While this can still be difficult for some demographics, it was a massive improvement over the past.

This redundancy, and the democratization that came alongside it, was almost immediately threatened by entertainment monopolies across the world. Seeing this storage of information simply as a reduction in their profits, they quickly began lobbying for comprehensive copyright laws and using invasive Digital Rights Management technologies.

Because of their massive power, draconian copyright laws were rapidly enacted to legally “protect” this work from being saved, allowing companies to sue, or otherwise legally threaten, individuals and institutions who distribute copies of these works. Embodying this ethos, Nintendo is well known for exorbitant copyright claims on games and software that is no longer even available for purchase. Even massive institutions, like the Internet Archive, a repository of a wide variety of online content, are frequently threatened with legal action. Today, these archives are massively important for many kinds of work, including authoring these articles.

Despite these extreme copyright measures, piracy has continued, and even flourished in recent years as streaming services slowly enshittify. While entertainment monopolies will continue to press for legislation that restricts the rights of consumers in favour of corporations, there still exists a strong ethical argument that piracy should continue, if only to guarantee the continued existence of the thousands of human works that remain at the behest of commercial interests.

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Department of History and Sociology Hosts Trivia Night

On 24 November, 2025, students from the Department of History and Sociology organised a “Students V.S. Teachers History Trivia Night” at The Well. With eight student teams and one team of five History professors, The Well was packed with almost 70 participants. Emerging victorious from the nine teams was “Here for Subsidized Beer,” a student team that beat the professors team by just two points!

This event would not have been possible without the Department’s generous monetary contribution, their preparation of refreshments such as pizza and beer, the location provided by The Well, as well as the guidance of Dr. Margaret Carlyle.

A History Course Union is in the works and we are hoping to form a committee for Fall, 2026. We would like to invite anyone who is interested to contact Dr. Carlyle at margaret.carlyle@ubc.ca. We look forward to hosting more events for our fellow history enthusiasts in the Spring semester.

– Simar Sandhu



Dr. Carlyle with the History Department's mascot, Anubis, the ancient Egyptian god of funerary rites, the afterlife, and mummification.



The winning student team with Anubis, the mascot, and their winning trophy.



A great turnout at The Well.

Quotes from the Participants:

“We came, we saw, and we fully expected to conquer – but then quickly realized the students had their own plans. Since so many of the questions came from our classes, it is a testament to our students that they had all the answers. Not even our beloved mascot, Anubis, could guide us to victory. But if the students won the battle, professors shall win the war. On that note, we’re already looking forward to reclaiming the trophy in next year’s rematch! In it to win it!”

– Dr. Margaret Carlyle, Assistant Professor

“Having a student and faculty trivia night was a fantastic event, especially at this point in the semester when we can all use a bit of time to relax and have some fun. We sometimes get caught up in our busy schedules and don’t take as much time to engage with students in a casual, fun way. Having everyone together needs to happen more – and I thank Simar and all those who helped and attended for a memorable night! Building a community is so important, and events like these keep us connected.”

– Dr. Colin Osmond, Assistant Professor

“I’m actually not a history student but take history courses as a personal interest. Anyway, after much badgering from the most braggadocios of

professors, I just had to do my best to bring them down. In exchange I received one of the best events of my career at UBC. It was hilarious, fun, competitive, and hey! I even learned a thing or two. Events like these make me grateful to be at UBC and encourage me to eventually take the plunge and go for that history degree. Most of all it was a great way to meet new friends. Okay okay, most of all it was amazing to beat my professors. SUCK IT, UBCO HISTORY FACULTY! PHD MUST STAND FOR PRETTY HORRIBLE (AT TRIVIA) DUDES! SEE YOU IN SEMESTER TWO, LOSERS! WOOOOO!”

– Taylor Wilson, Digital media Specialist & Production Assistant

“The History trivia night was one of the best campus events I have attended. It brought together students and faculty from all disciplines to put our knowledge on the line – and to answer your question, yes, the students won!”

– Mackenzie Lambert, Student. Major: Anthropology

“It was super fun!! 100/10 would do it again!”

– Anonymous Student. Minor: History

“It was a really fun and cathartic way of getting revenge on your least favorite prof.”

– Anonymous Student. Major: History

Running Up That Hill and Falling Into a Government Conspiracy

BY JUHI SARVAIYA

Before Hawkins, before the Demogorgon, before a girl named Eleven opened a portal with her mind, before all of it, there was Montauk — a real coastal town on the edge of Long Island that has spent decades wrapped in rumour and mystery.

After nearly three years of anticipation, Netflix finally released the first four episodes of *Stranger Things*' (2016) fifth and final season this November, sparking the last wave of the show's global craze.

But have you ever wondered where the Duffer brothers — creators of the show — first got inspiration for a story like this? Viewers love *Stranger Things* for its character chemistry, its themes, and the pure thrill of the storytelling. But the show's real power stems from something deeper than just clever writing. Stories this eerie do not appear out of thin air; they are molded by real fears and, occasionally, real history.

Behind the show's neon-washed nostalgia lies a history that looks far less comforting when separated from fiction. The Duffer brothers first wanted to call the show "Montauk." This is because the show's central storyline surrounding Hawkins Lab is inspired by the rumours and theories you may have briefly stumbled upon — secret government facilities, psychic experiments on children, and what is infamously known as "The Montauk Project."

