



Students speak on experience changing preferred identities

By Amethyst Martinez

SENIOR Isaiah Banks, who changed his Rider documentation to his preferred identity this school year, described the switch as an affirmation he “needed.”

In an effort to allow students to align their identity with multiple Rider communication aspects, the university offers an option to change to a preferred name, gender and pronouns through the MyRider portal.

“It just kind of makes me feel more at peace with myself that I can go to class and not be called by my dead name,” said Banks, a game design major.

The option came into fruition in 2017 when the university created a committee for the issue, and began to allow preferred name and gender specifications in electronic systems in 2018, according to Christine Melhourn, associate dean of students.

As updates have been made to the process since its inception, a variety of things have been added to give faculty, staff and students the opportunity to align their lived identity with certain functions at the university.

One example is the name-changing process, which, according to the university website, will automatically allow students to change their preferred name to appear on class lists, faculty grading, the student advising profile, DegreeWorks and Canvas. It can also be requested to appear on identification cards and diplomas, along with email addresses.

Nick Kelly-Wilson, a junior English major, changed her name in the system before she arrived at Rider three years ago, and called the experience “beneficial” to her mental health.

“I have a lot of trauma behind my previous name, so being given the option to go by my preferred name from the getgo is super important,” said Kelly-Wilson. “The ability to be able to identify yourself and brand yourself as who you are and not have to correct people over and over on simple things is so important and allows people to focus on things other than past traumas.”



Cecilia Simon (left), Emily Porter Siegel (middle) and Isaiah Banks (right) describe the process of changing preferred names, pronouns and gender.

The preferred name process does have its limitations, however. On certain documents, legal names still need to be displayed, such as transcripts, enrollment certifications, degree verification requests, financial aid records, health insurance, student financial accounts, payroll and reimbursement check requests. Sue Stefanick, the university registrar, said that this was due to legal limitations. She also emphasized that anyone can change their name in the portal without ever even having to visit the registrar’s office.

“It’s a great opportunity to have people identify the way they want to be identified with their preferred name,” said Stefanick. “Then, of course, if a student legally changes their name, then we can make the change on other documents.”

Cecilia Simon, a sophomore political science major, said that sometimes her deadname shows up on certain

university systems, including MyRider, the same portal that she used to update her information last year. A deadname is a term used to describe a name a person no longer goes by.

“The cost of getting the name change request into the system is easy enough, the problem is the universality of it,” said Simon. “Whenever my deadname comes up, it makes me uncomfortable.”

Melhourn blamed this on systems outside of the university’s control, including MyRider. She said that new systems are planned to be put in place to better reflect Rider’s values on the topic.

“As we get new systems in place, it’s going to be sure that that’s a priority,” said Melhourn. “Anyone who’s touched by this issue sees it as a priority and something that we want to make sure we get right.”

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Rider takes measures to uphold DEI in curriculum

By Kaitlyn McCormick

In a national climate that some may argue has quickly grown polarized and politicized, institutions of higher education have made concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) a quick selling point, Rider being no exception. Varying perspectives and topics in education like LGBTQ+ rights and critical race theory (CRT) have been criticized and even banned in different schools across the U.S., and the politicization of education has defined the importance of diversifying curriculum available to students, which has become an integral part of university discussion.

Piloting a new course

Part of the application of including more DEI threads in curriculum at Rider has included the freshman year experience course (FYS101), which started its first of a three-year pilot this past fall.

According to Cynthia Martínez, Spanish and Latinx studies professor as well as the faculty director of the course, the Fall 2022 program held nine sessions with around 160 students enrolled.

While a large part of the course includes preparing

students for the college experience and acquainting them with resources and expectations, the course also serves as a foundation for instilling DEI elements of curriculum into incoming students: a main component of the course, according to Martínez, is “engaging with diversity and social justice.”

Last semester, all nine sections of the course read from the anthology “Tales of Two Americas,” a multi-genre piece dealing with topics of inequity in the U.S.

“That was the common read that all instructors used in their FYS course as a way to kind of bridge some topics related to diversity and social justice, and then each instructor kind of brought their own perspective, expertise, background into how they approach those conversations,” Martínez said.

While the course isn’t yet a requirement for first-year students, that is the goal for the end of the pilot.

“My academic background is in Latinx studies,” Martínez said. “For a long time, I’ve seen the value and the benefits of exploring experiences and narratives and concepts that... the kind of dominant majority in the U.S. is diverse.”

Reevaluating global perspectives

College of Arts and Science (CAS) Dean Kelly Bidle described Student Government Association (SGA) President Andrew Bernstein as the “student champion” of the request to administration to include more DEI concepts in academic curriculum, starting with the general education global and social perspectives requirement.

Bernstein, a senior political science major explained that part of the push to incorporate more DEI concepts into curriculum was to take a look at what courses may not fully fit the bill.

“We tried to figure out where some weaknesses might be, and I think the biggest one is in the [CAS] in terms of the courses listed under global perspectives and social perspectives, [they] don’t necessarily require students to take a course that is DEI centered ... you can take a global perspective course that’s completely unrelated to anything that’s going to teach you a different perspective,” Bernstein said.

Though FYS is a new course prospect to Rider’s tackling of DEI, the slated elimination

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BIG MAN ON CAMPUS

Rider basketball’s Ajiri Ogemuno-Johnson has come a long way since leaving Nigeria.

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THE POSTPARTUM PROBLEM

Reproductive healthcare is not prioritized and leaves women with few resources.

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SHEDDING LIGHT ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Professor pens new story for “Black Panther” comic.

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SECURITY BRIEFS

BY SHAUN CHORNOBROFF

Beckett Blemishes

Panels Pummeled. On March 13 at 1:30 p.m., Public Safety was performing fire safety checks in Beckett Village B, when they discovered damage to the elevator. Upon entering the elevator, they observed damage to the ceiling and the track that holds the paneling up. It is unknown what caused the damage. Public Safety is investigating.

Ominous Odors

Stench of supplies. On March 17 at 9:57 a.m., Public Safety was dispatched to Wright Residence Hall for the report of the odor of natural gas in the building. When Public Safety arrived they met with the students who reported the odor. They checked all three floors and the basement and did not detect the odor of natural gas. It was determined that the odor was likely caused by cleaning products.

- Information provided by Public Safety Capt. Matthew Babcock

CORRECTIONS

An article in the March 8 print edition of The Rider News regarding Rider baseball featured an inaccurate headline. The headline was updated on The Rider News' website. The Rider News regrets this error.

After an investigation, The Rider News has determined that three pieces written by a single author, published in print and online, contained numerous fabricated sources, quotes and examples of plagiarism. The author was not a member of The Rider News and has never taken journalism classes at Rider, where the curriculum enforces that fabrication and plagiarism are unacceptable in the profession. The Rider News has decided that in the future, it will not publish material from this writer and has taken down the author's past work from its website for failing to meet basic journalism standards. The Rider News deeply regrets this situation and will continue to strive to uphold professional standards, as well as be an honest and reliable source of information to the university community.

Westminster returns home for 'Serenity of Soul' performance

By Jake Tiger

JOHNN Finley Williamson founded the Westminster Choir College (WCC) 103 years ago in Dayton, Ohio's Westminster Presbyterian Church, a building specifically made to house Williamson's choir and students.

Now, the college grapples with its recent relocation to Lawrenceville, New Jersey, and the problems that came with it, but for a fleeting moment in Dayton, Westminster was home.

After COVID-19 derailed its centennial celebration in 2020, the Westminster Choir returned to Dayton on March 12 for its first "Serenity of Soul" concert, and a meaningful reunion with its "Mother Church."

"Being there is ... a helpful reminder that [WCC] has moved twice before," said Associate Dean Jason Vodicka in an email to The Rider News. "Knowing that the mission of the college has been implemented in other places, knowing that the core purpose of Westminster can be carried out wherever we are, has been helpful to me during the last several years."

The choir's performance at the Westminster Presbyterian Church was the first of five shows in the series that features excerpts from a variety of choral pieces, ranging from folk to gospel in what WCC

professor James Jordan, the choir's conductor, called a "salad bar approach" to composition.

"It was more emotional than I thought it would be for all of us. It's kind of sacred ground," said Jordan. "For me to stand on the same podium that Williamson stood on, and for the choir, it was quite an emotional experience."

The concert was the choir's first time back in Dayton since visiting in January 2018. The choir was supposed to return in Spring 2020 for the WCC's 100th anniversary, but COVID-19 halted any tours for the college until its recent "Serenity of Soul" series.

"My favorite part of the experience was meeting the congregation and staff of Westminster Presbyterian," said sophomore music education major Emilie Beals in an email to The Rider News. "They treated us like we had always been and would always be family, shared stories of our school's beloved history and welcomed us home with loving arms."

The church itself was tailor-made for the Westminster Choir, featuring hallways on either side of the sanctuary that branch off into practice rooms and studios.

At Rider's Lawrenceville campus, WCC has persistently struggled with finding proper facilities for its staff, students and faculty, with rooms in Omega House and the Fine Arts building being repurposed just to give Westminster students a place to practice, and instructors a place to teach.

"I do think that it is still a challenge to get students to come to a school where the rehearsal facilities are not attractive," said Jordan. "It'd be like going to a school for athletics and not having a decent gym."

After the concert in Dayton, the choir performed at Otterbein University in Westerville, Ohio, on March 14, and at the Calvary Episcopal Church in

Photo courtesy of James Jordan



Westminster Choir College stands in front of Dayton's Westminster Presbyterian Church where the choir was founded.

Pittsburgh on March 18.

The choir also has two more "Serenity of Soul" concerts planned for later in the semester, performing at Rider's Gill Chapel on April 15, before heading to Washington, D.C.'s Saint Peter's Church on Capitol Hill on April 16.

