



THE PHOENIX NEWS

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Ableist UBC?

Accessibility issues at UBCO and the repercussions for students

by Noah Davis & Ana Salgado

"I don't think the university should promote full accessibility when there are problems like this. Students come here and pay tuition and housing with full trust in these services when these problems can hold them back in their studies and independence."

Noah: In the pitching room, I know Ana Salgado as my coworker and the Rants writer. Outside the pitching room, I know her as a bright student with a passion for writing and representing students at UBCO, just like me. One night, in the middle of pitching an article about tuition, Ana raised the issue of accessibility on campus and lack thereof...

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If you are looking for a sign to go to the Farmers' Market, this is it.



Provided by Aiisha Rishi, 2022.

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by Aiisha Rishi

When I think of art, I usually associate it with canvases, sketches, and sculptures. However, after attending Patrick Lundeen's Happy Day Free Gift Truck event, I see art from a completely different perspective: something that can bring people together.



Provided by Patrick Lundeen, 2022.



Illustration by Derian Guadarrama, 2022.

SPORTS



Provided by Jacobo Saenz Ramos, 2022.

PLAYER PROFILES: Mexican Magician Jacobo Saenz Ramos

by Carlos J. Real Lopez

Given the impending playoff push, his presence on the team, and his journey from Mexico, striker Jacobo Saenz Ramos is an excellent player to showcase.

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Cold Sandwiches for Dinner in Europe —and Canada Could Follow

by Aleyna Kirilmis

The next time your phone bill makes you reconsider going out with friends, and you have no other company that offers you a better solution, you'll understand our European counterparts to some extent. Though, hopefully you won't be shivering under a blanket like they may be.

All hands are on deck to handle the energy expenses this winter in Europe. With electricity bills expected to rise more than threefold in some places, it's no surprise that people have had to put in maximum effort for a minimal decrease in their bills.

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OPINIONS

TV SHOWS ARE INFLUENCING WHAT MAJOR STUDENTS ARE CHOOSING

by Noah Davis

Thanks to the voices of students here at UBCO, I was able to learn more about what each student dreamed of doing and how their favorite TV show influenced which major they chose.

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Comic by Derian Guadarrama, 2022.



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PLAYER PROFILES:

Mexican Magician Jacobo Saenz Ramos

WORDS BY CARLOS J. REAL LOPEZ



Photo 1. The joy of scoring. Provided by Jacobo Saenz Ramos.

Achievements on any field are the result of the clustering of individual contributors striving for excellence. While the Heat has been scorching their opposition as of late, there is a lack of recognition for the players: players who train tirelessly, diet stringently, and perform where they must on the pitch.

Hence, it is my honor to present the player profiles: a series in which standout athletes shall be dignified not only for their achievements on their field of play, but also for their respective journey outside of it.

Given the impending playoff push, his presence on the team, and his journey from Mexico, striker Jacobo Saenz Ramos is an excellent player to showcase. For those who have been following the varsity soccer team, Jacobo has been a standout contributor on the final third of the pitch, not only through his assisting and scoring, but also with the dummy runs (which open up space for teammates), guarding possession to continue to build up play, and ini-

tiating the pressure while on defense.

Overall, he is a terrific prototype number 9 (forward) who can participate in many tactical schemes, like tiki taka or long ball buildup; a sophomore who has had a great run with the Heat thus far, and will continue to do so for a while.

Sports writer, Carlos Real Lopez, had a brief conversation with Jacobo, covering a wide array of topics from his favorite player to his favorite memory in the yellow and blue. The conversation is presented below:

Carlos Real Lopez: Tell us Jacobo, why UBCO?

Jacobo Saenz Ramos: "I really like the personal treatment you get as a student, and after talking to Dante, the head coach, I knew it was a place that would just work out for me."

How did it feel scoring the first goal of the season?

"There's no better feeling than scoring in front of the fans."

How do you balance the often competing and stressful situations that come with being a student athlete, that is, on the field and in the classroom?

"Often, just organizing your day is enough. Putting the work in is key. But dividing your energy the right way can sometimes be challenging."

What has been your favorite memory on the varsity team?

"My favorite memory is definitely my first goal against UVIC. It is something I'll never forget."

Do you have any pre-game rituals? That is, any particular snack or music you favour before games?

"To get my mind right, I tend to meditate for a few minutes, and listen to the right music to get ready."

Do you have any workout tips for students?

"The Heat strengthening team helps us with what we do. But knowing what you're trying to improve changes your mindset completely."

Which football (soccer) player do you admire the most?

"Cristiano Ronaldo, who is also the greatest of all time".

How can students keep up with the soccer team?

"The Heat Instagram and Twitter accounts do a great job of giving live updates on games and events."

Do you have any message for the readers of The Phoenix?

"We are fighting for a playoff spot, and the extra support can make the difference."

There you have it folks, Jacobo Saenz Ramos. Make sure to support Heat varsity soccer during their playoff push by attending the crucial home games at Nonis; check out the Heat website for the dates.