At first, there were whispers and what-ifs, but now there are fleshed-out theories and insights on this mysterious project. The infamous book *Montauk Project: Experiments in Time* (1992) by Preston B. Nichols and Peter Moon puts into print what a lot of folks living in or around Montauk have long suspected — that the old military base may have once been the site of some of the most secretive and disturbing experi-

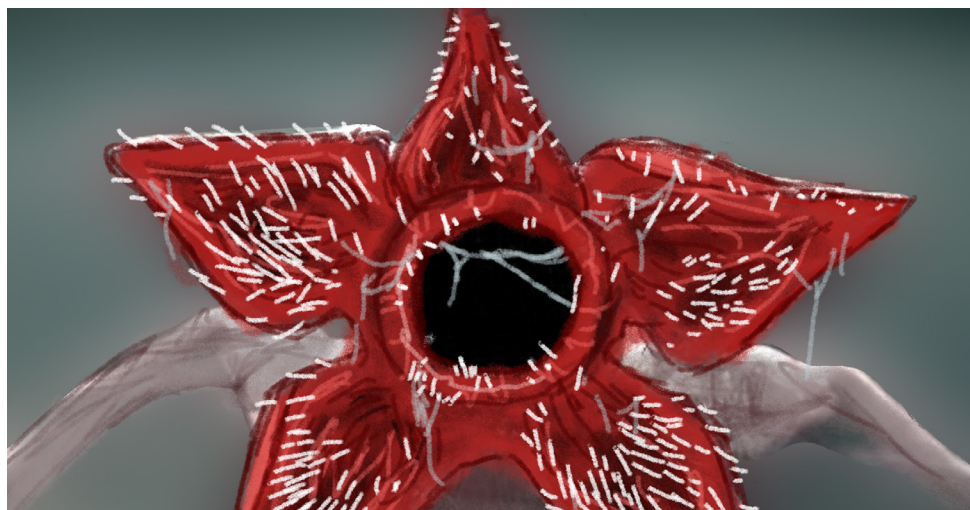


Illustration by Iso Maauad Rodriguez.

ments and research projects in modern American history.

Any serious investigation will show that a Montauk Project did, in fact, exist.

The Montauk Project is a conspiracy theory that refers to a set of alleged secret experiments carried out by the U.S. government on mind control and time manipulation, believed to have taken place at the former Montauk Air Force Station in New York. Scrutiny of this theory has only increased after the popular book by Nichols and Moon came out in 1992, which claimed the authors had recovered memories of being unwilling participants in these experiments.

The book opens with an ominous introduction: most of what follows is made up of "soft," or "gray" facts — claims drawn from memory, rumour, and testimony rather than real, verifiable evidence.¹ The authors acknowledge that proper documentation is nearly impossible to obtain, given the secrecy and security they be-

lieve surrounded the project. The book is based on Nichols' recollections, with the author assuring their accuracy while also acknowledging that his memories may be distorted by trauma or misconception.

Montauk is portrayed as the culmination of a history of secret research that stretches back to the 1943 Philadelphia Experiment.² This was a Navy invisibility test said to have torn a ship out of space-time and damaged the crew in terrible ways. According to the book, Montauk's mission was to pick up where those experiments left off, focusing not on ships but on people: how powerful electromagnetic fields could influence the human mind, body, and reality itself.³

Nichols claims he eventually recovered memories of serving as Montauk's technical director in a labyrinth of underground labs, living in some sort of alternate reality he could not initially explain. There, researchers allegedly developed the "Montauk Chair," a device designed to ampli-

fy psychic abilities through electromagnetic frequencies. Its primary subject, Duncan Cameron, was said to project thoughts and open portals.

The book also describes children — runaways, youth with no paper trail — being used as experimental subjects, put through psychological conditioning and, in some accounts, sent through "time tunnels" that linked Montauk to other eras and even other worlds.⁴

The project's end supposedly came in 1983, when Duncan, sitting on the psychic chair, manifested a monstrous creature that tore through the base, a deliberate act meant to collapse the experiment. What followed, according to the book, was a rapid shutdown: tunnels sealed, equipment destroyed, and the base abandoned.

There is no hard evidence and many contradictions, yet its imagery of abducted children and psychic experiments gone wrong is unmistakably like *Stranger Things*. That is what makes this origin story unsettling: some of the show's most thrilling ideas began as claims someone believed were true.

While celebrating the show's nostalgia and spectacle, we tend to forget the darker anxieties surrounding it. *Stranger Things* turns those fears into entertainment, but the real tales that inspired it were born from suspicion, distrust, and covered-up information.

Perhaps that is why the Montauk legend is still so intriguing, not because it can be proved, but because it gestures toward the uneasy space between imagination and reality.

As *Stranger Things*' final season arrives, let's raise a final question: what does our fascination with *Stranger Things* say about our willingness to accept, or even overlook, the darker histories that actually inspire it?