According to Vodicka, WCC plans to revisit Dayton on tour approximately every five years, just as they had done prior to the pandemic, while also connecting with other parts of the country in an effort to aid WCC's dwindling enrollment.

"While Dayton is an important place for our history, touring is ultimately about ensuring our future — connecting with new audiences who may not know about us, and singing for high school and college students who may be looking for a place like Westminster," said Vodicka.

Jordan specifically listed Texas and Florida as likely locations for future tours, due to the Choir's contacts with major universities and churches within those states, but any exact dates or locations are yet to be determined.

Photo courtesy of James Jordan



Westminsters first students stand in front of Dayton's Westminster Presbyterian Church over 100 years ago.

Rider prepares for 41st annual Gender and Sexuality Studies Colloquium

By Kaitlyn McCormick

An itinerary decorated with a guest keynote speaker, student and faculty awards and three student panels, the Gender and Sexuality Studies (GSS) program is preparing to hold its 41st annual colloquium on March 28.

The event, sponsored by the College of Arts and Sciences in tandem with GSS, will run all day in Lynch Adler Hall 202 from 9:45 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and welcomes Kristy Drutman as its keynote speaker.

Drutman, founder of BrownGirl Green, a media platform centered on diversity in the environmentalism field, will present her talk, "Owning Your Environmental Story: Feminism as a Tool for Climate Change" at 1:10 p.m.

Professor Erica Ryan, GSS director, expressed her excitement for not only the colloquium but a keynote speaker whose focus centers on the timely topic of climate change.

"Kristy is young, she's in her 20s, so she has a very sort of Gen[eration] Z appeal, which I think our students are really going to love," Ryan said. She also lauded Drutman's resume, including that while she is young enough to appeal to the college demographic, she regularly attends climate conferences, interviewing figures like Cory Booker and Al Gore and was even invited to watch the State of the Union address at the White House.

"She's just wonderful, and I think that she's going

to have a lot to say that our students will relate to," Ryan said.

In addition to a decorated guest speaker, the day will highlight three student panels: "Gender and Media," "Historicizing Sex and Gender" and "Literary Constructions of Gender." The panels will highlight student research through papers and multimedia presentations and combine GSS studies with many different relative fields.

"I would love if students who came to the colloquium who haven't thought a whole lot about that before [could] get a sense of the significance of being aware of the way sexuality plays a role in our society," Ryan said.

Junior music production major Asha Burtin will be presenting on the first panel about women in hip-hop, as well as accepting the 2023 Virginia J. Cyrus Scholarship for "academic performance and work on behalf of women and girls," according to Ryan.

Associate professor Allison Weidhaas will also be recognized with the 2023 Ziegler-Gee Award.

Burtin explained that her application letter for the scholarship centered around the research she had done in her GSS minor, titled "Where Are the Black Riot Girls?"

The research, from the fall semester, focused on the "Riot Girl" feminist movement of the late '90s, and she took a special interest to focusing on the racial demographic of the movement through a

paper and small documentary.

"I find it important to apply voices like my own, as well as queer voices," Burtin said.

Outside of the research that earned her the scholarship, Burtin is currently focusing on research pertaining to people of color within the queer community through her minor.

Both Burtin and Ryan urged students who may have a curiosity regarding topics in GSS and may not know where to begin to attend the colloquium and hear their peers' work.

"I just think it's important to hear about perspectives that are not your own," Burtin said. "A lot of the research I find interesting, a lot of the stuff that I like to read about is pertaining to my own specific experience [as a] Black woman, and so [I] think it's important to attend things like this so that I can learn about experiences that I don't go through myself."

Ryan encouraged potential audience members as well, especially contextualizing GSS to the current national climate.

"I think something like our colloquium can help make them see the way our society categorizes people, the way our society constructs things like gender norms ... conceptions of sexual orientation, conceptions of sexual identity," Ryan said.

Ability to change names, pronouns gives students solace

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Simon said she will sometimes get emails with her dead name from certain organizations that pull their files from the registrars legal name records, which Melhourn said is being fixed as issues are brought to the university's attention.

"It's a thing of validating people's identities and ensuring the comfort of students," said Simon.

Rider's Student Government Association (SGA) recently posted an infographic on their Instagram explaining the preferred identity changing process to students in what SGA's Vice President for Communications Kayla Wagner described as trying to "illustrate that the process was not daunting or difficult."

"Overall, I wanted to emphasize that students can easily update their personal information to reflect their preferred name and identity across many of the systems we use daily at Rider," said Wagner, a senior digital marketing major.

Emily Porter Siegel, a sophomore English literature major, who goes by they/them pronouns, said they found out about the option through the infographic made by SGA.

"Basic human decency is addressing people how they want to be addressed," said Siegel. "The ability to go in and change your preferred name and your preferred pronouns is the bare minimum. ... I hate that it wasn't something that was presented to me the moment I came to this school."

Andrew Bernstein, senior political science major and SGA president emphasized that SGA's efforts are "always centered on creating a safe environment for students," including making graphics about issues like the identity-changing process. He said there were two goals: "that students feel included by being able to identify with their lived/preferred name in university communications" and "students aren't outed by email addresses that use their dead name."

Siegel said, "That's like also a question of I didn't know if it existed before the SGA infographic." Siegel outlined the struggles that transgender students at Rider face, not only for themselves, but for others.

"I am in rage a lot of [the] time, not only for myself, but for all of my trans[gender] siblings at Rider," said Siegel. "Trans[gender] people are nothing new."

Dell'Omo estimates latest budget cuts will save university \$450,000

By Jay Roberson and Shaun Chornobroff

In its latest effort to cut costs on the road to financial stability, Rider has asked a number of departments to give a portion of their annual budgets back to the university.

The administration is asking all departments to take the total of their current budgeted amount for travel, supplies and meals for meetings and remove 20% of that from their budget for the 2024 fiscal year, a measure which Rider President Gregory Dell'Omo estimated will save the university \$450,000.

The 2024 fiscal year lasts from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. Dell'Omo said the cuts don't have to be made exclusively to travel, supplies and meals, but departments must "give back to the university" the equivalent of 20% of those expenses.

"We need savings, but it gives people a little bit more control over their budgets based on what they do," said Dell'Omo in a March 15 interview with The Rider News.

The president said these cuts, the most recent in a long line since the pandemic rattled the university's financial state, are a way for the administration to "tighten our belts." He emphasized that when contextualized in the amount of departments the school has, these cuts aren't severely hampering any sector of the university.

In addition to the reduction, a 2024 university budget timeline, co-written by Rider's Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer James Hartman and Director of Financial Planning Lisa Tindall, stated a 3% reduction to all budget ceilings has been implemented.

"While we realize that these budget reductions may seem steep, the fact remains that the University's expenses still far outweigh the revenues we bring in. Balancing the need to deliver on our mission and do it in a financially responsible way falls on all of us," said the document, which was obtained from a member of Rider's faculty union.

University members were notified on Feb. 28, according to Associate Vice President for University Marketing and Communications Kristine Brown.

Hartman reflected a similar outlook to Dell'Omo in an interview with The Rider News, specifically stating the university evaluates its cost reduction measures ensuring they don't impair students.

"What we always try to do as we look at our budget and any budget restrictions, we always try to make sure that we're not adding lines that are going to affect the student experience. And the lines that we

focused on here, do not in any way affect that," said Hartman.

The Path Forward

As Rider continues to cut costs, the administration remains firm on its goal of bringing the university back to a stable, growing institution by fiscal year 2026, according to Dell'Omo and other members of administration. The latest reductions are one of the many steps the university has taken in an effort to recover financially. Rider has experienced significant loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic, feeling the impact of an empty campus, as a decrease in on-campus residents and declining enrollment, resulted in more than \$30 million lost in housing revenue.

With recruiting operating at its most normal since the pandemic uprooted standard proceedings in March 2020, Dell'Omo said he's already seeing an improvement, a crucial step to financial recovery for the university.

"We're making progress," said Dell'Omo. "But remember that the biggest chunk of our path forward, particularly over the next three year plan, clearly is both cost cutting and revenue generation. And the biggest piece obviously is revenue from tuition, making sure we're on track for enrollments."

Rider's chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has openly called for Dell'Omo's removal and given a vote of no-confidence twice during his tenure, citing a multitude of reasons, including the financial strain the university has been under. Contract negotiations over the summer between the union and the administration bled into the school year and a strike was narrowly avoided. Even as Dell'Omo maintains



Andrew Xon / The Rider News

Departments are asked to 'give back to the university' in new measures to seek financial stability.

progress is underway, Rider's faculty union remains pessimistic of administration.

"We are accustomed to seeing these kinds of messages," said David Dewberry, president of Rider's AAUP chapter. "It seems like there's never more resources being given to the institution, we're just asked to do more with less."

In the interview, Dewberry said he questioned Dell'Omo's hopes for the university, specifically saying that if the union heard a "coherent vision, something that we could believe in, something we could buy into, I think that would help."

When asked by The Rider News what his vision for the school is, Dell'Omo suggested a university that is representative of a post-pandemic world, one that is investing and reallocating funds into programs that will define the future of higher education.

"Even though we're a university, even though we're a not-for-profit, we have to be looking at how we can constantly manage our resources," said Dell'Omo. "That means looking at which programs are still doing well [and] which programs still have a demand out there ... but also looking at what new programs that we have to have as the world changes."

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Rider community reiterates need for consistent DEI coverage

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and archival for certain courses by the university's Prioritization Task Force, provost and president has received backlash.

The elimination of the American Studies program, which housed courses that serviced multiple majors across the university, drew concerns from the program's director, Mickey Hess. He feared the absence of popular courses would provide less opportunities for students to learn directly about Black and diverse philosophies in their general education requirements.

Chief Diversity Officer Barbara J. Lawrence said that while the conversation surrounding course prioritization did not directly include her prior and during her 2021 joining to the university, DEI standards should and will be consulted in future curriculum decisions.