Also, feel free to nominate other student athletes for the player profiles, by emailing sports@thephoenixnews.com, as it is imperative for us to showcase the splendid folks representing us in athletic competitions.



Photo 2. Provided by Jacobo Saenz Ramos.



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Want a Free Gift?

CHECK OUT THIS ART INSTALLATION

WORDS BY AIISHA RISHI

When I think of art, I usually associate it with canvases, sketches, and sculptures. However, after attending Patrick Lundeen's Happy Day Free Gift Truck event, I see art from a completely different perspective: something that can bring people together.

Patrick Lundeen is a UBCO Visual Arts professor, as well as Kelowna's Artist-in-Residence this year. This means that he has been appointed to create art for the city, and the Happy Day Free Gift Truck event is his creation, which will run until November 19th.

Lundeen said that "the idea of the project is to connect different kinds of people. Kelowna as a problem with people that are marginalized and living on the street. The initial idea for the truck was to give free food to everybody that would want something delicious. But then it switched because we weren't

able to give food away. So I thought free gifts might be similar to that in a better way."

Lundeen describes his art style as "jumpy or weird-looking kind of garbage." His art form isn't conventional, but that's what he says makes it special.

"I try to approach the world with a child-like sense of wonder. [For example], a kid might pick up a candy bar wrapper which is shiny on the inside and maybe it smells good. And, to them, they wouldn't know that was garbage. It might be the most beautiful object that they've ever seen. So, I try to approach art in a similar way."

His main idea for the event was to connect people from all backgrounds.

"For example, if I gave the same hat to a billionaire as I would to somebody that lives on the street, maybe that would equalize people as everybody would be wearing the same hat...[That way], people could see how they're connected rather than the way they are different."

I attended the opening day of Happy Day Free Gift Truck, and I absolutely loved it. The first word that came to my mind when I saw the truck was character. It was an unconventional, spruced-up trailer truck with a goose on top of it, similar to Lundeen's art style. There was ice cream truck music playing with options for attendees to pick the songs and reverb it if they chose to.

I had expected to see people standing in line, getting their gifts, and leaving. But, I was surprised to see that people were chatting with Lundeen about his work and gifts, and were even chatting with other attendees they had never seen. I immediately felt extremely

welcomed there. Lundeen was giving out gifts to people based on what he thought they would like, such as hats and shirts he made, cassette tapes of his music, mood rings, balloons, and toy bags for children. He even gave out free snacks and drinks to everyone.

I loved all my gifts, and it felt amazing to get them from the artist himself.

I got a cassette tape and a mood ring from Lundeen. The mood ring is wonderful, colorful, and lovely to wear. And, though my cassette player is not with me at the moment, the tape looks amazing in my room and I can't wait to play it when I go back home.

There were people I spoke to that I would never have gotten to know in a university setting, and it was all because Lundeen's art had brought us together. Lundeen hoped that "people would come and enjoy themselves and speak with each other. The best thing would be if I gave somebody something that they liked, and they actually used it."

Lundeen's event is open to anyone who wants to appreciate his art. In addition, the gifts being given away are not what would typically be considered "art." At first glance, they are objects you can purchase from anywhere, but what makes them special is the intent behind them. Lundeen is giving out gifts to people free of charge, simply to make them happy.

"I would like to be a person that helps make the world a better place, through art and through trying to be better towards everybody."

Lundeen's heartfelt event is a must-go for all. Even if you are not



Photo 2. Provided by Patrick Lundeen.

typically into art, it challenges your perceptions of what art is supposed to look like. Plus, you get a free gift!



Photo 1. Provided by Patrick Lundeen.



Photo 3. Provided by Patrick Lundeen.

KELOWNA FARMERS' MARKET:

A PERFECT SHOWCASE OF THE CITY'S CREATIVITY

WORDS AND IMAGES BY AIISHA RISHI

Visiting a Farmers' Market seems like the perfect thing to do on a Saturday. The Okanagan sun, the colorful stalls, the cute outfits you get to wear. But, despite living in Kelowna for a year, I haven't gotten around to it. I could lie to you and say that it's because of schoolwork, but the honest reason is that it runs from 8 am to 1 pm, and I don't like to get up early. Yes, 1 pm is early for me on a Saturday. However, I finally forced myself to go.

To my surprise, there were numerous stalls, and I would even compare it to Farmers' Markets in larger cities such as Toronto or Edmonton. All of the vendors were friendly, and there were various things you wouldn't usually find in other places, like the mall. For example, there were artisan crafts being sold, such as woodwork projects, tote bags, candles, and more. One of my favorite stalls sold crochet animals like bees, chickens, and even garden gnomes. Another sold tote bags with a map of the Okanagan on it.

Usually, when going to Farmers' Markets, I look around and don't buy much because the prices are too expensive for a starving student. However, though I wouldn't describe the prices as cheap at the Farmers' Market in Kelowna, they were definitely more affordable than I had expected, which caused me to blow my budget for the month.

I now have way too many crochet animals in my room. Was it worth it? Absolutely.