Phoenix Staff Movie Ratings

BEFORE SUNRISE (1995)



SAMAIRA: "Extremely beautiful and intimate film about two strangers who meet on a train and wander around Vienna, sharing conversations about love, life, and everything in between. I love that the whole movie hinges on dialogue and natural performances. There's also two more movies in the trilogy that are a near-perfect depiction of the evolving nature of connections and relationships. Richard Linklater really makes you reflect on love as being willing to truly know and be known."

DIL DHADAKNE DO "LET THE HEART BEAT" (2015)



CHIRAYU: "A chaotic, heartfelt film that uses a cruise as a backdrop for exploring family relations, identities and the messy ways they loved each other. The Mehra family, the organisers for the trip, looks perfect from the outside, but as the journey unfolds, you see each member struggling. The sharp, clever dialogue and the perfectly timed humour in every conflict makes the character feel real. I keep returning to it because it's humorous, honest and messy."

ONE BATTLE AFTER ANOTHER (2025)



QUINLIN: "A harrowing look into a world in pursuit of a paranoid stoner, well-written and deeply weird. The acting is excellent and the story is compelling. 9/10, welcome back to the Weather Underground."

PAST LIVES (2023)



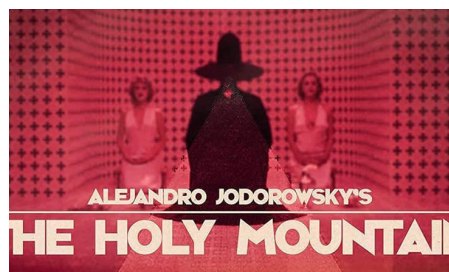
GABRIELA: "Past Lives moves beautifully across time and space, capturing a balance of awkwardness and grief that comes with being a Korean-Canadian immigrant who meets up with her childhood love for the first time in twenty four years."

THE BIG LEBOWSKI (1998)



AIDEN: "A few eventful days in the otherwise deadbeat life of "The Dude", where bowling, kidnapping, and White Russians are the norm."

THE HOLY MOUNTAIN (1973)



WENDELL: "I love how it explores many different facets of society through its story of bringing a bunch of irredeemable rich people on a quest for immortality. It's a visually beautiful movie and just feels like an artist's dream."

DAZED AND CONFUSED (1993)



AVERY: "My favourite comfort film for when I just need something to watch. I imagine whoever is reading this is already pretty cool regardless of whether you've seen it or not, but I'm just saying you'd be a lot cooler if you did..."

THE GOONIES (1985)



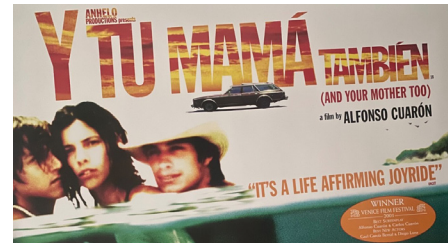
CHARLOTTE: "Truly a generational classic! If you didn't watch this as a kid, you missed out."

TRANSFORMERS (2007)



DAKSHIL: "The movie series which apparently is based on kids toys but even the adults rewatch it. The cinematic experience is filled with thrill, big stakes, action, and the best CGI I have ever seen!! Got me wondering if cars actually turn into planes or robots in real life."

Y TU MAMÁ TAMBIÉN "TRUTH IS COOL BUT UNATTAINABLE" (2001)



ISO: A TRASHY road trip with a BOMB sound track and two best friends with a manifesto. I recommend this movie if you (like me) are a little bit in love with your friends and a lot in love with México and believe that nothing is at all too serious.

SCHINDLER'S LIST (1993)



NISHA: "It's one of the best classics!"

Strikebreaking and Notwithstanding Clause Sparks Albertan Controversy

BY QUINLIN OSADCZUK

Over the course of the last few months, the province of Alberta has seen a political battle the likes of which has been otherwise unheard of in recent Canadian memory. Sparking from a teachers' strike, the ongoing clashes between Premier Danielle Smith and her governing United Conservative Party of Alberta (UCP) with the provincial New Democratic Party (NDP) has generated immense controversy, which may lead to the first NDP government to be formed in Alberta in over a decade.

The ongoing controversy is derived from the Alberta Teachers Association (ATA) after 51,000 members voted 95% in favour to go on strike this October 6th, with the commonly cited issues at task being a demand for class-size reduction, alongside better working conditions and a pay raise.¹ Alberta's recent growth spurt, brought on by lower housing prices and taxes relative to the rest of Canada, has seen a considerable increase in families moving to the province, but not a corollary increase in funding towards education. As such, most classes have seen a stark increase in students as teachers have struggled to keep up.² To remedy this, the ATA demanded an increase of benefits to bring more people into the profession, the hiring of more educational professionals, as well as a mandatory cap for how many people could attend a given class.

In response, the government provided a counter-offer to hire 1,000 more teachers by 2028, alongside an additional 1,500 educational assistants. It would also include a general 5% pay increase, among other miscellaneous benefits. That offer was rejected by 90% of teachers, with some claiming that it was practically identical to the original offer that led to the strike in the first place. Others criticized the increase in teachers as being roughly what the province had already planned with its new school constructions already underway.³ Further, most saw the 5% pay raise as being insufficient when paired with the inflation of the past several years.⁴

1. Johnson, Lisa, and Jack Farrell. "Alberta uses Charter's notwithstanding clause to order striking teachers back to work | Globalnews.ca." *Global News*, 27 October 2025. <https://globalnews.ca/news/11496133/alberta-government-to-table-legislation-to-order-striking-teachers-back-to-work>. Accessed 1 December 2025.