"I can say that moving forward, when decisions are made about courses and our students coming in, DEI will be in front because we are looking at what students are interested in," Lawrence said. "We will definitely take that into consideration in course design, in co-curricular programming. We will work with faculty and staff to make sure that we are lifting up DEI more intentionally."

DEI and education

While Martínez noted that the FYS course was currently open to CAS and business students, it may be possible for

first-year students in the College of Education to take the course in the future, according to the Chair of the Department of Teacher Education Susan Dougherty.

The College of Education has its own introductory course, EDU 106, that threads topics of DEI into the syllabi for young educators in training, according to Dougherty. The one-credit course, which is offered in two sessions, one for elementary education and one for secondary, focuses on the system and cultures of educating and schools.

"DEI is super important in schooling. It has so much to do with how successful individuals are in schools ... we want to make sure that [education students] are prepared to make sure that all of their students are successful," Dougherty said.

Dougherty pulled from her own experience as a professor of literary education to also draw attention to the importance of text in the classroom, calling on the theory of "windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors," from children's literature researcher Rudine Sims Bishop.

"Books can either be a window for someone, it can be a mirror for someone else, and then potentially it could be a sliding door between people

that are not from the same group or background or have the same experiences," Dougherty explained.

The need for more 'consistent bravery'

As conversations of DEI and CRT spring up around the country with more institutions enacting plans to diversify the perspectives engaged in curriculums, one professor at Rider is calling for what she calls more "consistent bravery" from the top down.

Sociology and criminology professor Sarah Trocchio, a critical scholar by training, is well versed in conversations of DEI with plenty of ideas for how those concepts be better embodied not only in curriculum, but by the university as a whole, and including courses like FYS101 are just one piece of the ongoing puzzle.

Trocchio said she wanted to "shout out" Martínez for being "at the helm" of the first-year seminar.

"I know that that has really intentionally integrated DEI-related themes, and I think that's fabulous," Trocchio said. "I also think that it can't just be faculty members or just a few select staff members or just some really active students that are carrying this conversation. The responsibility is on our leadership to carry it ... in all honesty, it seems like these conversations have just been brushed aside in favor of a very myopic concern for financial health as an institution."

While the intention and plan to remain active and avoid stagnance in tackling issues of inclusion and diversity in curriculum is an ongoing effort, Bidle maintained that the commitment is one that she sees as "a university priority, period."

'It's just the right thing to do'

Discussing a three-pronged approach to the need for DEI standards to be discussed, implemented and supported at Rider by its faculty, Lawrence maintained one major consideration - a moral obligation.

"The world is changing," Lawrence said. "Most aspects of society, whether it has to do with legislation, whether it has to do with community development, whether it has to do with enhancing an economic system, requires an understanding of [DEI]."

She also noted that the student population at

Eric Buckwalter/The Rider News



DEI has become a crucial component of university conversation.

the university is changing, making it even more important to include DEI standards of practice, adding on the letter J to the initialism, standing for justice.

Outside of just focusing on course offerings and curriculum, faculty members have been provided with various training opportunities in inclusive pedagogy. She's also most recently launched an online Chief Diversity Officer dialogue space and intends to commit to ongoing microaggression training for faculty after receiving student feedback.

Valuing diverse perspectives

At a time where sociopolitical conversations and implications are holding a more active presence in dialogue, many are recognizing the importance of carrying these concepts into various institutional contexts, like education.

Bernstein said, "I think it's fairly obvious to say that certain perspectives have become even more in focus recently learning to appreciate the history of LGBTQ+ individuals is something that's even more important now. ... This kind of evolving social and political atmosphere that we're in really sets the stage for what I think we should be learning about."

Courses with built-in DEI components like the pilot FYS101 seminar were created with the intention of making these conversations more accessible to students and consciously bringing diverse perspectives into curriculum, but, as some like Trocchio have expressed, they cannot be the only ways DEI is being implemented.

Bernstein said, "It's important to be able to understand people's unique experiences and to be able to successfully work with them despite their unique differences."

Rider Arena Project closes in on financing goal for renovation

By Carolo Pascale

THE spiking of volleyballs, squeaking of basketball shoes, slamming of bodies on wrestling mats and screaming crowds are all common sounds that come from inside the Alumni Gym, the home of many Rider athletic programs. With plans for major renovations, the Rider Arena Project continues to push toward its goal of turning Alumni Gym into a modern NCAA Division I arena.

The project, started in 2019, has steadily built momentum after major donations from Rider alumni and has now entered its "final phase," according to the project website. Rider Athletic Director Don Harnum said that while it is in the last stretch, the school needs \$2.5 million more to reach its ultimate goal of \$18.2 million to finish the project.

"It hasn't been the best environment in the last couple years with COVID-19 and other things, but the project as a whole has gone very well. The finishing part we knew was going to be a challenge," said Harnum. "The first couple phases were for the enhancement of the student athlete and coaching experience and the day-to-day operations of the programs. This one is more the public face. This one's for the fans. This one's for the alumni."

Harnum mentioned the money the school has already received and used for parts of the project,

like the practice facility in the back part of Alumni Gym, as well as what the final \$2.5 million would do for the school.

"We've already spent a significant amount of money on the practice facility, which is all part of the project. It's just that last \$2.5 million that gets us what you're looking at right here," said Harnum while motioning to a picture of the concept art for the arena.

When the project is completed, the arena will increase fan capacity alongside a center-hung scoreboard, an entertainment suite, an expanded lobby with concessions, upgraded restrooms and improvements to day-to-day operations for athletics staff and student athletes. Part of the project also goes towards updating the strength and conditioning facilities in the Canastra Health & Sports Center.

The updated arena will be renamed, changing from Alumni Gym to Canastra Arena in honor of the Canastra family, who made a \$2.5 million dollar donation in October 2020, the largest donation in Rider Athletics history. There are more naming rights still available, such as the court, the practice facility, conference rooms, offices, and seats.

The renovations are planned to benefit all of the sports programs that the Alumni Gym hosts, such as mens and womens basketball, wrestling and

volleyball. The improvements are geared toward making a high quality student athlete experience at Rider and to help make day-to-day operations smoother.

Women's basketball Head Coach Lynn Milligan said that the changes that the project has already brought have helped her team and staff exponentially.

"The original project started with the video board and upgrades to Alumni Gym itself, which have been awesome. That grew into locker rooms, offices and a practice facility, which have been really game changers for us," said Milligan. "I can only imagine that the rest of this phase is going to be as good when it happens."

Once Rider gets the rest of the money for the project, Harnum said the timeline to get the project done would be very aggressive.

"It's going to have to happen right at the end of the season. We can use the practice facility for offseason workouts and all that," said Harnum. "But the goal would be to start it about now, whichever year we do it, and have it done by October. Maybe the entire thing's not done, [but] the ability to bring fans in has to be done."

Graduate student discusses experience working with Residence Life



Photo courtesy of Rider University

Graduate student **Rachel Rivera** is receiving her master's degree in school counseling. **Rivera** is in her second year at Rider.



Tristan E. M. Leach/The Rider News

Rivera is the community director for Lincoln Hall, home to the Lincoln Lions.

By **Tristan E. M. Leach**

FOR graduate student Rachel Rivera, inspiration comes in the form of experiencing life. Rivera, who is currently receiving her master's degree in school counseling, has dedicated her life to helping others and using her experiences to inspire students, staff and her community.

Before coming to Rider, Rivera attended Montclair State University for her undergraduate degree. It was at Montclair where she found her passion for Residence Life, becoming a resident assistant (RA) because she wanted to make a difference.

"I genuinely just wanted to get involved. I had had a lot of leadership experiences up until going to college, and my undergrad was a school of 20,000 plus students," said Rivera. "It is really easy to feel small in such a large space."

Rivera was inspired to apply for the position by other RAs and started the process of the 20-page application. It was crucial that everything was done in an exact way or applicants would not move on to the interview process.

"I was really motivated to do it because I had such a passion for getting involved and helping people. I just wanted to make an impact on my campus," said Rivera.

And make an impact she did. Rivera learned how to take on huge responsibilities and also keep a positive attitude. She emphasized that being an RA was one of the most rewarding experiences of her life because of the impact she had on her residents.

For the next three years, Rivera made a lifetime of connections and found that she wanted to continue making a difference in people's lives. Rivera found that many students and fellow staff members had poor mental health and often could not find the right outlets or people to go to.

Rivera said, "The mental health aspect, being able to have a diverse experience with crises and helping people and counseling people has been really impactful for me."

After graduating from Montclair State with a degree in psychology, Rivera applied to be a community director (CD) at Rider. This past summer, in mid-July, Rivera and 14 other hand-selected CDs moved onto campus to begin training for their positions.

Alongside her during the training was friend and fellow CD Kylie Dillon. Dillon is in her final year as a CD and is receiving her master's in business communications.

"We met on the very first day of CD training, August 1, 2021. Our relationship started off of our mutual liking of the singer Olivia O'Brien and discussed that we would both be seeing her in concert," said Dillon.

Rivera began growing her relationship with Dillon and her fellow staff members from Residence Life and soon met her staff of Community Assistants (CA). Rivera and her fellow staff members helped train the CAs that had been selected by Residence Life staff and the CDs. For two weeks Rivera and her colleagues participated in the training of each other's staff.

Rivera oversees five CAs, all of whom are undergraduate students. However she has also developed a relationship with the other CAs on campus. For Rivera it is important to connect to everyone who works with her, and she considers Residence Life her family.

"I get to be a face for all the community assistants campuswide, which I take a lot of pride in. Feeling like a lot of them feel comfortable coming to me," said Rivera.

One of these CAs is Kiley Kearney, a sophomore psychology major, who is a CA in Wright Hall.