Even the food was wonderful. Many food trucks and stalls sold fresh goods from

all over the world. As an international student who grew up in the Middle East and India, I was happily surprised to see dishes and snacks from my country being sold at the market. This helped me feel less homesick and was a nice break from eating Kraft dinner every night.

The abundance of local wine and cider stalls made this Farmers' Market feel local to the Okanagan. All of them offered tastings for people 19+ (sorry, kids) and were all amazing. My absolute favorite stall was the 'Meadow Vista Honey Farms.' They made me taste their 'Mabon Spiced Mead' wine, which was heated honey wine with mulling spices in it.

I am not joking when I say it is probably one of the best wines I had ever tasted, and it is just perfect for the fall and winter seasons.

The only thing I thought could be improved was, although there were a large

number of sellers, many were selling similar products. Despite Kelowna's relatively small community, I think the market would benefit from having more 'unconventional' stalls. I only found a few selling things I wouldn't expect from a Farmers' Market. For example, I was surprised to see a stall that sold sensory toys for children, and another that sold print aprons and linen from Ukraine.

So, was the Farmers' Market worth it? Absolutely. I expected to go for a short time, smell some candles, buy some food, and leave. However, I was there for hours talking to the vendors, buying things, and dancing to the music.

It really showed me how creative and passionate people in the city are about their craft.

There were singers, guitar players, and even a person playing the flute! I felt so welcomed and didn't feel like leaving. And I was not the only one. Hundreds of people were at the market, including many students and families.

My top tip? Go before the end of this month. Even though the market runs throughout the year, it moves indoors in mid-November when the weather gets cold. During the winter months, there are fewer vendors, and, in my opinion, you won't be able to get the full experience.

If you are looking for a sign to go to the Farmers' Market, this is it. It truly was a wonderful experience, and I can't wait to go again soon.



Ableist UBC?

Accessibility issues at UBCO and the repercussions for students

WORDS BY NOAH DAVIS AND ANA SALGADO

GRAPHIC BY DERIAN GUADARRAMA

Noah: In the pitching room, I know Ana Salgado as my coworker and the Rants writer. Outside the pitching room, I know her as a bright student with a passion for writing and representing students at UBCO, just like me. One night, in the middle of pitching an article about tuition, Ana raised the issue of accessibility on campus and lack thereof. I raised my hand and offered my perspective as an autistic student who is registered with the DRC (Disability Resource Centre), and my concerns about accessibility on campus.

This led to a collaborative discussion with many members of The Phoenix Team. For me, this was exciting as I strive to be a journalist. I knew right away I would help write the article because I wanted to collaborate with Ana and I wanted to provide a platform for disabled people to discuss their experiences and struggles with navigating campus and academics. Ana and I talked to students with disabilities, evaluated accessibility around campus, and reached out to the DRC. We sat down together and had a lively conversation about our interview and research process, as well as our genuine thoughts about accessibility on campus.

Ana: Ever since I walked down Academy Hill on my first day of school last year, all I could think was “damn, this is a tough walk. I cannot imagine what it would be like if I had any sort of disability.” And, upon my arrival to campus, everything got worse. I noticed that the campus, and getting to and from campus, was hard to navigate around. Hills, stairs, uneven paths, heavy doors, and a lack of functional push buttons; all of these and more are a huge concern for disabled folk who require mobility aids. UBCO’s campus is not built for people with disabilities, and the DRC tends to have some fallbacks. Imagine going up and down all those hills in the winter time!

Noah: When I broke my foot in August and had to use crutches, I struggled because the push buttons don’t all work, even the trek to my dorm and to my classes was strenuous. I can imagine the struggle it must be for students with permanent disabilities that require the constant use of mobility aids.

Ana: I don’t have any disabilities, but it’s even hard for me sometimes to get to and around campus. I honestly cannot imagine what it is like to carry this struggle on your shoulders when students already have to worry far too much about academic performance.

Noah: I’m starting to think students don’t get what they pay for.



Has anyone ever walked around campus and noticed the lack of accessibility? Most people do not, because they have the privilege of not requiring certain support needs. But, if you start looking around, you’ll notice that UBCO has more accessibility issues than they make it out to be. Lack of braille outside buildings and classrooms, faulty buttons for doors, inconvenient routes to access ramps, and most importantly, a Disability Resource Centre that has a reputation for being slow and inefficient.

After sitting down with a fellow student who uses a mobility aid on a daily basis, we managed to get more insight into what it’s like to navigate campus and student residence for someone who is not part of the able-bodied majority at the university.

“I’ve generally been able to get around campus, but there is definitely a lack of accessible paths, and the ones that are accessible are not the best either. I’ve had a few occasions where the elevators have been out of order, forcing me to go through more difficult ways and be late to class as well. There have also been delays in issues with the DRC and handicapped buttons [on campus and residence].”

They went on to add:

“I don’t think the university should promote full accessibility when there are problems like this. Students come here and pay tuition and housing with full

trust in these services when these problems can hold them back in their studies and independence.”