AFL President Gil McGowan, a prominent opponent of the back-to-work order.

Image from devberta.ca.

Nevertheless, the government instated a back-to-work order through Bill 2, which forced the ATA to accept the aforementioned offer, and placed a ban on them from striking until August 2028. For a number of reasons, this bill was illegal, as the right to strike and arbitration is a legal right both in provincial and federal law, while also violating other various human rights laws at various levels of government.

As such, the bill was passed with the "notwithstanding clause," a legal tool which allows for legislatures to override roughly half of the Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.⁵ Legally, therefore, the bill is sound, and cannot be overridden unless a provincial government seeks to undo the "deal" and implement a new deal later. Use of the notwithstanding clause has been controversial in most instances, and are accordingly very rare in order to minimize popular uproar. After all, the only time the province of Alberta had invoked it before now was in the

3. Bellefontaine, Michelle, and Katie Teeling. "Striking Alberta teachers forced back to work by fast-tracked legislation, notwithstanding clause." *CBC*, 27 October 2025. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-teachers-back-to-work-bill-9.6955558>. Accessed 1 December 2025.

4. French, Janet. "Alberta teachers to vote on tentative contract agreement." *CBC*, 24 September 2025. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-teachers-employers-reached-tentative-agreement-1.7642248>. Accessed 1 December 2025.

year 2000, defining marriage as necessarily being between a man and a woman.

Yet the UCP has decided to invoke it another three times on top of the back-to-work order to pass an additional three bills since this November.

Last year, the UCP passed a bill known as Bill 26 to halt all gender-affirming care, including hormone therapy, gender-related surgeries, and puberty blockers for those under 16. That bill was blocked by a judge's injunction on the grounds of wanting to hear more information in court before approving it, though the UCP passed a bill with the notwithstanding clause that would place these enforcements into immediate effect, thus bypassing the judicial review of the courts.

Another bill the UCP passed, Bill 27, now forces all teachers to inform parents and/or legal guardians of children under 18 if students had changed their name or pronouns, and that any student under 16 interested in changing their

6. Johnson, Lisa, and Jack Farrell. "Alberta Teachers' Association challenging law that used notwithstanding clause to end strike." *Globalnews*, 6 November 2025. <https://globalnews.ca/news/11514750/alberta-teachers-association-legal-action>.

7. Bartko, Karen. "General strike if necessary: Alberta unions declare intent to bring down UCP government | Globalnews.ca." *Global News*, 29 October 2025. <https://globalnews.ca/news/11500727/alberta-federation-of-labour-notwithstanding-clause/>. Accessed 3 December 2025.

8. Farrell, Jack. "Alberta's Smith only has herself to blame for recall pe-

pronouns needed parent or guardian permission before it would be respected by staff and teachers. It also now makes Alberta the first province to require students and parents to explicitly opt-in to sex-ed courses in order to attend, and the education minister is now responsible for approving all sexual health-related educational materials.

The third bill, the "Fairness and Safety in Sports Act," requires that all participants in female-only sports be assigned female at birth, including national or international sports events which may occur in Alberta.⁶ Furthermore, all three of these bills could be protected from repeal should Alberta pass Bill 9, which would ensure that all aforementioned bills cannot be challenged for nearly a decade.

The hands of the opposition are practically tied at this point, as the UCP has expressed an open willingness to use the notwithstanding clause, and more than enough MLAs are aligned with the party leadership to continue exercising this agenda. However, two different wildcards might threaten their government's continued stability and bring about an NDP government in Alberta even before the next general election.

The Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) has been, naturally, up in arms over the use of the notwithstanding clause regarding the forced ending of a strike. President Gil McGowan of the AFL has since organized with a variety of provincial labour unions to begin preparations to declare a general strike province-wide.⁷ On the political side, 15 campaigns have been started to hold recall elections for 15 UCP MLAs, including for the seat of Premier Smith herself. The NDP is six seats short of a majority government, and would need to win only four in order to form a coalition government with the centrist Alberta Party, should both parties be willing. As those recall petitions continue to collect signatures, and as deliberations of an all-out general strike continue to simmer, the province holds its breath in the face of what is very likely a wholly new political age.

9. DePatie, Mason. "Alberta recall campaign launched against Premier Danielle Smith." *CTV News*, 3 December 2025. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/calgary/article/alberta-recall-campaign-launched-against-premier-danielle-smith/>.

The SUO's 2025 Annual General Meeting at a Glance

BY CHARLOTTE TAPPIN

On the evening of November 27th, 2025, the Student's Union Okanagan (SUO) held their Annual General Meeting (AGM) in the UNC Ballroom. Despite the cold weather, this year's AGM had a good turnout and students seemed eager to hear about the SUO's budget, reviews of the past year, proposed bylaw changes, and plans for the remainder of the academic year.