Kearney said, "Rachel is always there and so understanding. She is also very kind and caring about not only her staff but the community."

For Rivera, every day is filled with hardships from several health issues that have been with her nearly her whole life and now affect her as a CD. At age 11, Rivera received surgery for extreme scoliosis; her spine was at an 89-degree curvature and was also pushing itself forward, leaving Rivera with kyphosis, an excessive curvature of the back that causes people to become extremely hunched over. Rivera suffers from weak hands and finds it difficult to walk, even years after doctors diagnosed her and started finding cures.

"My discs on the bottom of my back were slipping off of each other, causing significant nerve damage. I'd be walking in, say, a grocery store, and I'd have to sit in the middle of the aisle because I could not walk anymore because my legs were numb. I'd get what I

called sparks of pain," said Rivera.

The surgery later turned out to be one of two. The first put a stop to the slipping of the discs at the base of Rivera's spine, and the second, six months later, was for the curvature of her spine. Rivera's spine was successfully corrected to 18 degrees, but Rivera still has extreme problems with her back.

Rivera also has Marfan syndrome, which is a connective tissue disorder that affects the elasticity of the body. Rivera's scoliosis was further impacted by the disorder, causing her spine to essentially become too loose.

"I have mobility issues. I have really weak hands which are getting worse as I get older. I have heart issues ... Something that is significant with Marfan syndrome is the aorta in the heart can become dissected, which is a significant problem, especially if you don't know what is going on," said Rivera.

Rivera went on to speak about Jonathan Larson, a famous playwright and composer, who ended up passing away from dissection of the heart due to Marfan syndrome. One of the slogans for this syndrome is "Know the Signs, Save a Life."

It was speculated by Rivera and her family that she had the syndrome since she was 9 years old, but she wasn't diagnosed until she turned 19. The doctor did not believe that Rivera had the disorder because she only had seven of the 24 symptoms.

"I am so blessed and grateful that I don't have a lot of the signs and symptoms of Marfan syndrome. I still try to advocate for the disorder because it's something that affects so many people," said Rivera.

Rivera said that her experiences have pushed her not only to become a leader but also an advocate. For Rivera, speaking up for those who may not have a voice or a chance to use it has been extremely important. She hopes to become a school counselor for elementary-level students.

Until she graduates with her master's, Rivera continues to be CD of Lincoln Hall and participates in other jobs in Residence Life, such as teaching the CA class and attending events, meetings, training and recruitments.

"This role teaches you a lot about yourself that you didn't realize before," said Rivera. "I love the people aspect and the connection aspect. It has been one of my favorite things about the position."

East Coast rapper 'brings the magic' to campus

By Tristan E.M. Leach

RIDER has many traditions: Midnight Breakfast, Eggscellent Egg Hunt, Cranberry Fest and more. While all these traditions made a return after COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were lifted, one tradition that has yet to make its way back is the Student Entertainment Council (SEC) Concert.

The tradition invites a musical celebrity to perform in a Rider student-exclusive concert and has been a student favorite since its inception. The last time a concert took place was in September 2019, when artist A Boogie wit da Hoodie performed. When the pandemic swept the world, big music events all over the world were kept from taking place, including at the university. Even when it was deemed safe for schools to reopen, the event did not return.

Many students who had been attending Rider when the pandemic hit reminisced about the concerts, telling their younger friends and fellow peers about the A Boogie wit da Hoodie concert.

However, the 2019 concert will soon just be another good memory. March 24 sees the return of the SEC Concert with Nardo Wick and special guest Gloss Up.

Students like Lianne Litchfield, a sophomore film and television major, had heard about the experience from her friends and peers that had been at Rider pre-pandemic.

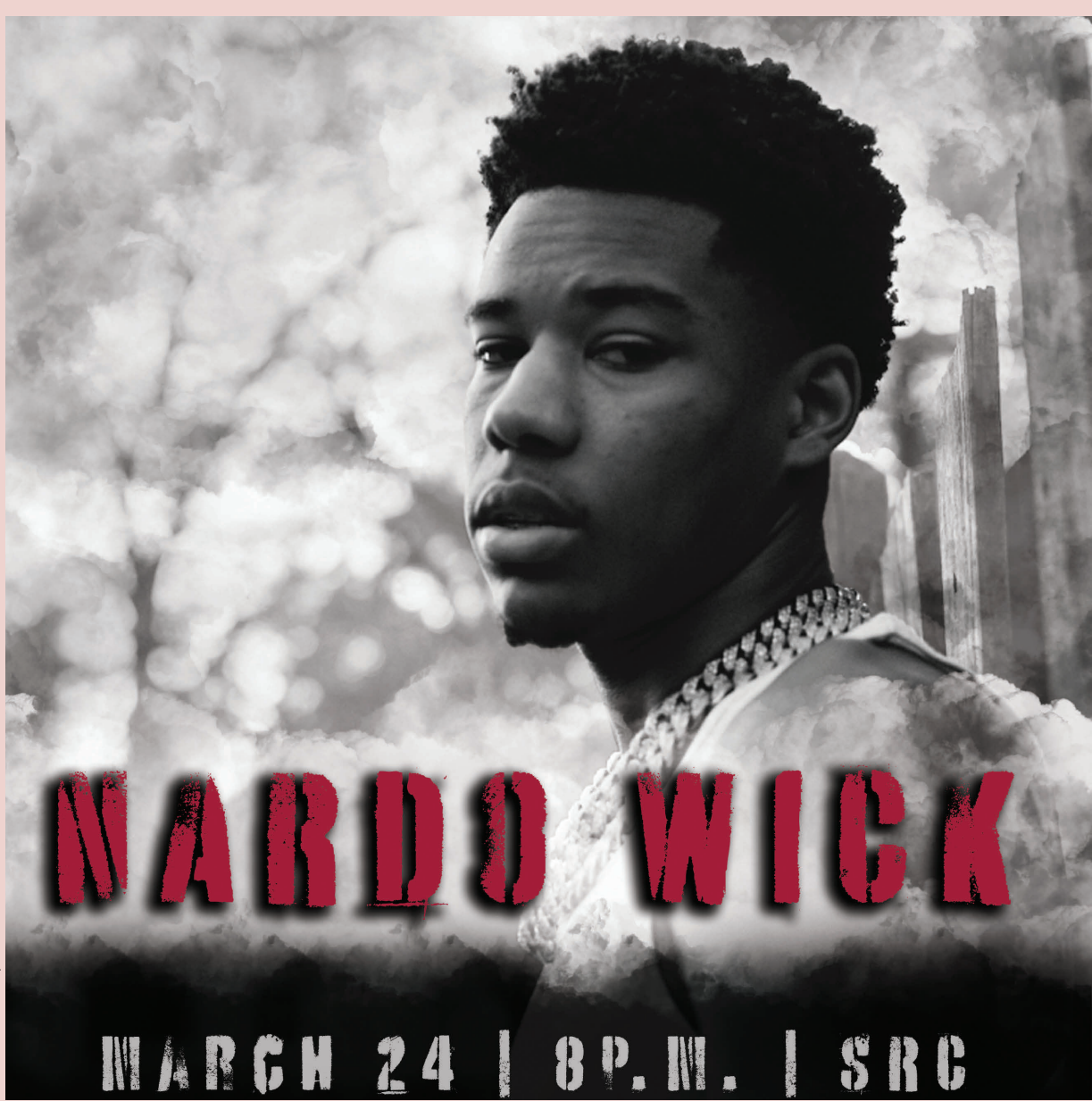
"I know they've talked about these experiences a lot. Now I'm finally gonna get to experience that myself and that's pretty fun," said Litchfield.

Wick is famous for songs such as "Who Want Smoke??" and "Me or Sum" which features rappers Future and Lil Baby. The rapper has been featured on 42 Dugg's song "Opp Pack" and on rapper Katana 10400's "She Want Me Dead!" For lovers of East Coast rap, Wick is a welcomed surprise, and for all of Rider student's, the concert is one of the missing puzzle pieces in their university experience.

Nick Barbati, associate dean of campus life, works with SEC and was excited to help bring the event back to campus.

"I think [the concert] was important. One of the things that since COVID we've been hearing constantly is, 'When is the Student Entertainment Council going to bring back the concert?' And it has been a wonderful tradition over the years," said Barbati. "Rider has had some really wonderful artists. I think at this point the timing felt safe and it felt right to allow students to celebrate with a large-scale concert that they've been asking for."

Junior dance major Marissa Stellato expressed her



Eric Buckwalter/The Rider News

Nardo Wick has been chosen to bring back the tradition of private concerts to Rider's campus. Wick will be joined by special guest Gloss Up.

happiness that the concert would bring a new feeling of life to campus.

"We haven't really had a big event yet this semester. I think it's something everyone will enjoy," said Stellato.

Members of the Rider community were notified about the event on March 6, and excited students rushed to sign up for their tickets. The concert is exclusively for Rider students, who must wear wrist bands distributed on the day of the concert in the Student Recreation Center (SRC) from 11 a.m. to 4

p.m. On March 20, the Rider community was informed that Wick would have a special guest: Gloss Up. Gloss Up is originally from Tennessee, and like Wick, appeared on the rap scene just a few years ago.

As March 24 approaches, anticipation fills the air as excited students ask their friends if they got their tickets yet. Rider is alive with tradition, and the community is ready for it.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Wed,
March 22

Equity & Inclusion at Work
6 p.m. | Rue Auditorium

Mon,
March 27

Celebrating Womxn in Rider Athletics
6 p.m. | BLC Cavalla Room

Tues,
March 28

How LGBTQ+ People Feel at Rider
11:30 a.m. | CDI Living Room

Tues,
March 28

Trivia Night with Rider Latinas Unidas:
Womxn History Month Edition
6 p.m. | Center of Diversity and Inclusion



Hannah Newman/The Rider News

Communications professor **Sheena Howard** displays 'The Illusion of Fairness,' a comic she worked on for Marvel.