After hearing what the student had to say, we were overwhelmed by emotion and frustration. Having to use a mobility aid, plus no straight paths to move around and get to class or residence, is exhausting and goes to show how campus is not built for people with disabilities. Without appropriate and accessible student residences for people with disabilities, we can only imagine what would happen in case of an emergency...

A third year visually impaired student here at UBCO gave us further insight into their life on campus; specifically, their trials with getting around campus and the challenges they face with keeping up with their studies. This student made it clear that they struggle to navigate university, especially with the lack of braille on campus and outside of classrooms, buildings, and dorm rooms.

“Getting around campus is okay. They have decent tactile things on the road, any important road...they have tactile things. Roads and grounds are good. But there’s no way to figure out which building I’m outside of, or what room I’m outside of. Not even the DRC has a [braille] sign outside their office, which says who they are.”

This student described their pro-

cess of figuring out which classroom they are in front of, which consists of counting doors to find their way to the correct classroom, counting residence doors and scanning their key on the locks in hopes of scanning the right door, and being escorted to class by their friends. The lack of braille around campus and in residences essentially takes away this student’s sense of independence, an important factor of the university experience. The only time they don’t struggle with a lack of braille is when using elevators on campus.

The student said that, “when I was very new, they were talking about building a tactile map, but there [still] is none. I’m a third-year student.”

So the question we must ask ourselves is:

How are disabled students supposed to navigate a campus that wasn’t built to accommodate them in the first place?

After hearing many students struggling to move around campus or find spaces to feel at ease, we felt it was necessary to ask the one resource on campus that can bring answers not just to us, but to all the students who are most affected by these issues. And so, we contacted the DRC for an interview, where our goal was to understand why, despite it being such a big centre at the university, many students are still dissatisfied with their services, or feel there is a lack of accessibility on campus.

Unfortunately, we were unable to meet with them. Emails, phone calls, and even showing up in person at their office were not enough. Not only were they slow with their responses, but kept pushing back potential meeting times, which was very frustrating as us writers work with tight deadlines.

We came into this article thinking we’d be able to meet with them and get some clarification as to why many students are still struggling to move around campus. Unfortunately, that was not possible.

We can only assume why the DRC did not want to meet for an interview. However, we hope that this article voices the major concerns students who struggle with accessibility issues have at this university.

Hey UBC, are you listening?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

If you want to contribute to the conversation, email us at management@thephoenixnews.com or send us a dm on Instagram!

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Cold Sandwiches for Dinner in Europe —and Canada Could Follow

WORDS BY ALEyna KIRILMIS

All hands are on deck to handle the energy expenses this winter in Europe. With electricity bills expected to rise more than threefold in some places, it's no surprise that people have had to put in maximum effort for a minimal decrease in their bills.

This rise in cost is not only due to inflation, it is mostly because of the effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The European Union has had a mostly united front in sanctioning Russia for its actions, but now the public is paying the price of the politicians' decisions.

With 40% of the natural gas used in Europe originating from Russia, the cutoff of the gas supply has shaken the European economy to its core, with some experts forecasting a disaster similar to the energy crisis in the 1970s.

As the price of nonrenewable energy increases dramatically, you may think that everyone in the economy is feeling the effects, right? Unfortunately, that doesn't seem to be the case.

In July 2022, Shell and Centrica, two major energy providers based in the United Kingdom, reported record profits of £11.5 billion and £1.3 billion respectively.

Clearly, some profit has been made amidst the crisis. On the other hand, the poorest household may be spending up to 50% of their disposable income on energy bills this year, according to a report published in the UK.

A few different methods to address this current crisis have surfaced on the other side of the ocean. Consumers themselves do not have the option to change their providers

as the few energy companies that there are all charge extravagant fees. As such, some of the politicians have taken the responsibility upon themselves.

In Italy, an energy windfall tax was enacted to increase the taxation of energy companies' profits. The excess tax revenue will go towards helping families pay their energy bills this winter.

This idea has been proposed to the European Union too, with debates now in session about whether to do the same.

Of course, the United Kingdom is no longer in the European Union, and their different approach shows their independence from the rest of the European countries. The new British Prime Minister, Liz Truss—a proud conservative—has spoken out against an energy windfall tax under the claim that it would hinder investment in the British economy. She has instead resorted to giving the energy companies a slice of the tax revenue to make up for the portion consumers will struggle to pay.

With her plan, yearly energy bills are expected to rise a little over double what they were last year instead of triple, and no action will be made to control the rate of profit the energy companies will make.

It is entirely possible to dedicate many pages simply to Truss's policy alone, but our real question is why this concerns us here in Canada.

When you got your first phone number in Canada, you may have noticed that your options were quite limited. Similarly, when you wanted to fly out to visit your family

over the winter, you may have been annoyed at only having two (expensive) airline options to choose from. If so, your experiences would have pointed to a broader issue in the Canadian economy: monopolies (or oligopolies)!

Unfortunately, a monopoly is not as "fun" as the famous board game.

Instead, a monopoly happens when one company (or a few in the case of an oligopoly) takes over an entire sector of the economy.