Quickly following the start of the meeting, a group of students associated with the RBC Off Campus activist group moved to amend the meeting agenda to address some of their requests for the SUO. Sheets with all of the proposed resolutions were handed out to students and the executive board in attendance at the AGM. These papers included two resolutions regarding UBC Okanagan divesting from Israel, and removing RBC On Campus from the UNC building.

The first and second divestment resolution asked for the SUO to write a letter to UBC President Benoit-Antoine Bacon, Deputy Vice Chancellor and Principal Lesley Cormack, VP Finance Frank Laezza, and the UBC and UBCIM Board of Governors. In this letter, they wanted the SUO to ask for an update regarding the responsible investment strategy adopted by UBC Okanagan, and to "cancel all student mobility agreements with institutions upholding apartheid" until the UN no longer considers Israel an apartheid state. Both of these motions were adopted by the SUO.

The RBC Off Campus movement then had specific resolutions they proposed to the SUO regarding the status of RBC being allowed to operate within the UNC building on campus.

The first of these resolutions called for the SUO to review contracts between the SUO and RBC, redact any confidential portions of the contract, write an explanation regarding the re-

dacted sections, and make all of these documents available to members of the SUO one month after the AGM. Meeting chair, Joey Hansen, explained there would be issues setting a timeline when the SUO would need to speak to legal counsel for this information to be released to members. SUO President, Peter Idoko, explained that the SUO would be seeking legal counsel on this matter following the AGM.

The second resolution requested for the SUO to release a statement saying that they would not renew their lease with RBC On Campus upon its expiry and would explore the possibility of early termination of that lease. Upon this



Image from @suo_abc.

request, Idoko stated the SUO "[does not] want to cross any lines [they] are not legally allowed to cross," which would prevent issues related to

prematurely withdrawing from the contract with RBC. It was also amended that the SUO will publish the legal opinion on this matter after speaking with legal counsel.

The third resolution sought for the SUO to lobby for early termination of the RBC On Campus lease, hoping that all parties involved in the contract would walk away with no retribution. Following this, the SUO would find a credit union to take RBC's place on campus so students can still conduct banking activities in an accessible manner. In response to this resolution, Vice President External Olivia Lai emphasized "this needs to be taken with a lot of precaution," and

Okanagan.

The fourth and final resolution asked that the SUO release the meeting minutes from specific in-camera sessions to the public. However, no notes were taken for these past sessions, so none are able to be released. It was also mentioned by Vice President Internal, Shreya Patnaik, that there is ongoing discussion within the SUO to change the secrecy of these meetings.

Vice-President Rajat Arora then presented the financial audit for 2024-2025. This audit was conducted by the accounting firm Tompkins Wozny, which concluded that the SUO adhered to the standards of a non-profit organization. The budget for the 2025-2026 year was also presented, and importantly featured a decrease in total membership revenue, meaning the SUO will have a lower budget this coming year than they did last year. However, students should not expect any dramatic changes in the services they receive from the SUO.

Bylaw changes regarding the new Graduate Student Association (GSA) also took place, and the amount of time taken by Patnaik to read out these changes in entirety was impressive and showed her dedication to ensuring a smooth transition as the GSA separates from the SUO.

This AGM demonstrated that the current SUO executive board is committed to transparency, maintaining open communication, listening to students' concerns, and providing the best possible support for the student body. In the future if students at UBC Okanagan wish to make changes to how the SUO operates, the AGM is a perfect opportunity to do just that.

that the current executive board could do very little because this agreement was made long before any of them had even begun attending UBC

Building Breakthroughs: Students Share their Research Experiences at UBCO

BY NISHA CHOUDHARY

Students on campus who are working on research in various fields have one big thing in common: a thirst for knowledge and action. Sci-fi movies with scientists in white lab coats carrying out breakthrough research can paint an unrealistic picture of what the job is like, but one thing student researchers have in common with such caricatures is their evident passion for their fields. But how do these students get those research opportunities? To gain some insight into the process, I reached out to current Faculty of Science students at UBC Okanagan who are involved in various research projects on campus.

Emmanuella “Emma” Esebor, a third-year student completing her honours in biochemistry, says she first got involved in research by “hustling nonstop.” She emailed professors, cold called their offices, attended symposiums, and showed up to office hours until someone finally gave her a chance. Now, Esebor works on a project which focuses on comparing the use of carbon nitride with and without iron to remove arsenic from water which is then being tested on cyanobacteria to understand the effectiveness of the carbon nitride materials.

Esebor explains that she faced many rejections at first, but resilience was key: “You can’t be afraid of hearing no. Either your ego gets bruised, or your résumé does — you choose.” She adds that it’s never too late to start research, noting that networking and volunteering opened doors she didn’t expect. These experiences, she says, helped her build skills, connect with faculty, and even earn TA positions. “You just have to start at the bottom and keep going.”

For Esebor, research has broadened her horizons and opened her eyes to a wide range of career possibilities, especially through the networking opportunities it has provided. Along the way, she has developed important skills, such as learning not to worry about others’ opinions and building resilience. One of her biggest lessons, she says, is that it’s okay to cry and it’s okay to fail. She believes you have to be willing to be challenged — “you have to be okay getting bruised to grow and burned to learn.” Esebor also suggests using your time at UBCO wisely and maintaining a healthy work-life balance by continuing to do things you love. Growth doesn’t end after graduation, and learning good habits early is important. She reminds students that focusing only on small setbacks can make you lose sight of the bigger picture. It’s okay to take breaks, and if you fail, there’s no need to be ashamed — just try again and keep going. Everyone fails, and that’s normal. She notes that being at a top university means you won’t grow if you stay comfortable. Finally, she encourages students to choose a supervisor whose values align with their own.