Shedding Light on Women Empowerment: Sheena Howard

By **Hannah Newman**

AWARD-WINNING author and communications professor Sheena Howard has continued to let the power of written work amplify the voice of her community after making her first contribution to Marvel.

Howard's comic, "The Illusion of Fairness," incorporates a traditional African folktale that showcases the well-known character Anansi, a spider who has traveled across African folk over time and contributes to the story of a new trainee of the Dora Milaje, the group of female warriors who protect Wakanda.

This was not Howard's first time in the comic sphere, also making contributions to DC Comics in the past.

Howard said, "The stories that we tell in the comics medium do not have to be confined to a box. We can think outside the box. That's how the comics industry grows — by interacting with other industries, other cultures and different vehicles to tell a story."

This story is one of five new stories in the anthology series "Marvel's Voices: Wakanda Forever #1," released on Feb. 15, which centers around the heroes of Wakanda and spotlighted Black History Month through its writers and illustrators that centered their work around "Black Panther."

"For my story, I wanted to sprinkle in some African mythology because we're so used to our comics using Greek mythology, and so that was important for me in developing the sake of people in my community who had been saying they wanted to see those things," said Howard. "At the highest-level places like Marvel and DC was a perfect opportunity for me to include some African mythology and kind of switch up what's typically done a little bit and add something new to the medium."

With an undergraduate business degree in marketing, a master's degree in graphic design and a Ph.D. in communications, Howard's studies were not centered around the profession of writing, but Howard's love for it was always present.

Growing up, Howard knew that the creativity behind the art of writing was something she could never get enough of; however, she felt that public school systems never prioritized students' creative minds, but rather their ability to write grammatically correct, which discouraged her vision of having a writing career.

"I wish I had decided to be a writer a long time ago," said Howard. "My journey is my journey and it's obviously led me here to do some very amazing things, but the school system never encouraged writing, and so I think because of that, I never saw it as a vehicle for me to actually do as a job full time."

Despite the lack of focus on writing in the public school curriculum, Howard refused to allow the environment to deter her from exploring literature and the universal language of storytelling.

Contrary to her eagerness to write, the concept of reading digested poorly with Howard throughout her adolescent years. It was Howard's mother who inspired her to read more after she spent years as a kid tagging along to Borders Bookstore, a chain that went out of business over a decade ago, grabbing a smoothie at the bookstore's cafe after choosing a book.

"It's my mom that kind of brought me into the world of reading, but writing has been my preferred way to express myself. So I had journals when I was little, I wrote poetry, and so when we talk about an author, we usually think about somebody that is publishing something for the world, but I think you're an author when you're writing, right?" said Howard. "When you're writing in your journal, you are authoring something. And so I would say from the beginning of when I was able to write I've always preferred to be an author in that way."

The small dream evolved into a much stronger craving for Howard, one of her published works with her name and authorship filling stores and bookshelves.

With a goal of publishing her first book at 30, Howard's first became "Black Comics: Politics of Race and Representation," which came out in 2014 and was filled with foreshadowed success for the future of Howard's career. The book was based on Howard's dissertation, which focused on the history of Black comic strips.

"There are amazing stories yet to be told and yet to be tapped into, because we haven't included different types of storytelling in our mediums historically," said Howard.

Howard's publication earned her an Eisner Award, the highest award in the comics industry, receiving the award at the San Diego Comic Convention.

Howard's first publication also etched her name in history, as being the first Black woman to receive an Eisner Award.

Since her first release, Howard has published at least one book a year, and continued to multiply the amount of awards that have her name on them.

As Howard proceeds to reach heightened levels of success within her writing career, she mentioned that this publication has come with some of the best feedback she has ever received.

"I've won a lot of amazing awards, but people are crazy about Marvel, and they were super amped about this book, and so I think just being able to write for them is something that you can use as leverage for the next thing," said Howard. "It puts you in front of more people because I write books for celebrities, CEOs and social impact companies, and so this is just another step on the ladder in terms of making an impact at scale with helping people tell their stories."

Howard's success as a professor has paralleled her career as an author, as she continues to inspire her students to achieve their wildest dreams.

Junior communications major Angelina Leunes said, "When I took an academic course with Dr. Howard, she was nothing but encouraging and supportive. I feel like her publishing a Marvel book has taught me that you should continue to fight for your goals; if you set your mind to something, you can achieve anything. It may take time, but never give up on yourself."

Regardless of the level of success Howard has reached, her main goal remains the same: touch the lives of her audience and change the world, one reader at a time.

"For me, the rewarding part is the end user, so the reader. When people send me pictures of their kids with something I wrote, that is the reason why I write, when someone sends me a message and says, 'I just read this and I love it and it was super inspiring.' Everything I write is to encourage people to challenge the status quo," said Howard. "Whether that's the status quo of your relationship, your household, your relationship with your parents, anything that you need to break out of so you can be the best version of yourself, that is the mission."

This article is a part of the Shedding Light on Women Empowerment series by The Rider News to showcase impactful women at Rider University.

The postpartum problem: systemically failing parents

WOMEN'S reproductive healthcare rights, or lack thereof, have been making headlines for the better part of the past year and beyond. Between the conversations of who can have babies and when and why, one major question falls short: how do we care for new parents after they've delivered, and are we doing enough?

One condition that has made its way into the forefront of recent discussion is postpartum psychosis. According to the Cleveland Clinic, postpartum psychosis, while rare, affects 320 to 9,400 births in the United States each year and 12 million to 352.3 million births globally.

Receiving national attention, Massachusetts mother and nurse Lindsay Clancy was arraigned remotely from her hospital room in February following the deaths of her three children, ages 5, 3 and seven-months old the previous month. Clancy allegedly attempted to take her own life in the aftermath of the incident. Clancy is accused of strangling the children in her home with an exercise band, multiple sources report.

Since then, the topic of postpartum psychosis has increasingly surrounded the speculation of her case.

A series of attorney statements and information compiled by The New Yorker's Jessica Winters recaps a suspected timeline of Clancy's story. The information includes reports of Clancy journaling about her confiding in her husband regarding recurring suicidal thoughts, at least once mentioning thoughts about harming her children. A pre-Christmas evaluation at Women & Infants Hospital Center for Women's Behavioral Health, in Providence, Rhode Island, however, resulted in no diagnosis of postpartum depression.

On New Year's Day, Winters reports Clancy voluntarily checked herself into the McLean psychiatric hospital, in Belmont, Massachusetts, and she was discharged within a week with, again, no postpartum-related diagnosis. Various reports note that Clancy was prescribed at least 12 different medications between October 2022 and January 2023.

Clancy's lawyer, Kevin J. Reddington, claimed that the mother was overprescribed a series of medications used to treat anxiety, psychosis and mood disorders, and is someone who "suffered grievously as a result of what possible could be postpartum depression, postpartum psychosis," as reported by the Boston Globe.

The purpose of this piece is not to equate any mental health disorder with the tragedy the Clancy family endured or to promote a stigma, rather to draw awareness to the ways that mental health issues faced by women, especially new mothers, continue to fly under the radar.

In response to Clancy's story, moms who have suffered postpartum mood disorders have took to social media to share their own experiences.

On TikTok, one user captioned a video compilation of her and her newborn in part, saying, "I suffered in silence because I thought I was insane — that is until my husband realized what was happening and immediately got me help. To this day I'm still afraid to admit I had postpartum psychosis. ... I stand with the Clancy family, and am thinking of those sweet babies and mom and dad as they navigate through this world that failed them."

Another shared a video about the intrusive thoughts she suffered postpartum, recounting fears of hurting herself or her baby. "Mothers with these [postpartum] intrusive thoughts are not bad mothers. We need people to care. We need people to know the signs," the user wrote.

While postpartum psychosis may be hitting timelines and newsfeeds harder than usual, it is far from the only mental health issue impacting people after giving birth. Much less rare is postpartum depression, which the National Institute of Health reports impacts 6.5% to 20% of women.

Following the Supreme Court of the United States' June 2022 reversal of Roe v. Wade, many states across the country have implemented numerous abortion bans ranging in consequence and severity. As laws are passed across the country that will probably result in higher birth rates and less accessible reproductive care procedures, the health and safety of childbearing people need to become an even higher priority.

If the number of births are going to increase, which they likely will, as reproductive resources dwindle, then there should at the very least be more resources and conversation destigmatizing the physical and mental healthcare of women and childbearing people.

It should not be seen as taboo in 2023 to speak up about real issues of mental health, and no new parents or family should be made to feel alone or trapped in their struggles or failed by a system intended to help them.

Kaitlyn McCormick
junior journalism major and news editor



Adrienne Unfreed/ The Rider News

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SOPHOMORE SIGHTINGS

Why are college textbooks so expensive?

COLLEGE students know buying textbooks can be a hassle, and course-required readings can be cost-bearing, sometimes amounting to hundreds of dollars. Some professors ask students to purchase \$400 textbooks that they won't even open throughout the semester. Textbooks vary in price from major to major, leading to cost discrepancies among students in different departments as well. Why are college students spending so much on textbooks when they often sit in a dorm room collecting dust?

An article by Thought Co.'s Allen Grove titled, "Why Do College Textbooks Cost So Much?" explains why textbooks can hurt a college student's wallet. Grove says that although tuition, room and board prices may vary for different colleges, the textbooks will remain the same price for every college bookstore.

Some reasons behind the high prices are that in college, students are assigned more reading and the course could require content from multiple textbooks. Another reason is the highly specialized material within the book. Grove said, "Many college textbooks are highly specialized and the material is unavailable in any other book. The low volume of published books and the lack of market competition drive publishers to jack up prices."