Monopolies are why you have to pay extravagant fees for a mere 3 GB of data, and they're also why you have to reconsider your budget for the month when you want to travel home.

Many reports have been published to highlight the problem of the lack of competition in Canada, pointing to issues such as a lack of privacy, consumer autonomy, and even issues which could affect the integrity of elections.

Though an energy crisis similar to the magnitude of Europe is not on the horizon for Canada (yet), any sort of crisis which disrupts the global supply chain could affect you quickly if your economy relies on the goodness in the hearts of a few companies.

So, the next time your phone bill makes you reconsider going out with friends, and you have no other company that offers you a better solution, you'll understand our European counterparts to some extent. Though, hopefully you won't be shivering under a blanket like they may be.



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TV SHOWS ARE INFLUENCING WHAT MAJOR STUDENTS ARE CHOOSING

WORDS BY NOAH DAVIS

A week before moving out of Calgary, I found myself reminiscing about the years I spent at home watching TV shows with my dad. Eventually, these nights turned into editing nights as well, where my dad would read and edit whatever short story I had written that week, while I watched reruns of Star Trek and occasionally streamed a couple episodes of Gilmore Girls or How I Met Your Mother. It wasn't until I was sitting at a party explaining my choice of major for the fifth time that I realized how much I was influenced by these TV shows to study creative writing.

I was chatting with my mom's friend in the corner and when I expressed how I wanted to pursue journalism, she said, "Like Rory Gilmore!" and I agreed enthusiastically.

Whether it be admiration for Rory Gilmore (the student journalist at Yale) or a coincidence, I didn't entirely know. But, I was certain that I wanted to figure out exactly how my favourite TV shows influenced my career choice. More importantly, I wanted to know if this also happens to others. Thanks to the voices of students here at UBCO, I was able to learn more about what each student dreamed of doing and how their favorite TV show influenced which major they chose.

Most people have a favourite TV show, the one thing they turn on after a bad day, or the film they watch over and over for some form of comfort or entertainment. From a young age, individuals are influenced by what they see on TV.

Students choose their major in order to pursue the same career as the characters they admire in their favorite TV shows. In addition, tv shows often dramatize or glorify certain aspects of certain careers, making them seem more appealing than they actually are.

Although I don't believe that students want to be exactly like the main character in their favourite TV shows, I believe that students admire characters with similar flaws and who overcome similar struggles because it makes them feel represented. This leads to students choosing a major that aligns with that character's interests and career path.

A first year student, whose favourite TV show is The Amazing World Of Gumball, stated:

"We're influenced by everything around us, at every single moment. What we watch when we're little absolutely has an impact on what we want to learn about."

At UBCO, many students interested in biology and sciences expressed their interest in studying animals because of their love for National Geographic and Wild Kratts. Some students explained how they watched medical programs like Grey's Anatomy and thought they wanted to go to med school to become a surgeon until they realized the reality of the field, specifically how much education and how difficult it actually is to become a surgeon.

This demonstrates just how powerful dramatization of certain careers is; making a high demanding job seem less strenuous than in reality, full of gossip and romance.

Another shared frustration among students is the misconceptions TV shows create, a frustration expressed to me specifically by psychology majors.

Among students here at UBCO, some of the more influential TV shows are Gilmore Girls, Greys Anatomy, National Geographic, Criminal Minds, Friends, and true crime documentaries.

I think my coworker Lois' words are a perfect illustration of the students' stories and experiences I gathered. She said,

"Media almost always represents humanity; it represents people, right? So when you see yourself in media, when you really connect to something, I think it's just really seeing yourself. I think media is a means of allowing you to explore yourself and what you want to do in life. That's what media is, imagination and possibilities."

THE PHOENIX WANTS YOUR SUBMISSIONS!

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I met Lucas Arnold for the first time through my lovely roommate Yvonne when she invited me on a grocery run, and he needed to pick up ingredients for his staple recipe of ‘chicken breast boiled in pickled beet juice.’ Further assertions of his unique personality were made known when Yvonne told me of his ‘personal challenge’ to take a selfie with a fellow student on campus everyday, and ask them a series of questions about themselves. Upon following the Instagram account where he’d share these photos and interviews, I noticed one question that generated very different responses each time.

“When UBCO is considering new applicants, do you think it’s more important for them to look at merit or diversity?”

I asked Lucas if he would be willing to share his own thoughts about this hot topic, and to take a stab at being the interviewee instead of the interviewer.

Lois Chan: To start off, who are you and what’s the story behind your Instagram account @arnys_selfies?

Lucas Arnold: My name is Lucas Arnold; I’m a third year Microbiology major from Chilliwack, BC. The whole concept of the Instagram account started over the summer while I was in Victoria. A few friends and I found a McDonald’s cardboard advertisement with a Minion on it, and we walked around [with the advertisement] taking photos with strangers on the street. The prop gave us an excuse to take photos with people, which was fun, but getting to talk with strangers and hearing about their life stories and unique views was more fascinating.

LC: When did the topic of merit and diversity first come across your mind?