Michelle Soenardi, another student researcher, says she became involved in her current project by reaching out early and staying informed. When she came to university in her first year, she was interested in neurobiology, but after taking an organic chemistry class she changed course. She contacted her current supervisor, Dr. Fred Menard, during her first summer in Kelowna, and began working with him that same autumn.

Her research focuses on designing chemical probes that allow scientists to

better understand how proteins function.

These probes often work by undergoing specific chemical reactions, and the speed of those reactions can be critical. To support this work, Soenardi’s work involved creating simplified versions of the probes that could be used to study and measure their reaction rates more accurately.

Soenardi explains that she made it a habit to ask around about opportunities and check her emails regularly, noting that the Faculty of Science often sends out updates about awards and positions. She learned about the Undergraduate Research Awards (URA) and International Undergraduate Research Awards (IURA) in her first year and had been intentionally preparing and waiting until she was eligible to apply. Soenardi says her experience shows that being proactive, staying connected, and paying attention to campus resources can open doors just as effectively as direct outreach.

Research shifted Soenardi’s long-held future plans. Since high school, she imagined doing research for the rest of her life, but hands-on experience taught her more about the realities of the work and about herself. She still finds research exciting, yet she now knows it isn’t something she wants to pursue forever and she views that realization as both important and valuable. She advises students to start early and don’t think you need to wait until upper years to reach out to a professor for research opportunities.

Jonah Dizon, a current biochemistry student conducting research at the Integrative Cerebrovascular Physiology Lab, realized that traditional wet-lab research wasn’t very fulfilling for her. She enjoys collaboration, which led her to explore research in Health and Exercise Sciences, where the work is more team-oriented. Balancing school and research was difficult at first, especially when she had to fit lab work between classes, but her supervisor was very supportive. Now in her fifth year, managing both is easier, though schedules can still overlap.

Dizon’s goals have shifted significantly since starting student research. She didn’t expect to enjoy it as much as she does, and now plans to pursue graduate studies. Through her research, she has also learned the importance of making participants feel comfortable, being confident in her abilities, and communicating science clearly by explaining ideas in simple, accessible terms.

Reflecting on broader lessons, Dizon says she has become a firm believer that initiative is rewarded. Even if she isn’t always the first to reach out, she has learned that taking a chance is worthwhile because it never hurts to receive a “no.”

Current master’s student Jesus Jair Hurtado Campos researches photocatalytic materials used for the sustainable production of chemicals and environmental remediation, including water purification. He is specifically investigating how carbon nitride can be integrated into internal light sources like optical fibers. By coating optical fibers with carbon nitride, he aims to improve light utilization in reactors, addressing current limitations and advancing greener chemical processes.

Apart from balancing school, HurtadoCampos says there are several major challenges in research. Coming from a chemical engineering background,

he initially struggled to get familiar with the dense chemistry terminology used in chemical research and had to build that foundational knowledge from scratch. He explains that every step comes with a steep learning curve, but it is ultimately rewarding.

Time management is another difficulty; unlike industry, where work hours are fixed, academic research requires maintaining your own pace and consistently producing results while juggling other responsibilities. Hurtado Campos adds that choosing when to be in the lab is very personal, and sometimes stepping back to take a break can provide valuable perspective.

For Hurtado Campos, completing his master’s degree has motivated him to continue on to a PhD. He hopes to work in a role that connects academic research with industrial applications. Throughout his research experience, he has also learned the importance of putting himself in vulnerable situations — presenting data, speaking in front of others, and stepping into unfamiliar environments can be daunting, but getting comfortable with discomfort has helped him grow.

He explains that you can’t always be the person who knows everything, but accepting that and choosing to learn anyway is essential. Asking questions, even when they feel “dumb,” has helped build his confidence. He has learned to embrace new challenges, seek out new opportunities, and put in the effort to gain as much experience as possible.

Hurdato Campos encourages students, especially those from his birthplace Mexico, to put themselves out there and be open to research opportunities. He explains that it is painful to see how many people back home are not interested in research, and he hopes that by sharing his own journey, he can help shift that mindset. He believes that a willingness to try new things is essential, because we often grow up with a narrow view of what is possible. Tough experiences, he adds, can broaden your perspective and help you see far beyond where you started.

After spending time in their respective research areas, each student has gained a clearer understanding of their future career goals.