While some works are timeless, like Shakespeare's "Hamlet," students may still be required to buy a specific version because the subject is always evolving, so the professor could require a more expensive, updated version of the book. Also, with more students using used textbooks, publishers aren't making as much money, so they will release a new version of the textbook every few years to make the old one out of date.

This requires the student to buy the new, more expensive version of the textbook. Some professors may require the newer version because it has more specific or different information, causing added costs for students. Faculty have control over what textbooks they assign, and some professors aren't aware of or care about the cost of the book. The professor may also assign textbooks that they wrote themselves, even if it costs hundreds of dollars.

There are better ways to buy textbooks, and Grove suggests buying used textbooks whenever possible. College students can save up to 25% on used textbooks, and he also suggests buying online textbooks. "Online bookstores, such as Amazon and Barnes and Noble, often discount books up to 20% of the standard retail price. Sometimes you can pick up a used copy online for even less. But be careful. Make sure you're getting the correct edition, and make sure shipping costs aren't more than you're saving," said Grove.

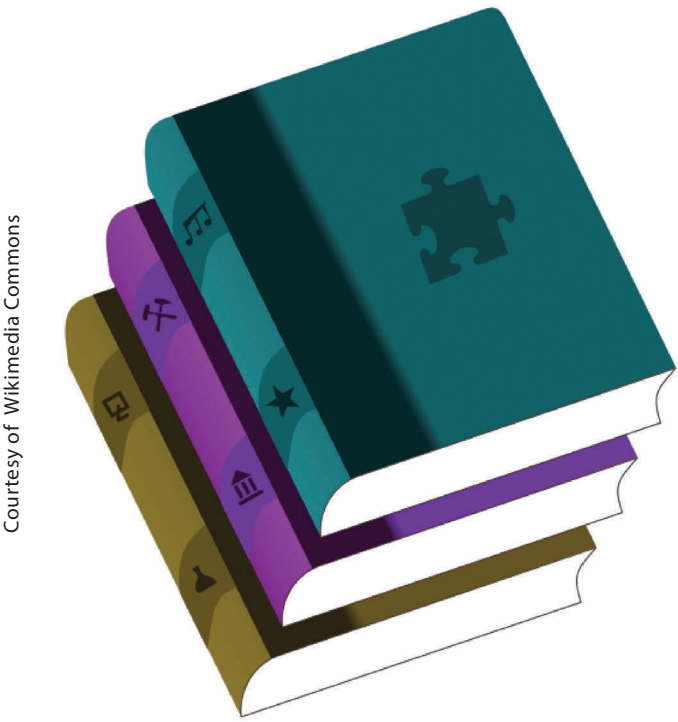
Also, students may rent textbooks instead. Grove explains that students can save up to 30% by doing so instead of buying them. A lot of colleges and universities, including Rider, have a buy-back program where students can sell their old textbooks back to the bookstore and get some money back for them.

However, it may not be the same price they were purchased for. Sometimes, textbooks worth hundreds may only be bought back for as little as dollars.

Students can also share textbooks with each other if they are in the same class, or students can sell their textbooks to their peers at a reduced price. Students don't always use the textbooks they were required to buy after the semester is over, so those who choose to can get rid of the book, and another student has the book they need without spending a ridiculous amount of money.

Also, if the student doesn't want to sell their textbook, they could let another student borrow it instead. There are many options for college students to save money on textbooks and not break the bank at the beginning of a new semester.

Felicia Roehm
sophomore journalism major and opinion editor



FRESHMAN FINDINGS

Weekends on campus: expectations v. reality

WHEN I toured Rider one weekend in 2021, one of the many times I visited, I pulled my car in front of a group of students that were standing at the entrance of the parking lot, holding pompoms, clad in their Rider gear. The upbeat '90s and 2000s music emanating from their speakers shook my car, making it impossible to refrain from smiling. The pure excitement that radiated from those students was intoxicating, and the experience became the moment that secured my place at Rider.

Throughout the aforementioned tour, students emerged from dorms and school buildings, and I deduced that every weekend must be bustling with activity. Other universities that I toured previously, such as Ramapo College and Quinnipiac University, felt like an absolute ghost town in comparison to Rider's small, yet exuberant student body.

When I enrolled and began my educational journey at Rider, I found that the exuberance and excitement I encountered on my tour may have been a one-off experience. Subsequently, I began to question whether or not that electric environment created on my tour was just a ploy to recruit more students such as myself.

Rider is almost empty on the weekends, and the abundance of activities that were promised by the very tour that I discussed were few and far between.

Hannah Wallace, a freshman graphic design major, had similar experiences pertaining to the mental toll a barren school environment could have on a student.

"I definitely think that Rider becomes a ghost town once the weekend comes. Hardly anyone is on campus, and it feels very lifeless and empty. I definitely think that it's depressing and doesn't make me want to stay," Wallace said. "I was surprised that the weekends were so barren and devoid of students. I've come to expect it now, but initially it was somewhat surprising, especially since Rider seems to talk up all the events and programs they constantly have going on."

Some students even argue that Rider misleads incoming students when giving tours.

Freshman psychology major Alison Mandel, speaking on her experience on Admitted Students Day this year, said, "When [my friends and I] toured on a Saturday, they had Saxby's open. Now being students here for a few months, we've noticed that Saxby's is never open on the weekends, so we're disappointed." Mandel was not affiliated with the tour, but witnessed them passing through while the restaurant left out samples for the groups.

Another concern regarding an insufficient weekend life at Rider is that students feel as if they are missing out on opportunities for the college experience.

Wallace said, "I usually go home on the weekends because, A: all of my friends do too and B: there isn't anything making me want to stay. It's definitely lacking entertainment and the feeling of community that they advertise."

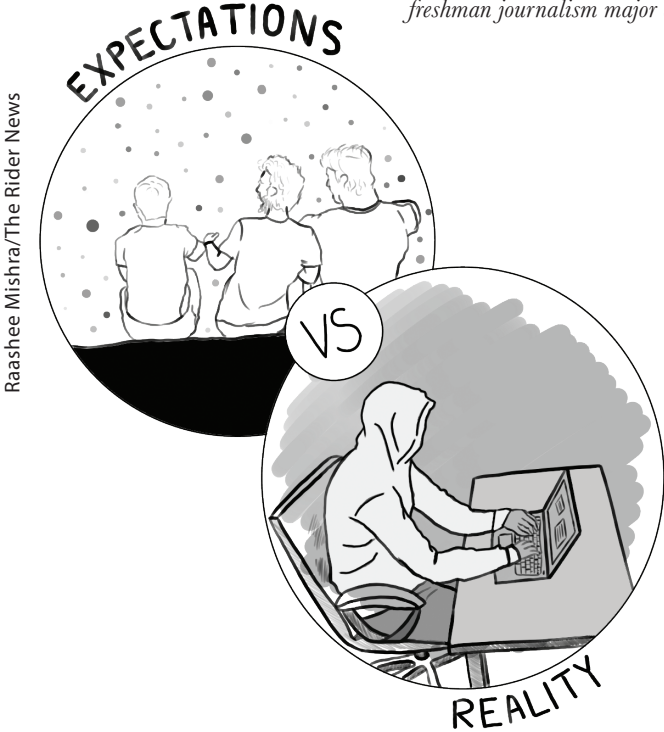
This situation is not as despondent as it may seem, however.

Rider prevails in enjoyable activities and entertainment such as the "R Factor," "Build-a-Bronc," sports and a plethora of theater performances.

Ultimately, Rider has a lot to offer when it comes to engaging opportunities on campus; however, it would be rewarding to see more of this advertised and available on the weekends, making students feel less inclined to go home.

Students need an incentive to stay and feel as if they are an active member of the Bronc community.

Madison Lewis
freshman journalism major and copy editor



MEN’S BASKETBALL

‘Quitting is not an option’ for Ogemuno-Johnson

By Hannah Newman

NINE years and nearly 5,500 miles away from home and one passion steering the wheel toward success.

From being a two-year varsity starter and captain at Monsignor Bonner in Pennsylvania, to a five-year contributor who became Rider’s program leader in games played, graduate student forward Ajiri Ogemuno-Johnson has made the court more than just a reason to play basketball, but a reason to score a new beginning.

“At the end I know what my goal is so quitting is not an option. At some point you’ve got to find your own path and I think that’s very important, finding what’s important to you,” said Ogemuno-Johnson.

Making the dream a reality

Ogemuno-Johnson, a native of Delta State, Nigeria, began his basketball journey in the eighth grade. A child that came from a family background without any athletic history, the 6-foot-8-inch Ogemuno-Johnson grew up unaware of the impact the game would have on his life.

As his days of middle school turned into high school, Ogemuno-Johnson knew that his heart fell into the hoop the more he would shoot the ball.

“Nobody in my family played sports so it’s kind of like a coincidence type event that happened in my middle school years,” said Ogemuno-Johnson. “It was something that I never really thought about at first, it just happened. I just fell in love with the game and knew it’s what I wanted to do.”

The abrupt devotion made Ogemuno-Johnson an addition to the AAU Circuit, a travel sports organization geared toward preparing athletes for the next level. Joining the league brought Ogemuno-Johnson to the United States, where he came as an independent teen yearning for more opportunities to play basketball and a broader future to lock his eyes on.

In 2014, Ogemuno-Johnson was recruited to play basketball for a high school in Florida. Johnson then had to learn how to navigate through three new worlds: basketball, America, and independence.

Complications during his time in Florida pushed Ogemuno-Johnson to transfer to Monsignor Bonner in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His move did not go as smoothly as planned. Due to his late transfer, his transcripts were not received in time. His next best option was playing basketball in Connecticut for his sophomore year season.

Beaten down by the multiple detours along the way, Ogemuno-Johnson refused to give up his vision of playing basketball at Monsignor Bonner and transferred back his junior year. Ogemuno-Johnson stayed with a host family after his move back to Monsignor Bonner until he graduated, mentioning that he still stays in contact with them today.