LA: I remember seeing this question in a Youtube video asking Harvard students thought-provoking questions, and it stuck with me because of the ever-changing world and its cry for diversity, inclusion, and affirmative action in recent years. I also listened to debate segments about whether or not affirmative action [the practice of intentionally recruiting oppressed minorities in workforces and schools] should be implemented, and whether that is racist in itself.

LC: What is your personal opinion on the issue of merit and diversity related to university admissions?

LA: Merit. I think merit should be the only consideration when looking at applicants. People should be looked at as individuals with a resume, like what you have done for your community, academics, experience, and achievements. Accepting applicants because they check a box for being a man or woman, domestic or international, rich or poor, solely for the purpose of creating a student body that is diverse, discredits the merit of those that don’t fall into “victim” categories. Applicants need to be treated as individuals who have accomplishments without being tied to a category membership when applying to UBC.

LC: Would you say your identity and upbringing has had an impact on your opinion?

LA: Absolutely. How people are raised, and the experiences they have in life, shape one’s views and ideologies. My parents taught me the value of hard work and determination. If I wanted something, I needed to put in the work and take the steps required to accomplish or attain whatever I was chasing. This is the same view regarding university admissions. I believe those who put in the most work deserve to reap the rewards of what they have sown.

Diving Into the Definitions

Before we get any further, we should define the key terms of ‘diversity’ and ‘merit.’ As told by the Canadian Centre of Diversity and Inclusion, diversity is “about the individual. It is the variety of unique dimensions, qualities and characteristics we all possess.”¹ Oftentimes, diversity is confused for inclusion, which is “about the collective [, and] creating a culture that strives for equity and embraces, respects, accepts and values differences.” Diversity is a term applicable to the variety of identity markers like gender, race, sexuality, and disability

MERIT versus DIVERSITY
Where Should the University’s Priorities be for Admissions?

WORDS BY LOIS CHAN

status, but it also involves a range of opinions and values.

On the other hand, merit is defined as “the quality of being particularly good or worthy...to deserve praise or reward.”² These days, merit is typically confused with the ability to get good grades. But, merit is a concept that inherently is not —and should not— be confined to intellectual standing.

If an aspiring university applicant from a background of poverty has to balance a part-time job, family commitments, and schoolwork, on top of undertaking volunteer opportunities that are nowadays basically mandatory to enter higher-ranking universities, do they not possess merit?

Even if they generate grades lower than a B+ because of their time-consuming duties, compared to the stellar A+ earning student with a slew of tutors, would they not show more promise as a hardworking student?

Think about how a hard-of-hearing student could be hindered by the lack of slide-shows or lesson transcripts offered by their high school instructors, which could lead to an inability to complete assignments. Or how a student undergoing a gender-affirming transition might have to deal with a hostile classroom environment, which may prevent them from excelling in group projects. These situations could contribute to reduced chances of entering certain universities.

The truth is, the world isn’t built for many marginalised groups. It’s common that most universities are structured in ways that actively exclude or negate the needs of diverse people.

These impediments were one of many topics brought up by Dr. Jannik Haruo Eikenaar, the Associate Provost of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Anti-racism (IDEA) at UBCO. The university’s efforts to amend these systemic injustices come in the form of the Equity and Inclusion Office, which Dr. Eikenaar closely works with.

The Mission of UBC’s Equity and Inclusion Office

Lois Chan: What constitutes your role and mission as a professional advocate for equity and inclusion at UBCO?

Dr. Jannik Haruo Eikenaar: My mandate is to look at the implementation of the Inclusion Action Plan and the Anti-Racism Inclusive Excellence Task Force recommendations. Most of my work is with staff and faculty, but there’s also work with students in thinking about curricula, programming, and services. More broadly, my role is to offer guidance and direction to the folks on campus doing the work of inclusive excellence, which is defined by UBC as the “[cultivation] of a diverse community that creates and sustains equitable and inclusive campuses.”³

LC: In the Inclusion Action Plan, it’s stated that “UBC will actively recruit, support, retain, and advance students, faculty, staff, and leaders from systematically marginalised communities.” What does recruiting students from marginalised communities entail?

JHE: There are a couple of great initiatives that demonstrate UBC’s commitment. One is a community engagement outreach program, which is working with the local school districts, trying to identify ways that we can support equity deserving groups if they’re interested in attending university and coming to UBCO. That really requires taking a look at our current population and how we might strategically encourage a more diverse student body. Then we have to think about how we can make UBCO more accessible for members of equity deserving groups, so they can envision themselves here. One way we can do that is by sharing stories about students from the same backgrounds and their experiences on campus.

Our Senate and committees are also

reviewing admissions and awards, learning and research curricula, along with our policies and practices to see how we can improve them according to the larger goal of inclusive excellence. Admittedly, this is very early work, but I think it’s important. We have an opportunity to review policies in the context of specific values, in that we want to be a more inclusive community.

LC: Do you know if there are diversity quotas to bring a number of marginalised people into the admissions pool?