Hearing from all these experiences, one thing is evident: the importance of reaching out and taking initiative. This is an ideal time of year to look for research opportunities, and there are many resources available to students who want to get involved. One major avenue is connecting with professors from your courses who are currently engaged in research. Another valuable resource is the URA, supported by the Irving K. Barber Endowment Fund, which provides exceptional research experiences for undergraduate science students at UBC Okanagan. The IURA are funded through the ISI International Student Financial Assistance and Awards budget, supporting experiential learning opportunities specifically for international students. The goal of both the URA and IURA programs is to give undergraduate students in the Irving K. Barber Faculty of Science the

opportunity to pursue innovative, original research as part of their academic journey.¹

For these students, doing research was not a bullet point on a resume, but rather a way of fueling their passions. Science and technology requires an immense amount of research in order to reach new heights, and when we see big breakthroughs they don’t just appear out of this air. Instead, they start right here at university with the small skills you learn in each step of a research assignment. Failure is definitely a large aspect of research, so it is very important to learn to accept failure and grow from it.

Soenardi and Esebor say they definitely experienced failures. The former says she knew of many techniques that should theoretically work, but once she tried them in the lab, she realized it wasn’t nearly that simple. She often had to search for alternative solutions, and the process took much longer than she expected.

Esebor says that a part of managing failure means balancing her personal life with her work. She often felt pressure to be perfect, even in difficult situations, because she didn’t want to let anyone down. She explains that failure in research feels different from doing poorly on a lab report.

When an experiment doesn’t succeed, it can feel disappointing because the work is connected to real-world outcomes. In the end, Esebor says you have to face your emotions honestly and keep moving forward, because research requires working through those tough moments.



KIANA ONYANGO
EDITOR IN CHIEF

SAMAIRA TALWAR
OPERATIONS MANAGER

AVERY CUMMINS
TECHNICAL EDITOR

JUHI SARVAIYA
CAMPUS LIFE WRITER

GABRIELA CHAN
FEATURES WRITER

QUINLIN OSADZUK
NEWS WRITER

WENDELL ZYLSTRA
ARTS & CULTURE WRITER

NISHA CHOUDHARY
SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY WRITER

CHARLOTTE TAPPIN
SUO CONTENT CREATOR

AIDEN MALCOLM
OPINIONS WRITER

MARKUS GILL
PHOENIX FILES PODCAST HOST

VANI DHILLON
PHOENIX FILES PODCAST HOST

DAKSHIL PATEL
SOCIAL MEDIA COORDINATOR

SABHYA ARORA
VIDEOGRAPHER & PHOTOGRAPHER

ISO MAAUD RODRIGUEZ
GRAPHIC DESIGNER

CHIRAYU AHUJA
LAYOUT DESIGNER

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A Short History of Drug Laws and Discrimination

BY AIDEN MALCOLM

The widely publicized killings of alleged Venezuelan drug traffickers by the Pentagon is not an act without precedence, but instead the latest in a campaign with a long pedigree of terror, rooted in racist tendencies.¹ This campaign is that of the anti-drug offensive, a brutal ideology characterized by the terrorization of populaces by their own government, the wholesale butchering of human rights, and the spread of an ideological agenda accepted as fact.

The prosecution of drugs at large was preceded by the temperance movements of the mid-1800s, which sought to close saloons and federally prohibit the sale of alcohol. Despite the popularity of some groups, they failed at any meaningful federal prohibition because of the widespread unpopularity of such policies, and the large tax revenues collected by provincial governments.

This paradigm was shifted as increasing numbers of Asians, especially Chinese people, immigrated to Vancouver and other parts of Canada seeking work, notably on projects like the Canadian Pacific Railway. To many Canadians who had come to see Canada as a white, Christian nation, Chinese people represented the degradation of Canada's moral fibre. Exacerbating this deeply ingrained racism was the widespread employment of Chinese people as labourers and the fear of unemployment it generated among many white labourers.²

At this time, opium use was rising in China. The drug had exploded in popularity after Britain had been importing massive quantities from India to gain trade leverage against the Chinese. This culminated in the two opium wars of the 19th century, both of which China lost, leading to the unadulterated spread of the drug across the country.³ As such, some late 19th century Chinese immigrants brought it to Canada. Opium, providing euphoria while sedating its user, was the antithesis of the Puritanical belief in happiness through hard work.

Opium was ripe for the targeting. After a group of 9 000 protesters marched to Vancouver city hall, garnering international attention, Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier sent a government official to investigate. This official was Mackenzie King, future tenth Prime Minister of Canada. After meeting with the group, King declared:

"The Chinese with whom I converse on the subject assured me that almost as much opium was sold to white people as Chinese, and the habit of opium smoking was making headway, not only among white men and boys, but also among women and girls... to be indifferent to the growth of such an evil in Canada would be inconsistent with those principles of morality which ought to govern the conduct of a Christian nation."⁴

King's statement exemplifies the cultural strategy moral reformists used to prohibit opium, and later many other drugs. First, drug use is portrayed not as a public health issue, but as a racial issue. This tends to be used in situations where a racial divide already exists, stoking ongoing tensions. Second is framing the problem as one that only affects innocent, blameless groups, in

this case women and children. In this way, blame can be shifted from those consuming the drugs to a malicious other, one who is taking advantage of those most vulnerable. The third is making an unjustified moral claim, which is backed not by its validity, but by the sheer volume of people who believe it. Especially in contemporary society, if these moral claims were validated with religious ethos, they would be invalid for large portions of the population. As such, they



Illustration by Iso Maauad Rodriguez.

must remain nebulous to apply to as many people as possible.