“The biggest thing for me was learning that trusting is not easy,” Ogemuno-Johnson said. “A lot of people will sell you lies but there are good people in the world and being open to understanding who has your best interest at heart. My journey has been so successful from meeting the right people.”

Ogemuno-Johnson remained active in summer leagues in between his years of high school refusing to trip over adversity in the process of building himself and his future.

“I stayed true to myself, I knew what I wanted to do and if I met somebody whose idea of what they wanted me to do did not match my idea of what I want to be, then I kind of distance myself or change my environment,” said Ogemuno-Johnson.

Following his years at Monsignor Bonner, Ogemuno-Johnson was recruited to Rider.

As a freshman, Ogemuno-Johnson played in 25 games, including three-straight starts. The following year he was one of six Broncs to play in all 30 games, every one off the bench.

In the 2020-21 season he averaged 7.7 points and 5.1 rebounds per game, while shooting a team-best 60.6% from the floor and during his senior year he averaged 7.7 points and 5.1 rebounds per game, while shooting a team-best 60.6 percent from the floor.

This past year, Ogemuno-Johnson started all 31 games played, averaging 8.6 points and 7.0 rebounds



Carolo Pascale/The Rider News



DEDICATION AND DOMINANCE

Check out photos of Ogemuno-Johnson’s best moments as a Bronc.



FIND THE GALLERY ON [THERIDERNEWS.COM](https://theridernews.com) OR SCAN THE QR CODE

In graduate student forward **Ajiri Ogemuno-Johnson’s** career, he has been a mainstay on the court, becoming Rider’s all-time leader in games played.

which brought him to seventh in Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference (MAAC) play.

“When I came in, I was a part of the group that won 10 years in a row so just being a part of the community itself has been great for me,” said Ogemuno-Johnson.

With an undergraduate degree in psychology, Ogemuno-Johnson’s graduate studies consisted of leadership with a concentration in counseling. His academics have paralleled his success as an athlete as he pursues a career in counseling with a hope to work on improving the mental health of student athletes.

“I’ve been through it in a sense so that kind of sparked that in me to want to be an uplift for athletes when I get done playing basketball and provide social services for them from a person who has been through it, someone who has their perspective of it,” said Ogemuno-Johnson.

Adversity into an achievement

Ogemuno-Johnson recalled the battle he fought with his mental health upon arriving in America toward the end of 2014, although with time and determination, he became more at ease. The experience inspired him to pursue a career that consists of finding a better mental state for others he can see sitting where he was at one point in his life.

“I’ve grown so much coming here to the U.S. and being alone for so long. I had to adjust many parts of my life so I understand the struggles and that’s what really built me to want to help in that [mental health] area,” said Ogemuno-Johnson.

Ogemuno-Johnson is currently enrolled in an organizational research course where he focuses on the approaches athletic administrators had to take in order to recreate the program’s protocols that have never had to be manipulated in such a way before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Professor Donald Heilman, who teaches the course, was pleased with Ogemuno-Johnson’s dedication to his future career goals and his persistent

balance of being a student-athlete.

“His proposal for research, essentially, focuses on how difficult it was for athletes, when the pandemic struck and athletic programs were suspended,” said Heilman. “His viewpoint of his research is to find out what athletic administrators had to go through to build that out because there was no existing model.”

Ogemuno-Johnson’s research will consist of a series of surveys that outline the path in which the athletic department had to take in order to mold the programs to their original shape and success they held.

“That’s what a lot of my students want to write about, COVID-19 had this huge impact on their lives and Ajiri is the first one though, to frame it,” said Heilman.

As Ogemuno-Johnson approaches his master’s degree, the athletic department has acknowledged the influence he has made on his community as an figure whose goal is to help others while in the process of helping himself.

“It’s been clear working with Ajiri over the past five years that he not only views the opportunities he’s had at Rider and in the United States differently, but exhibits a unique appreciation of them,” said Assistant Administrator for Sports Communication Gregory Ott. “It’s been truly refreshing to follow Ajiri’s journey to this point and I know he’ll be successful in whatever his future holds.”

No matter the distance, no matter the challenge and no matter who or what attempts to interfere, Ogemuno-Johnson’s tunnel vision on success and his future has canceled any negative weight that has been thrown on his shoulders during the building process of his future.

“For me it’s about the success of it,” said Ogemuno-Johnson. “I can go home at any time that I want but that’s not what I want to do, I don’t feel like I’ve accomplished anything so the accomplishment that what I want to achieve in my life is more important than going home for a few weeks.”

WRESTLING

Laird finishes sixth at NCAA Tournament

Hailey Varga/Rider Athletics



Graduate student **Ethan Laird** finished sixth at the NCAA Tournament and was named an All-American.

By **Logan VanDine**

If graduate student Ethan Laird wanted to leave a lasting legacy for Rider wrestling, he sure did at the NCAA Tournament from March 16-18 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, placing sixth overall and earning the title of All-American, an honor reserved for the top-eight finishers in each weight class.

“Overall, we wrestled well, especially Ethan. He was mentally and physically ready for this tournament and made it count. McKenzie [Bell] and Quinn [Kinner] had their opportunities; they just came up short,” Head Coach John Hangey said.

The first day of the tournament saw Laird advancing to the quarterfinals thanks to winning

a pair of matches by a score of 10-5 against Trey Rogers of Hofstra, and defeating Yonger Bastida of Iowa State by a 3-1 score. Unfortunately, junior Quinn Kinner and redshirt senior McKenzie Bell did not perform as well as they had hoped, coming up short in both of their matches.

Laird expressed how pleased he was with his performance on the first day of the tournament with him taking both of his matches.

“It was nice to win those first two and get in the quarterfinals, and put myself in a position to make the semis,” Laird said.

Day two of the NCAA Tournament saw a bit of Rider history as Laird wrapped it up by advancing

to the semifinals, after winning his bout against Zac Braunagel of Illinois with a score of 3-2.

On top of the huge win, Laird was also crowned an All-American.

“It’s a huge honor to join the group of Rider wrestling All-Americans. It’s something I’ve worked hard for a long time. I definitely think I [should] have placed higher. I had a couple of winnable matches in the consolation bracket, and unfortunately, I couldn’t get the job done,” Laird said.

Laird is the eighth Rider Bronc in the last nine seasons to be named an All-American and picked up his 100th career win during the tournament.

Despite Laird falling in the semifinals against top-seeded Nino Bonaccorsi of Pittsburgh, Hangey could not have been prouder of his effort and entire wrestling career at Rider.

“I am extremely proud of and happy for Ethan. He is the face and leader of our program and deserves this All-American honor. He poured his heart and soul into the sport and worked to become one of the best 197-pounders in the entire country,” Hangey said.

With his career at Rider officially over, Laird reflected on his time with the program and how grateful he was for his time at the university.

“Overall I’m just grateful for my time as a Rider wrestler,” Laird said. “I’ve made a lot of relationships that I’ll have for the rest of my life. I’ve grown a lot during my time at Rider and I’m happy I was able to finish my career as an All-American.”

With Rider’s campaign all but over, Hangey looked back on his team’s 9-5 campaign and the most notable and memorable victories.

“We beat Purdue, and Princeton, and won the MAC East dual meet Championship. We did fall short of our goal to win the MAC Championship which will keep us motivated moving forward,” Hangey said. “We qualified three athletes for the NCAA tournament and came home with our program’s 19th All-American. I’d say the season was a success.”

SOFTBALL

NOTEBOOK: Broncs struggles continue over break

By **Andrew Smolar**

SOFTBALL’S sluggish start to the 2023 season continued during the week of March 13.

After a game against in-state rival Monmouth was canceled on March 15, the Broncs dropped a pair of matchups on March 17 to Texas Tech University by a 9-1 score in a five-inning matchup and the University of North Dakota, 5-4. Rider followed that by losing 3-2 on March 18 against Bucknell, before bouncing back against the University of North Dakota with a 9-1 blowout victory.

The Broncs’ final game of the week on March 19 against the University of Maryland was canceled, as they finished the trip 1-3 and now sit at 5-13 for the season.

Despite the weekend losing record, freshman pitcher Jadeyn Merrill was the Broncs star of the week notching RBI’s in all three games she played in, including three in Rider’s 9-1 blowout over North Dakota. In the young season, she is batting a blistering .345 and has 11 RBI’s.

What’s working

Bookended offense has been a strength the Broncs. While Rider has struggles to score consistently throughout games, but they have done a good job at scoring in the early and late innings.

In their March 17 loss to Texas Tech, the Broncs had a productive first inning offensively as they grabbed an early lead by drawing a leadoff walk, getting a double and then an RBI groundout.

The Broncs also showed resilience in their second game that day against North Dakota. Despite falling behind 4-0, they were able to score two runs in both the sixth and seventh innings before ultimately falling 5-4. In their dominant victory over North Dakota on March 18, the Broncs scored runs in every inning, one in the first and second, four in the third and three in the fourth.



Junior infielder **Jessie Niegocki** throws five strikeouts in five innings against North Dakota on March 18.

“This may be the momentum we need to find consistency,” said Head Coach Davon Ortega.

While work remains to be more consistent throughout matches, they can take pride in knowing they have done a good job in the beginning and end of games.

Stopping the bleeding

Similar to its hitting, Rider’s pitching has been streaky at times. When it pitches well, it isn’t allowing anything; when the Broncs are struggling, they have problems recording outs.

This was evident in their loss to Texas Tech as the Raiders scored four runs in the first inning, three in the fourth and two in the fifth. The Broncs’ loss to North Dakota had a similar problem as of the five

runs they allowed, four were in one inning. Stopping big innings has been an issue for the them as of late.

“We have to stay focused on improving on our weaknesses,” said Ortega.