JHE: The simple answer is no; there are no quotas for admissions into UBC. The Anti-Racism Inclusive Excellence Task Force Report does recommend and emphasise the need to recruit Black students, but there are legal and ethical considerations in the history of this kind of decision making. There are some targets that are relevant to our work at UBC, such as Engineers Canada aiming to have thirty percent of the nation’s licensed practising engineers be women by the year 2030.

LC: What is the relevance between merit and diversity?

JHE: This ties into the conversation about equality and equity. Equality assumes that different people can be evaluated objectively, but academic performance doesn’t exist in a vacuum.

Simplifying things by comparing test scores might sound appealing because it has the appearance of objectivity, but doing so loses all of the greater contextual understanding that should be taken into account.

It’s important to then think about equity. How do we evaluate people in an equitable way? That’s where we need to take into account relevant experience, knowledge, and identities that inform how someone matches the criteria of admission. What we really want at UBC is to be on the side of equitability.

LC: Then, wouldn’t the purpose of test scores be put into question? Are grades even necessary?

JHE: Research shows that test scores prior to university are still a good indicator of performance in university, but they’re not a perfect indicator. Now, I’m not suggesting that we would throw out test scores or averages...What we do want to do as part of this institution is to think about how we can get a better understanding of the people who are applying to be here, and whether they’ll learn, engage, and contribute to our community.

The Process of Decolonizing Universities as Western Institutions

As institutions situated on land taken from Indigenous communities and established by colonial settlers, Canadian universities often perpetuate Western knowledge and beliefs. The cultural effect of the colonial mindset creates a heavy emphasis on making our schools into what Cree scholar Candance Brunette-Debassige calls “transactional and hierarchical structures.”⁴

When we take a look at the capitalist society we live in, we can recognize that university students are set on track to becoming money-making cogs in a machine known as the economy.

Why else do we attend university? To get a job in the future. It’s more common than not for students to major in a field they aren’t passionate about because they hope to earn enough to make a comfortable living.

The competitive nature of earning top grades has created an individualistic process of ‘doing the job better than others,’ just so we can trick ourselves into believing that we’ll be more



Photo 1. Screenshot of @arnys_selfies on Instagram.

successful than everyone else. The anxiety of getting into the ‘best’ university allows for glorification of a schooling experience that negates the importance of the student themselves, as a person separate from their capability to earn good grades and work efficiently.

Although arguably its main function, universities are not solely meant to provide a greater variety of career opportunities. They also promote community and identity building. These factors are crucial and intertwined within the process of attaining education, not only in an academic sense, but also learning about the world.

For this reason, diversity is beneficial when it’s propagated within universities, to allow the student body to learn from others of different backgrounds and experiences, to better interact and function within a society.

There’s no need for the ‘versus’

Merit and diversity are not mutually exclusive.

Like Lucas rightfully said, individuals should be treated respectfully according to their resume of experiences and knowledge. That connects to Dr. Eikenaar’s point that our identities have an impact on our experiences, which posits diversity as a factor that shouldn’t be discounted when evaluating applications. Merit should get your foot in the door, but your unique (and diverse!) personality will make the room more interesting.

Although some people believe that merit should be the defining factor when evaluating applicants, this negates the extra effort marginalised groups must make while living in a predominantly heteronormative, white, abled, and patriarchal society. There’s nothing wrong with embracing what makes us different.

Diversity does not exclude groups or identities that have been historically privileged, nor those that have been oppressed and marginalised. Diversity is applicable to everyone. And, everyone is meritable in more than academic, intellectual, and economically productive matters.

We should remember that we, as students, are more than the futures we will inhabit one day. And, it is important to envision for ourselves a community that includes people of all identities, cultures, and physical and mental conditions.

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embrace joy (and trains)

SUBMITTED BY JONATHAN VAN ELSLANDER

There is a certain nostalgia that we have for the early days of the pandemic. For a few months, so many of us had, besides dread, nothing to do. Apart from the poorly appreciated “essential workers,” mostly everyone spent April and May of 2020 sitting around, making extravagant breakfasts, wandering the streets of their neighbourhood, and learning to bake sourdough. Now that we’re in the cruel world of 2022, where more people than ever are dying of COVID-19 and we are all crushed to death under too much work and expensive living, it’s easy to look back warmly on a time when just visiting the grocery store was monumental and exciting.

In that time when there was nothing to do, rose two parallel celebrity phenomena: first the lockdown darlings, like actor Leslie Jordan – who died tragically last week – a petite senior queen in whose irreverent and delightful videos many people found solace. Jordan, who like all of us was watching his sanity edge away from him, became everyone’s favourite Instagram follow with his stories and terrible dancing.

But the more lasting celebrity trend of the lockdown is people who used their pandemic-driven free-time to take up (or take seriously) some hobby they’d overlooked. Musicians and artists sprouted up from lonely apartments while scores of young people sought to cash in on an increased social media presence.

Which brings me to Francis Bourgeois, a charmingly awkward young British man, and his dear, dear obsession with Trains. In the same way the lockdown spurred many of us to pursue different life goals, Francis resigned from his job and began pursuing train-spotting – the act of chasing, studying, and looking for trains – as a full-time gig. The lockdowns seemed to have given Francis the free time to fully explore his deepest desire: watching trains go by in the English countryside.