Combining the Puritanical hatred of the drug with the white general public's fear of the Chinese population was a masterstroke, and opium was quickly banned. The Opium Act of 1908 was Canada's first prohibition legislature,⁵ and some of the first in the modern world. It punished those who sold, imported or manufactured opium, and not those who used, effectively targeting the Chinese who ran opium dens and grew opium for a living. Just three years later this was followed by the Opium and Drug Act (1911), prohibiting cocaine and morphine, among other drugs.

Much of this process was mirrored in the U.S., with some notable differences. Cities like San Francisco, which also had large Chinese populations, employed a similar strategy to essentially criminalize cultural practices of racialized peoples. However, the strategy for the prohibition for drugs like cocaine, especially in the Southern States, was slightly different.

In the deep South, where racial tensions already existed, politicians and police used a much more direct strategy, saying that "drug-crazed, sex-mad negroes" were immune to small caliber weapons."^{6,7}

While this had no true scientific or medical basis, it was widely reported by newspapers like the New York Times and used to scare racist white voters into accepting otherwise baseless laws.

The widespread acceptance by white Americans of these laws denotes their true aim. Had the reduction of drug use been their only concern, it would have served to disenfranchise the large population of voting, drug-using, white people. Instead, the primary goal of these drug laws was to target

racial minorities and left large avenues to the relatively rich white population to continue using.

Over the next 70 years prohibition continued its slow creep, with notable occurrences including the brief prohibition of alcohol within Canada (1916-1917) and the U.S. (1920-1933). However, 1984 marked a significant change in U.S. drug policy, and the world at large.

The demarcation for this change

was the election of Ronald Reagan. Reagan and his wife, Nancy, were both born-again Protestants and were hugely influential in the contemporary outlook on drugs. Nancy was responsible for important, yet almost completely ineffective, initiatives like the D.A.R.E. program, which sent local police officers into the classrooms of millions of children across both the U.S. and Canada to teach children about narcotics.^{8,9} The messaging of the program primarily relied on fear, attempting to scare children as young as ten into abstinence.

More importantly, however, were Ronald Reagan's introduction of draconian mandatory minimum sentencing and possession laws.¹⁰ These laws created harsher sentences and punishments for minor drug infractions like drug possession.

While they appeared racially unbiased, in practice these laws served to harshly target Black and impoverished people. This was primarily the result of two factors, namely the characteristics of drug acquisition and types of drugs used. Many of the drugs that were heavily legislated against, like cocaine, were accessible through legal channels, but at high expense. This effectively allowed the rich to avoid any criminal activity despite using the same drugs.

Moreover, drugs like cocaine hydrochloride, or crack, came with sentences 100 times harsher than those for normal cocaine. Crack had two main differences from cocaine: the removal of a hydrochloride salt that allows the drug to be smoked, and its prevalence in low-income Black neighbourhoods. While this was reduced by the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, it remains at an 18:1 ratio, despite being nearly the same drug.¹¹

Reagan's "War on Drugs" fell within the larger "Tough on Crime" prerogative. In tandem, the two dramatically elevated the prison population, raising drug-related incarceration by nearly ten times, and dispro-

portionately increasing Black incarceration numbers.^{12,13} The effects of these policies are still felt to this day within many disadvantaged communities across North America.

Today, it is not only the legacies felt within these communities, but the effects of new drug policies that systematically discriminate against low-income people, allowing powerful middle class voting blocs strategic access to certain drugs, while simultaneously criminalizing drug use for many impoverished people. This shift is almost more sinister than the first, in the fact that it placates many people who would be anti-discrimination into believing that they are actively solving the problem, when they are really strengthening discriminatory norms.

In America, an early example of this "modern era" discrimination is cannabis legalization. In California, where it was first legalized within North America, it was for medical use only. This meant that potential users had to go through the expensive and time-consuming process of getting the drug prescribed, essentially limiting use of the drug to those with a higher income. While cannabis does have many medicinal benefits, the actual driving factor behind this substantial change was not newfound research proving these benefits, but instead an acknowledgement of gradual cultural shifts within upper-class society into accepting the drug.

This is also evident with the widespread use of drugs like ketamine in clinics across the United States. While technically for "therapeutic" use, this distinction is almost completely semantic, masking the real difference: rich against poor. Legal ketamine access requires expensive doctor visits, deep pockets, or comprehensive medical insurance, effectively limiting legal use to the wealthy.

Right now in much of North America, many people are advocating for the legalization of psychedelics like psilocybin and LSD. However, much of their advocacy work is rooted in discrimination. The newfound interest in psychedelics does not represent a recent discovery in medical research, but a cultural shift of the monied class, who gradually began accepting psychedelics.

This fact becomes even more apparent when the historical context is considered. Just 50 years ago these very same drugs were demonized by the upper class. As such, it was widely understood that they were evil drugs, and medical research generally surrounded their induction of psychosis, and occasionally schizophrenia, into users. The medical potential at the time was the exact same as now, but there was one important difference: the monied class resented the drug.

With the horrible legacy of prohibition made clear, the current system which is treated as a necessity of everyday reality can finally be examined. Laws that could help drug users, and society at large, remain out of reach because decades of propaganda has convinced citizens that drugs are best stamped out.

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