Despite the sluggish 5-13 start to the season (5-13 record at this point), the Broncs will have a chance to right the ship with a pair of games against the University of Delaware on March 22, before Princeton makes the short drive to Lawrenceville, New Jersey, for a pair of matchups against Rider on March 29.

With all of their conference games still on the schedule, the opportunity is there for the Broncs to make a climb in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference (MAAC).

Sports

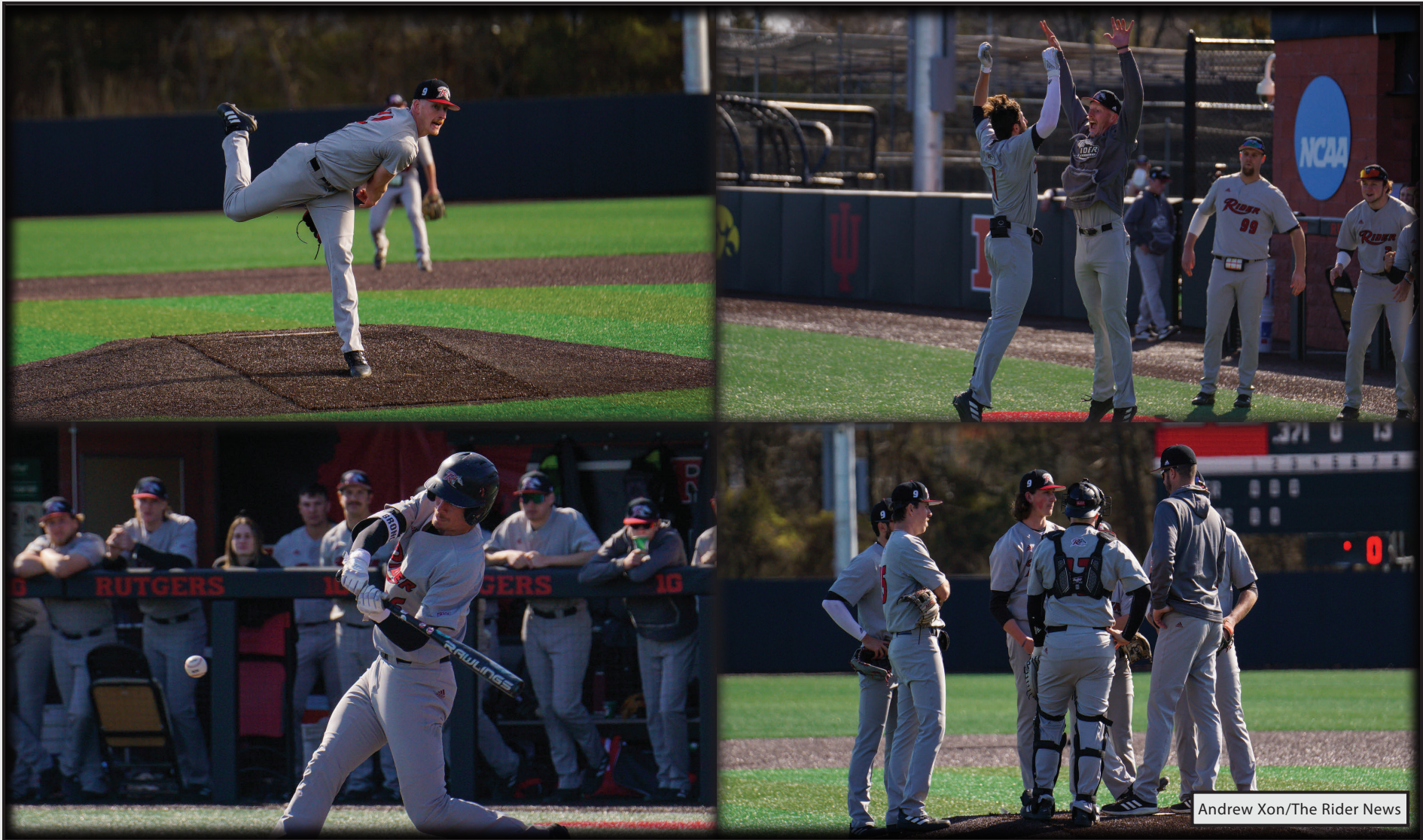
ONLINE

BASEBALL BATTLES RUTGERS
Check out photos from baseball's midweek matchup against in-state foe Rutgers.
FIND THE GALLERY ON [THERIDERNEWS.COM](https://theridernews.com) OR SCAN THE QR CODE



BASEBALL

NOTEBOOK: Mismatched Broncs have the pieces to win



The Broncs escaped non-conference play with a 13-7 record, the best in the MAAC. The start is the Broncs' best since 2011.

By Jake Tiger

In search of back-to-back titles, defending-champion, fifth-seeded Rider baseball battled its way to the final round of the 2022 Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference (MAAC) Tournament, only to fall to third-seeded Canisius, just short of the finish line.

This season, with a league-best, 13-7 record going into conference play on March 24, Rider looks to run the table at the 2023 MAAC Tournament, having learned how it feels to walk away empty-handed.

“Last year’s loss showed that we’ve got the talent, but we were a few pieces short,” said senior outfielder Brendan O’Donnell. “From what I’ve seen so far, I think we have those pieces.”

‘Limit the damage’

Behind the arms of freshman pitcher Christian Aiello, graduate student pitcher Danny Kirwin and more, the Broncs and their peculiar bullpen made an emphatic statement on Feb. 24, claiming a hard-fought, 6-3 win over Oklahoma, the 2022 Men’s College World Series runner-up.

To the delight of Head Coach Barry Davis, Rider’s 17-man staff has been elite despite being made up of 11 freshmen, as contributions from longtime Broncs and impressive new faces have melded into something uniquely special.

“There was a lot of talk and concern from the outside with having a ton of freshman pitchers, especially coming in relief. Internally, from what the older guys and coaches saw in the fall, we knew they would be fine,” said senior pitcher Dylan Heine in an email interview with The Rider News. “This bullpen and pitching staff as a whole can be one of the best we have had since I have been here.”

Through 20 non-conference games, the Broncs have the top pitching unit in the MAAC by far and 52nd-best in the nation, boasting an ERA of 4.33. Niagara sits closest to the Broncs in the conference at just 6.23.

“Our pitching has definitely been a strength to this team’s success so far,” said Heine. “Even though we have only had two shutouts on the year, I feel as if we are keeping every game close or manageable for the

offense to do their work.”

Not only do the Broncs have the best pitching of any team in the MAAC, they have the sample size to back it up, having pitched more innings and played more games than any other team in the conference.

“Our pitching has been a huge key to our success this year, from the starters to the late-inning guys,” said O’Donnell. “They’ve definitely picked us up and snagged wins when we weren’t supposed to.”

Rider’s army of arms has been led by two veterans in graduate student pitcher Frank Doelling and Heine, who are individually having arguably their best seasons yet, and at 3.94, they combine for the best ERA of any duo in the MAAC with at least 24 innings pitched.

As for freshmen, Clayton Poliey is one new pitcher who, when called upon, has held down the mound. In 17 1/3 innings pitched, the Ringwood, New Jersey, native has amassed 15 strikeouts with a 3.63 ERA.

“[The freshmen] are pitching in some important roles right now,” said Davis. “They’re coming along, and I think that’s going to be a big key on how well we do when tournament time rolls around.”

With the tutelage and talent of Doelling and Heine leading the way, the Broncs’ hodge-podge bullpen might just be the perfect complement to their explosive, well-oiled offense.

“Everyone on our roster is going to have to contribute at some point during the season if we want to hoist the MAAC Championship trophy again in May,” said Doelling. “We know our offense can go off at any moment, so as a staff, if we can just limit the damage each inning and throw strikes, we know our offense will break out at some point.”

‘We’re tough to deal with’

Against Richmond on March 10, the Broncs found themselves down 7-3 in the top of the ninth after a slow day offensively. But seemingly on command, Rider ripped off a jaw-dropping, 15-run rally to squash the Spiders, 18-7.

Despite a tough non-conference schedule, the Broncs’ offense has shown up more often than not and found ways to win.

“I said our offense is going to be our strength, and it still is,” said Davis, who earned his 1,000th career victory against Richmond on March 11. “We’re tough to deal with, and that’s been proven. That’s exactly what happened at Richmond.”

O’Donnell was a driving force behind the comeback win over the Spiders, giving Rider the lead with a two-run blast to left field before bringing in three more runs with a well-placed single.

With a team-high 19 RBIs and six home runs in his last seven games, O’Donnell has been great for the Broncs, despite being incredibly volatile at the plate. Of Rider’s nine usual starters, O’Donnell has the second-worst batting average at .211, while leading the Broncs in strikeouts with 25.

But O’Donnell more than makes up for his shortcomings, because when he does make contact, he hits the ball really hard.

O’Donnell, who broke Rider’s single-season home run record last year with 20 in 54 games, has seven homers on the season, tying him for first in the MAAC and putting him on pace for another historic season.

“Last year was memorable and one that I’ll never forget, but right now it’s in the past,” said O’Donnell. “As great as it was, there was one goal that I fell short of and that was winning the title. That’s the focus this year.”

Beside O’Donnell, senior outfielder Scott Shaw and senior first baseman Luke Lesch have each chipped in three home runs and 30 combined RBIs, just one example of the depth and experience that the Broncs hope will carry them to MAAC-Championship redemption.

“To me the biggest strength of the offense is the depth we have,” said O’Donnell. “When we put all nine together, it’s difficult to stop us.”

Finishing the non-conference portion with a confident 13-7 record, the Broncs begin MAAC play on March 24-26 with three consecutive home games against Quinnipiac, the team’s first outings on campus this season.

The first game of the series begins on March 24 at 3 p.m. and will be streamed on ESPN+.