Bourgeois – not his real name – became a quick and worthwhile meme in late 2020 when one of his videos went viral. And it’s important to consider the popularity of that first video when looking at the things that have

come to pass since. Two things in it struck a chord with viewers: the ridiculous and hilarious angle of Francis’s face filmed by his go pro, mounted, it seems, much too close to his face, and that Francis was breathlessly running around a train station in the middle of the night in an effort to catch a glimpse and a photo of a train that was officially named “Dick Mabbutt” (and aptly stated by Francis “what a beautiful locomotive she is”). The fish-eyed angle of Francis’s eager face chasing the train was quickly photoshopped onto the cover of Time, with many social media users crowning him a people’s choice for 2020 Person of the Year.

What’s interesting about that video all this time later is its similarities and differences to all the videos Francis has posted since. There have been no more crudely named trains seemingly destined to garner social media clout. In fact, there has been almost no calculated social media savvy from Francis: no nihilistic meta-humour or black comedy anti-jokes that are so popular among the meme pages of the internet. Francis does not make sardonic jokes about depression or anxiety, he doesn’t muse on the impending capitalist fueled destruction of the world, and he doesn’t repeat the cynical canned joke-phrases of his generation. The only ironically cool virality of his brief “influencer” (I use that word very reluctantly) career has been his over-the-top and forcefully fashionable outfits.

But his videos have continued to be charged in the same energy that the first one was so obviously full of. They have remained popular because they are funny and watchable. And they are funny and watchable because they are so happy. Which is obvious given how happy Francis is in them.

Because, to watch almost any Francis Bourgeois video is to watch an increasingly rare sight: a happy young person unironically and purely enjoying life.

The fact that we watch him chase trains is mostly a moot point. He could be chasing birds, or rare plants, or filming other forms of public transportation. As long as he has the energy he so obviously has, it would be worth watching. What is important about the

trains, or with any of the alternatives I’ve listed, is that so many of us, most of his viewers, don’t really care about trains, or at least didn’t really care about them when we started watching. The unpopular and mildly esoteric nature of trains serves as a blank canvas on which we can watch Francis paint pure joy.

This isn’t to say that all his videos are the same. There are the emotional odes to his friends new and old, fellow trainspotters, model train enthusiasts, or railway employees who extend unplanned invitations for Francis to board and inspect a train. There are the odd, stilted, sponsored posts where Gucci (yes that Gucci), Formula 1 racing, or local transit authorities, pay Francis to film himself enjoying fashion shows, cars, or certain trains (as you’d expect he enjoys the latter the most).

And importantly, there is one video where Francis confronts “the haters” and debunks rumours of his own personal history. In this, he reveals that there was once a time, pre-pandemic, when Francis longed to be “cool,” when he worked out and dressed differently in order to impress people. History, and Francis’s unbridled excitement for life (and trains), indicates how that turned out (he currently has a memoir, *The Trainspotter’s Notebook*, due out soon, and television series currently airing on Channel 4 in the U.K.).

But the most invigorating of his videos tend to feature a reality check in the form of someone else who doesn’t enjoy trains quite as much as him. Take for instance a series of videos featuring Francis and, of all people, Joe Jonas of the Jonas Brothers, who like an audience member inserted into the video stands by happily and contentedly, never getting nearly as excited about the trains as Francis. Jonas, and us, are more there to bask in Francis’s joy than to enjoy the trains.

What is most consistent in Francis’s content is an unremitting desire to just enjoy trains. It is not uncommon for comments on his posts to lament his apolitical nature. One commenter noted recently “silence on the rail strikes is deafening,” alluding to the potential of widespread strikes by railway workers in the US. This isn’t to say that solidarity is unim-

portant, that supporting workers and standing up to oppression should be on the back burner. But not every person in the world is an activist. Some things in life, and some people, serve foremost to spread joy. Take for instance the writing of someone like George Orwell, or poet Hanif Abdurraqib, who advocate for the appreciation and promotion of beauty, of flowers, alongside social justice solidarity.

What Francis Bourgeois offers the world is not criticism but encouragement. He offers an example of what life could be like if things were better. What it can be like when we appreciate what we have. Take the time, no matter your mood, to find three recent videos of Francis chasing a train across a scenic bridge from England into Wales. Surprises, of the train having two engines of it stopping on the bridge, of its engine roaring to life, of several train conductors leaning out the window to wave, overwhelm Francis and he sprints headlong across borders to follow it for just a minute longer. “Life. Is. Amazing.” he announces convincingly.

On running out of breath, Francis encounters a resigned man sitting on a bench next to his bike, which Francis begs to let him borrow. In the man Francis has found the tired indifference of the world and he is forced to offer his house keys in collateral for the bike. You can feel the man wondering, why on earth would anyone be so worked up over a train? But that is of course not the reasonable question to be asked. Instead, What is the point of joy? What inspires hope? Where should we look when we are sad? Watch Francis chase trains and you may find out.

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